ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: WRITING OCEANIC BODIES: CORPOREAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE WORKS OF DÉWÉ GORODÉ, CLAUDINE JACQUES, AND CHANTAL T. SPITZ

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Oceanic women's bodies have been objects of fascination throughout centuries of Western literature. European voyagers of the eighteenth century lauded the exotic Tahitian female body, while in the nineteenth century, the Kanak (indigenous New Caledonian) body was frequently dehumanized and regarded as uncivilized. Indeed, much Western literature prior to the second half of the twentieth century has portrayed an imagined, culturally produced Oceanic body that became a stereotype in what Edward Said would call an Orientalist discourse. This dominant Orientalist discourse has, until recently, overshadowed the voices of Oceanic peoples.

This project examines the representation of the body in the texts of three contemporary Francophone Oceanic women writers who successfully communicate their individual perceptions on Oceanic identity. Since the 1980s, Kanak writer Déwé Gorodé (1949), Caledonian writer Claudine Jacques (1953), and Tahitian writer Chantal T. Spitz (1954) have produced an explicitly Oceanic perspective and style in a writing that is distinct from other French and Francophone literatures. This project examines violence,

specifically sexual violence, and treatments of the damaged body in the literature of Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz, who turn the body into a political instrument. The display of sexual violence in these works forces the body into a public position, fostering a discussion and critique of the politics of Oceanic communities. Additionally, this dissertation discusses the political body, which is often either represented as in isomorphism with the land, or as rupturing the confinement endured in colonial-imposed institutions. Also addressed are the fragile silence and enunciations of identity in the texts of Jacques, Gorodé, and Spitz. Because both the Kanak and Tahitian cultures have a strong oral tradition, the question of silence imposed by the Western privileging of the written word features heavily in Oceanic writing, but as this project will reveal, the silence that has permeated the communities of French-speaking Oceania is a complicated and delicate silence. The aim of this work is to examine contemporary configurations of an Oceanic body in the works of Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz: a body that transgresses boundaries, destabilizes myths, and refuses objectification.

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by

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Introduction

> "les femmes de chez nous ont de longs cheveux de beaux cheveux tu dois toujours les soigner tu ne dois jamais les couper si tu veux rester une femme de chez nous." (*Elles, terre d'enfance: Roman à deux encres* 85)
>
> "the women from our country have long hair beautiful hair you always have to take care of it you can never cut it if you want to stay a woman from here."

The character of the grandmother in Chantal T. Spitz's most recent novel, published in 2011, insists to her granddaughter that for a woman, Tahitian identity is intricately linked to the body. Yet, rather than conform to the romanticist discourse that has surrounded the female Oceanic body since the eighteenth century, the character succeeds in subverting the gaze of the Other by representing the Tahitian female body through her own eyes, and in a language that does not objectify the body but valorizes it for its specificity. As Samoan writer Albert Wendt notes in "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," "much of what has been considered "decoration or "adornment" by outsiders has to do with identity (individual-aiga-group), status, age, religious beliefs, relationships to other art forms and the community and not to do with prettying yourself" (400).[1] Indeed, representations of (and on) the body are profoundly connected to understandings of identity and meaning in Oceania, and not necessarily to the desire to be aesthetically appealing.[2]

In the introduction to his work *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, philosopher Mark Johnson posits: "meaning grows from our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life. We are born into the world as creatures of the flesh, and it is through our bodily perceptions, movements, emotions, and

feelings that meaning becomes possible and takes the forms it does" (ix). Johnson seeks to dispel the "current misconception" (xi) that the mind is disembodied and that thinking transcends feeling. Meaning is entirely relational and is formed through corporeal connections. He reminds us: "…body-based intersubjectivity – our being with others via bodily expression, gesture, imitation, and interaction – is constitutive of our very identity from our earliest days, and it is the birthplace of meaning" (51).

While Johnson insists that the body is the birthplace of meaning, Daniel Punday observes that the body is not only an essential frame of reference for human meaning making, but it is also our reference point as readers of narratives. In *Narrative Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Narratology*, Punday insists that our encounter with texts is always mediated by corporeality:

> Narrative is corporeal not simply because it needs to use character bodies as a natural part of the stories that it tells, but also because the very ways in which we think about narrative reflect the paradoxes of the body – its ability to give rise to and resist pattern, its position in the world and outside of it, and so on. Narrative, then, always first and foremost depends upon a corporeal hermeneutics – a theory of how the text can be meaningfully articulated through the body… (15).

Like Johnson, Punday insists that the way we make meaning is through the physical, and because of this, the way we understand a text is also negotiated through our bodies. These formulations of understanding as corporeal allow us to regard the texts of three Oceanic women writers, Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz with a corporeal hermeneutics in mind, especially in light of the representations of the Oceanic body that have (inadvertently) deposited grave misconceptions in the minds of readers for over two centuries.

While this project focuses on the representation of the body in the works of three contemporary Oceanic women writers, I find it indispensible to situate the analysis of the body in Oceanic literature within a larger framework. I will therefore begin this project with an investigation of the representation of the Oceanic body in the literary works of eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century French writers. As I will demonstrate in Chapter One: The Instigation and Perpetuation of the Mythical Oceanic Body, both the female and the male Oceanic bodies have been fetishized and romanticized in the Western imaginary throughout centuries of Western literature, and looking at corporeality within this literature helps to shed light on the images the Oceanic authors in question attempt to bifurcate. As far back in history as the Ancient Greek philosophers, the belief in an antipodal land in the Southern hemisphere, the perfect balance to the Northern hemisphere, influenced the philosophies and voyages of European intellectuals. Numerous fictional travel narratives of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed to the curiosity and mystery surrounding the antipodal land, anticipating the "discovery" of exotic bodies in philosophical odysseys written well before European arrival in French Polynesia and New Caledonia. As Pamela Cheek observes of the works written without the knowledge of the existence of the archipelagos (such as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Denis Veiras's *L'Histoire des Sévarambes*, or Gabriel de Foigny's *La Terre australe connue*): "Written before Pacific exploration closed down the possibility of locating a critical world upside-down in the antipodes, imaginative fictions about the South Seas both made sex constitutive of political order and located the problem of recognizing shared humanity within the sexual scene" (135). Sex, and thus, the body, were the objects of focus in a literature of anticipatory exploration.

Following the literature of anticipatory Oceanic exploration, several eighteenth and nineteenth-century French male writers not only perpetuated the myth of the Oceanic peoples as exemplary, idyllic noble savages; they also adduced the Tahitian *vahine* as a highly sexualized object of desire and have profoundly entrenched the Oceanic individual in a corporeal discourse.[3] Notably, this discourse was characterized by a considerable historical misconception. Although Louis Antoine de Bougainville believed he was the first to "discover" the islands that would soon constitute French Polynesia, the British Samuel Wallis had landed in Tahiti in 1767, just eight months before Bougainville arrived in 1768. For the first several days of Wallis's encounter, many Tahitians were injured or killed in their dealings with the British, as they were evidently hostile towards the new arrivals, according to anthropologist Alexander Bolyanatz's *Pacific Romanticism*. In order to prevent further violence, Tahitian women distracted the British with sex, and when Tahitians realized that they could trade sex for iron, they used this as a defense strategy in the subsequent encounter with Bougainville and his men, leading the European explorers to believe in a Tahitian hedonism.[4] Thus, the works of Bougainville and the other members of his voyage read the myth of exotic, antipodal bodies into their own encounters in Tahiti.

The experience of Bougainville and his men inevitably led to an eighteenth-century fictional literature that perpetuated the myth of the exotic *vahine*, including the works of Denis Diderot and Nicolas Bricaire de la Dixmerie, whose works will be explored in Chapter One. However, Tahiti came under brief British control in the period leading up to the French Revolution. The London Missionary Society established itself in the archipelago and attempted to convert the Tahitian islanders. In their efforts to

"civilize" the "savage" indigenous peoples, the British missionaries learned the Tahitian language, or *reo mā'ohi*, set up a printing press, and beginning in 1818 began printing the Bible in *reo mā'ohi*.[5] In addition to teaching Tahitians to read and write in their own language, the British forbade traditional dancing, an integral element of Tahitian culture and storytelling. They also overthrew traditional Tahitian government, establishing the reign of the successive Pomarés, under whose rule Tahiti became a French colony in 1880.[6] Despite the changes during the brief British rule, many well-known nineteenth century French authors sustained the mythical image of Tahiti in their works. Chateaubriand laments the transformations that Tahiti underwent under British rule in *Génie du Christianisme*, and Hugo wrote a poem entitled "La fille d'Otaïti," included in his 1826 collection *Odes et Ballades*. Nevertheless, the most noteworthy nineteenth century literary works portraying the Tahitian woman were Pierre Loti's second novel, *Le Mariage de Loti*, and celebrated painter Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, both of which are considered in the first chapter of this project, followed by Victor Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux*.

While Tahiti was celebrated in literature for the elegance and "peacefulness" of its strong, herculean men and its exotic *vahine*, New Caledonia and its outlying Loyalty Islands were regarded as inferior, with uncivilized, barbaric cannibals as inhabitants, who were not afraid to defend their territory against the European invaders. Due to the view that the Melanesian *tribus* were uncivilized (the tribes were divided by more than 28 different languages, had no architecture, and practiced cannibalism) there was very little European effort towards assimilation, at least not on the level witnessed in Tahiti.[7] With the aims of turning the territory into a penal colony (*bagne* in French) resembling that of

the British in Australia, the French annexed New Caledonia on September 24, 1853, removing the indigenous Melanesian populations from their ancestral lands and displacing more than 200,000 criminals and political prisoners from France to the territory.[8] The indigenous populations of New Caledonia came under the regime of the *indigénat*, which created an inferior legal status for indigenous populations in French territories and did not end until after World War II. They were subjected to *cantonnement* from 1868 to 1903, a system similar to the reservation system the United States created for Native Americans. In 1878, the indigenous population rose up against the French settlers in a gruesome attack, which was afterwards called "La Grande Insurrection Canaque" ("The Great Kanak Insurrection," explored in more detail in Chapter Four) and referred to when evoking the formidable "savages." Although unsuccessful, the insurrection, along with the population of French criminals and forced workers, contributed to the unfavorable reputation of the island. In 1893, Caledonian governor Feillet attempted to ameliorate the reputation of the island by sending propaganda to France, lauding an idyllic tropical paradise and conflating the images of Tahiti and New Caledonia. During a second nickel boom in the twentieth century, there was a significant influx of French immigrants, as well as those from the neighboring islands of Wallis and Futuna, Vanuatu, and the Polynesian islands, which has contributed to the highly diversified demographic of the territory.

While travel narratives recounting voyager experience in New Caledonia did not see as much fame as travel literature about Tahiti, they did initiate the literature that viewed the Kanak population as fundamentally opposite to the Polynesian population in Tahiti.[9] D'Entrecasteaux's *Relation du voyage* recounting his 1792-1793 trip to New

Caledonia was the logical contrary to the myth of Tahiti, with stories of underhanded, ferocious cannibals. In the late nineteenth century, documentary and ethnographic literature was the primary literature that emerged from New Caledonia, and much of it followed the trend of D'Entrecasteaux and Dumont D'Urville, whose nineteenth century travel journal relates his displeasure upon viewing the inhabitants of the island. The portrait of the horrifying yet lazy cannibal abounded in ethnographic literature from the late nineteenth century, and as late as 1929, writers continued representing the Kanak as indolent, childlike, and incapable of intelligence. Jehanne D'Orliac views the "canaques" as "sans mémoires et sans projets" ("without memory and without purpose" 120), in *Les Îles au parfum de santal* (1929), a view that Henry Louis Gates Jr. examines in "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference It Makes." He observes that Westerners from the Enlightenment era to the nineteenth century based their definition of humanity on a "race's" ability to write and preserve their history, the visible sign of the workings of reason: "[…] Without memory or mind, there could exist no history. Without history, there could exist no 'humanity,' as defined consistently from Vico to Hegel" (1585). Therefore, as D'Orliac continues:

> Ils sont des enfants, et doivent être pris pour tels. À part quelques exceptions, vite comptées, leur intelligence ne dépassera jamais un certain développement. Race intermédiaire entre les quadrumanes et les hommes, ils ne peuvent acquérir qu'une expérience plus sensorielle que psychologique. (137)
>
> They are children, and should be seen as such. Despite some exceptions, quickly counted, their intelligence will never pass a certain development. Intermediary race between quadrumanes and men, they cannot acquire but a sensorial experience, rather than psychological.

According to D'Orliac, the Kanak population's perception of experience was based solely on the sensorial or the corporeal, as they were incapable of intelligent thought. Although

not all ethnographic studies of the Kanak population were as racially biased (Maurice Leenhardt, for example, wrote many ethnographic works from 1902 to 1958 which refrain from objectivizing and dehumanizing indigenous Melanesians), the image portrayed in many of these works was reinforced in the European imagination by the fictional writings that appeared in the first half of the twentieth century.[10] The first chapter concludes with the examination of two examples of this type of literature, the Nervat couples' *Célina Landrot: Fille de Pouembout*, and Jean Mariotti's *À bord de l'Incertaine*.

As Chapter One will demonstrate, the eroticized, fetishized, and dehumanized Oceanic body has been an object of fascination for Europeans for centuries, and in many ways still remains so today. Teresia Teaiwa notes that the "Polynesian" body has proven a powerful gimmick to draw tourists to the Oceanic islands, and has worked well for what she calls "militourism," a collaboration of militarism and tourism that has both provided employment and social mobility for many Islanders while simultaneously depleting island resources and threatening sacred sites. Indeed, Hawaiian Airlines employs the image of a Polynesian woman, long dark hair swept up with a hibiscus flower, as the emblem of their franchise, and reproductions of Paul Gauguin's Tahitian paintings "have introduced and entrenched exoticist notions about the Pacific to peoples all over the world" (Teaiwa 253). This image of the "Polynesian" body has often come to represent the image of the Oceanic or Pacific body as a whole, effacing the various cultures and specificities of the Oceanic islands. As Maryse Condé remarks in *La Parole des femmes*: "L'univers fabriqué par les media, le cinéma, la publicité forme un ensemble dans lequel la beauté noire n'a pas de place, ne peut pas exister" ("The universe fabricated by the

media, cinema, publicity, creates an ensemble in which black beauty has no place, cannot exist" 22). Similar to Condé's observation, Kanak Political activist Susanna Ounei remarks in a speech given in 1985 in Nairobi that when New Caledonia is advertised overseas, "they always introduce the picture of New Caledonia with beautiful beaches and a *wahine* – a Polynesian woman – who dances the *tamoure*. But they never show the picture of the Kanak people. The Kanak people are us – the black people – who live there" (163-164).[11]

Writing about bodies, on bodies, and representing the Oceanic body in literary texts is consequently an integral element in the assertion of identity in Oceanic literatures, because for so long Oceanic peoples have been identified or effaced by the Other's representation of the Oceanic body. The intention of the remaining three chapters of this project is therefore to bring awareness to the fact that many of the representations of the Oceanic body that are disseminated today are still representations from outsider discourses, and, I hope, to bring light to the discussions of the Oceanic body and the culturally specific meaning making as represented through the literature of Oceanic women writers themselves. Indeed, the "emerging" literature from the French-speaking Oceanic region paints a portrait of a unique, resilient, politically and socially engaged body that does not conform to the dominant European discourse that for so long fetishized, effaced, and circumscribed Oceanic bodies.[12] In the essay mentioned above, Albert Wendt asks: "What is the post-colonial body?" a question directed specifically toward the Oceanic post-colonial body (410). He responds:

> It is a body 'becoming,' defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies, in this case alongside other literatures […] It is a blend, a new development, which I consider to be Pacific in heart, spirit, and muscle; a blend in which influences from outside […] have been

> indigenized, absorbed in the image of the local and national, and in turn have altered the national and local. (411)[13]

While Oceanic literature in French may be a relatively "young" or "new" literature in terms of traditional writing, it is important to point out the sense of continuity that anchors this "body becoming" to its past in the midst of its "new development" and entrance into literatures of the world. In *Le Roman Autochtone dans le Pacifique Sud: Penser la continuité,* Sylvie André emphasizes the sense of connection that exists between the past, present, and future of the societies of Oceania. The critic of literatures of both English and French expression analyzes the writings of Oceania in terms of their continuity, a writing which asserts an enduring identity, that cannot be defined as "new" literatures, but rather as literatures "qui se revendiquent vivantes matures et s'assument originales originelles inattendues" ("that claim to be living mature and who assume themselves novel original unexpected" Spitz, *Pensées* 166). André prefers to embrace a meaning of the term "emerging" that includes with this "newness" an originality that would not deny its origins or heritage (7). Rather, this originality would encompass both the heritage of indigenous oral literature as well as the exotic and colonial literature of the metropolitan French and settler groups, because the French-speaking Oceanic islands have with the French, in addition to a common language, a common past that cannot be ignored.

In Oceania, literature, in the traditional sense – in other words, a form recognized by the West – did not "emerge" until the 1970s and 1980s, with the novel not appearing until Chantal T. Spitz's *L'Île des rêves écrasés* in 1991.[14] Since then, the literature emanating from the Francophone Oceanic region has burgeoned: Titaua Peu, Jimmy Ly, Ari'irau, Michou Chaze, Louise Peltzer, Jean-Marc Pambrun, Déwé Gorodé, Pierre

Gope, and Weniko Ihage have all contributed to the Oceanic canon in French, to name only a few of the indigenous voices. In comparison to the abundant appearance of literature from the English-speaking Oceanic islands, however, the writings of Francophone Oceanic Islanders have seen little attention. Due in part to the continued situation of French neo-colonialism (although independence may be imminent for New Caledonia, as a referendum is to be held within the next five years), "Pacific literature in English is all presence, visibility, articulation, and therefore power, while Pacific literature in French is all absence, invisibility, and silence" (Nicole, "Resisting Orientalism" 265). Additionally, for several decades, French publishing houses openly refused to publish writings from the French speaking islands, as the oral, spiral nature of Polynesian and Kanak writings conflicted with the traditionally accepted Western notion of literature. Translation, or lack thereof, has also contributed to the silence of Oceanic literature in French. In a recent conference at the University of Hawai'i in February 2013, Chantal Spitz noted that only three percent of Oceanic literature of French expression has been translated into English, whereas eighty percent of anglophone Oceanic literature has been translated into French or other languages, cutting the rest of the world off from being able to read Francophone Oceanic literature (Global Native). Despite the obstacles, Spitz has become the most recognized Oceanic writer of French expression. Spitz's texts, along with those of Kanak writer Déwé Gorodé and Caldoche writer Claudine Jacques, three prolific and profoundly original Oceanic writers, are the focus of the three remaining chapters of this project.

Déwé Gorodé

Eperi Déwé Gorodé Pourouin, the first Kanak woman author to publish a novel in French, has in fact been writing collections of poetry and short stories since the 1970s. Born in 1949 on the east coast of the Grande Terre of New Caledonia, she is a member of the Pwârâïriwâ tribe. Gorodé holds a *licence des lettres modernes* from the Université Paul-Valéry de Montpellier. As one of the first Kanak women to receive a university education in France, she became swept up in the reverberations of the May 1968 student and worker protests, which inevitably affected her perspective towards the French-colonized status of her country, at that time considered a *territoire d'outre-mer* (French overseas territory). In 1974 she returned to New Caledonia from her studies in France to become a French teacher, and later a teacher of her indigenous language, *paicî,* in the Kanak popular schools. In the same year, she joined the *Foulards Rouges*, a militant Kanak independence group with the aims of rediscovering and asserting Kanak identity and culture. Throughout her career, she has continued membership in several pro-independence political parties, most notably the *Front de libération nationale Kanak socialiste* (National Socialist Kanak Liberation Front, or FLNKS), and has been imprisoned on three separate occasions for her involvement in these militant groups and for her political writings. She served as the vice president of the government of New Caledonia from 2001 to 2009, and has been in charge of both the ministry of culture and sports, and beginning in 2004, the ministry of "la condition féminine" (the feminine condition). Her political engagements and time in prison have profoundly affected her writing, which celebrates women and denounces the violence of men within her own community, as well as the violent consequences of colonization. Her short stories,

novellas, three novels, collaborative works, a play, and poetry focus on the value of Kanak women's traditions and daily lives, in which oral traditions as well as violence play a significant role.

Claudine Jacques

As in Gorodé's literature, violence characterizes many of the novels and short stories of Claudine Jacques. Jacques was born in France in 1953, but her move to New Caledonia during her adolescence profoundly affected her. The island thus became her home, and she considers herself New Caledonian. After having participated in the Caledonian professional workforce, Jacques immersed herself in the world of writing, and in 1995 she published her first collection of short stories, *Nos Silences sont si fragiles*. The author isolates herself *en brousse* (in the bush) north of the island's capital, Nouméa. Fully immersed in Caledonian culture, her works focus on the intertwining yet distinct lives of indigenous communities and "le monde blanc" ("the white world") of Nouméa. Like Gorodé, Jacques frequently blends vocabulary from the various different Kanak languages, along with those of Wallis and Futuna, Ni-Vanuatu, and the Tahitian language, with the dominant French language. Similar to Chantal T. Spitz, she does not gloss this vocabulary, but leaves it in the text to communicate to the reader the multifaceted nature of the world in which she lives.[15] Jacques's works showcase a multicultural insular community entering into modernity, as the political and economic statuses of her island undergo seemingly constant transitions, from a *territoire d'outre-mer* in 1946 to what is now considered a *collectivité sui-generis* (sui-generis collectivity),

and within the next five years, perhaps complete independence. Importantly, her novels give a voice to the Caldoche community of New Caledonia.

The term Caldoche is not a universally accepted term, used to describe the descendants of forced workers, prisoners, and settlers; in other words, the white population of New Caledonia that has become profoundly attached to the land. In fact, the Caldoche situation is similar to that of the *Pieds-Noirs* of North Africa: although they are of European descent, they cannot identify with the Metropolitan French community because their lived experience has taken place in New Caledonia. They have not experienced the same four seasons as the French, and the Caldoche vocabulary differs from that of *la Métropole*. Caledonian historian Louis-José Barbançon notes that the word "Caldoche" appeared during the nickel boom of the 1970s, when the influx of new arrivals from France necessitated some sort of definition to differentiate Caledonians of European descent from the French who had just arrived. As Barbançon explains, Caledonians did not adopt the term immediately, since the suffix "oche" has a pejorative connotation. Yet, in 1983, the word Caldoche entered the "Petit Larousse" dictionary, with the simple definition of "white person from New Caledonia" (19). During the turbulent period in the 1980s called *les Evénéments,* the term became even more popular due to media coverage, and was frequently used in opposition to Kanak (19). Despite the initial negative connotations, the descriptive Caldoche has become more acceptable throughout the last several decades, separated from its racist associations, and serves to distinguish those who have grown up on the island from the French (often called "métros" or "zoreilles" by the Caldoche and Kanak communities). Claudine Jacques's works grapple with the term's negative history, but most importantly, they give a voice to

an Oceanic community whose situation as victim of colonization is frequently overlooked.

Chantal T. Spitz

Chantal T. Spitz, possibly the most recognized of the three Oceanic women authors studied in this project, is the first Tahitian novelist. She was born in 1954 in the capital of Tahiti, Papeete, to a family of both European and Tahitian descent.[16] Raised in a "Western" educational atmosphere at home, but always rooted in traditional Tahitian culture through the maternal side of her family, she attended the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa on the island of O'ahu to obtain her undergraduate degree, returning to the island of Huahine, close to Tahiti, to become a schoolteacher and mother throughout the majority of her young adulthood. Her first novel, inspired by orality and rhythm, *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, appeared in 1991 and brought attention to the island's literary community. In fact, it was considered scandalous by many, as it both scolds the indigenous Tahitian community for allowing their culture to be so easily effaced, as well as denounces the Demi community that has become Europeanized. Her *Pensées insolentes et inutiles* (2006), a collection of essays, poems, and lectures she has given at conferences, also made waves as it contains what some would call "politically incorrect" assertions about the West, "francophonie," and the silence that has for so long permeated the Tahitian community. As Patrick Sultan suggests, her rather radical and straightforward work cannot be considered "representative" of the thoughts and voices of Tahiti and its neighboring islands: "Mais cette absence de 'représentativité' ne doit pas s'entendre comme une limite ou un défaut; bien au contraire, se refusant à parler '*pour*'

ou '*au nom*' de son peuple, elle exprime en toute son acuité la singularité polynésienne" ("But this absence of 'representivity' should not be understood as a limit or as a fault; on the contrary, refusing to speak '*for*' or '*in the name*' of her people, she expresses, in all its intensity, Polynesian singularity").

Writing the Body in Oceania

In order to facilitate a (specifically Oceanic) comparative approach to the Oceanic women's literature in question, the remaining three chapters of this project are organized thematically, according to the different representations and treatments of the Oceanic body that appear in each author's works. The second chapter, entitled "Violating the Myth: The Damaged Oceanic Body," treats the subjects of violence and the body in the works of Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz. Not coincidentally, the theme of sexual violence as a symptom of colonization appears in the works of all three women authors. Yet the women also critique the violence within their own communities, and as Raylene Ramsay points out, "Given that brutal treatment of women has been a stereotype of 'savage masculinity' regularly activated in colonial representations for pragmatic imperial purposes, most writers have recognized that any such engagement with critique of domestic violence within indigenous societies is fraught" ("Sexual Violence and Return" 73). Ramsay also notes that the question of reaction to sexual violence is related to the imperatives of solidarity with one's group of origin and to the question of the return of Custom. Scenes of domestic violence problematize the hopeful, idyllic vision of the return of Custom and identity to a (mythical) peaceful, indigenous Other.

In the discussion of sexual violence in Oceanic literature, it is imperative to address the importance of land and the parallels that can be made between the sexual (as well as non-sexual) violations of women and the colonial perspective of land as an empty space to be penetrated in the Oceanic territories. Jacques, Gorodé, and Spitz all establish parallels between the land, violence, and the woman's body in their works. While Spitz makes a direct comparison in the title of her most recent work, *Elles, terre d'enfance: Roman à deux encres* (2011), Claudine Jacques's portrayal of the turbulent city of Nouméa becomes a backdrop for the violent crimes that take place both within the city and on its outskirts in *Nouméa mangrove* (2009).[17]

Land is also heavily tied to politics and cultural identity in both French Polynesia and New Caledonia. Because both indigenous societies were essentially invaded and overtaken by Western colonizers, the battles over land cannot help but enter into the discourse of politics and identity in the literature of the territories. In New Caledonia, land was originally divided between different tribes. When the French settled in the territory to establish a penal colony (and subsequently more arrived to participate in the nickel boom in 1873), they claimed land that they viewed as "unoccupied," fundamentally negating the existence of the Melanesian groups. Melanesian populations reacted violently towards the usurping of their land, and were in turn punished for their violence. In New Caledonia, as opposed to the islands of French Polynesia, there was a sharp segregation of indigenous and settler populations due to land disputes as well as French racism towards the indigenous populations.

In contrast, Europeans mixed enthusiastically with French Polynesian groups, creating the Demi "class." Yet the 1960s and 70s saw major political changes in both

territories. Stephen Henningham remarks: "In the 1960s in Paris, the ideals and notions later expressed in the protests of 1968 flourished in intellectual circles, and people interested themselves in the Third World. To be from a colonized indigenous people was to be in fashion" (47). Students from the islands who studied in France during the 1960s returned home horrified by the display of inequality still prevalent in their countries. Both in New Caledonia and in Tahiti, young intellectuals began independence movements and established political groups to fight for indigenous peoples' rights, including their rights to the land. Tensions were exacerbated when in 1963 the French government began building the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (Pacific Experimentation Center) on the atoll of Mururoa, a small island chosen for its "remoteness" and "isolation." Dozens of nuclear tests contaminated the waters of French Polynesia, and when in 1995 then President Jacques Chirac declared that there would be one more round of a dozen nuclear tests in French Polynesia, the capital city of Papeete erupted into riots. French officials were horrified, as the riots portrayed in the news disturbed the idyllic image of the "peaceful" Tahiti. Since the riots, the president of French Polynesia has changed more than a dozen times, as the citizens of the territory habitually vote "no confidence" to governments supporting increased legislation from France.[18]

Chapter Three, entitled "Writing Ecological and Institutionalized Bodies," will examine the ways in which land and politics enter into the discourse of identity in the literature of all three women writers in this study. In particular, this chapter will analyze how the representations of the body (both male and female) presented by each author facilitate a political commentary on land disputes, the ecological ramifications of colonization and globalization, and the institutions that have imprinted the territories with

the colonizer's presence. Notably, in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Chantal T. Spitz includes the point of view of a Western woman employed by the nuclear testing site, who must justify both her position as the only woman engineer, qualified enough to work with the men in her field, and as the lover of a French Polynesian man. Yet the articulations of Spitz's indigenous characters, including an appeal to the *Mā'ohi* from the land itself, serve to announce many indigenous peoples' political views on the destruction of the land and European domination in French Polynesia.

In Gorodé's work, like in Spitz's, corporeal identity is intimately bound with the land. Interestingly, in one of her 1970s poems, Gorodé laments the devastation caused by the French nuclear power plants in Mururoa, creating a bridge between Kanak and French Polynesian political values. While Gorodé's critique of the colonial and neocolonial seizure of Kanak land is a recurrent theme in her works, she is also heavily critical of the institutions put in place by French authorities, such as prisons, hospitals, and the school system. In the discussion of the various representations of institutionalized bodies, I will evoke Michel Foucault's theory of subjected or docile bodies, as he describes them in *Discipline and Punish*. Yet Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz utilize institutionalized or subjected bodies precisely in order to break free from the sociopolitical ideologies that circumscribe these very bodies. Possibly the most criticized institution of the Oceanic islands, as in the literatures of Africa and the Caribbean, is the French-imposed school system.

The school system, in Gorodé's work as well as in the works of the other two authors in this project, figures as a pivotal point in the discussion of politics and identity. Schools in both territories, until the 1980s, forbade any languages other than French to be

spoken on the premises. All three women's works critique the school system in their political discussions; yet most notably, they critique the limitations on language that the schools, instruments of colonial power, placed on young students and consequently the imposed silence of indigenous voices. Dennis Lee insists:

> The colonial writer does not have words of his own. Is it not possible that he projects his own condition of voicelessness into whatever he creates? […] Try to speak the words of your home and you will discover – if you are a colonial – that you do not know them… (qtd. in Ashcroft 142)

Indeed, the invalidation of oral tradition by writing, privileged in the colonial school system, rendered many indigenous peoples faced with an alien duality, or even prevented some children from being able to fluently speak what should have been their native languages.[19]

Chapter Four: "Writing the Silent Oceanic Body," will analyze the notions of the silent body, the textual body, and enunciations of identity in the works of Jacques, Gorodé, and Spitz. Déwé Gorodé's early work responds to the silences enveloping a Kanak society that, although technically able to vote beginning in the 1950s, was actually unable to break the barriers of the colonial system and insert a fervent Kanak voice until the turbulent decade of the 1980s. In fact, the colonial government attempted (and fortunately failed) to silence the voice of the poetess. During two imprisonments in the 1970s and 80s intended to muzzle her political voice (she was arrested for issuing pamphlets that were characterized by the French colonial government as "rebellious"), Gorodé wrote numerous poems included in her first collection, *Sous les cendres des conques,* that critique not only the colonial government for censuring the Kanak voice, but they also implore the Kanak community to seek a more effective method of speech and to dare to speak out despite the constraints of tradition.

Remarkably, silence has been imposed on indigenous authors not only by the colonizer and the colonial school system, but also by their own societies. In both Kanak and *Mā'ohi* societies, the collective voice has historically been privileged over that of the individual. Speaking as an individual is considered taboo, or scandalous. For example, Chantal T. Spitz's pioneer novel *L'Île des rêves écrasés* transgressed the boundaries of silence between the various communities in French Polynesia. As previously mentioned, the first Tahitian novel stirred the emotions of the diverse groups of the archipelago, not only for the condemnations she includes, but also for the daring act of speaking out as an individual. The author remarked in an informal discussion with a class at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in April 2012 that after the publication of her first novel, her father, a public figure, received angry phone calls urging him to "shut her up," and that her son "hated" her for three months due to the harassment he received at school. She admitted that she might not have published if she had known the scandal that the novel, originally intended to be a private story for her sons, would create. Both Spitz and Gorodé rupture the silence imposed on their communities by the colonial instrument, writing, and the self-imposed silence upheld by tradition.

The subject of silence is manifold, however, and the fourth chapter will also address the silence that permeates the diverse communities of the Oceanic islands. Notably, New Caledonia has been home to a particularly concentrated silence between the Kanak and Caldoche communities. While Kanak groups tend to maintain the idea that Caldoches are on the side of the French, they seem to forget that Caldoches were also displaced, and are similarly victims of colonization. In her later works, Gorodé recognizes the Caldoche voice as one that similarly must break out of the silence, and

acknowledges the need for a dialogue between the two communities. Claudine Jacques's works particularly address the silence that reigns over the Caldoche community and that still, on many levels, prevents the two communities from recognizing one another. In her first novel, *Les Cœurs barbelés*, Jacques features a Caldoche woman and a Kanak man who attempt a relationship in a time when doing so was almost unfathomable, and represents the extent to which the silence between the two communities was considered impenetrable. However, many of Jacques's female characters successfully break the silence preventing the two communities from seeking reconciliation. Indeed, all three writers of this project include the woman's voice, representing the woman's experience in both indigenous and Europeanized Oceanic societies and cultures that have traditionally been male-dominated. Chapter Four will conclude with an attempt to answer the question: is there an *écriture féminine*, expressed through the representation of the woman's body, in the Oceanic literary canon?

Ultimately, the aim of this project is to bear witness to the multiple configurations of an Oceanic body in the words of Oceanic writers themselves, a body that has long been defined in the terms of an "outsider" discourse. As Elizabeth Grosz insists, "far from being an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual, and intellectual struggles" (19). Grosz further contends: "Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities" (19). Indeed, the authors examined in this project write the Oceanic body as "the site of contestation" in a series of identity struggles. They employ culturally, racially, and sexually specific bodies in the creation of an original, confrontational literature that

transgresses historically and culturally imposed boundaries. In this emancipatory Oceanic literature, as Bernard Rigo remarks, “l’écriture peut dénouer le corps et libérer la parole” (“writing can untangle the body and liberate speech” 192).

[1] The word "aiga" is Samoan for "family" or "extended family."

[2] As opposed to the terms the "South Pacific" or the "Pacific Isles," I prefer to employ the term "Oceania" throughout this project. As Epeli Hau'ofa explains in *We Are the Ocean*, the former two terms are those that Western explorers and missionaries utilized to refer to the islands of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, essentially distinguishing them as separate, unconnected island groups in the Pacific Ocean. In Hau'ofa's view, the term "Pacific Islands" makes the islands sound small, confined, and separated, whereas the connections between the peoples of Oceania date back thousands of years. Pacific writers and scholars such as Hau'ofa are calling for a decentering of the Pacific, thereby employing the term "Oceania" in order to cultivate connections between the island communities. Kareva Mateata-Allain explains: "Such re-titling suggests a more holistic approach that unites Oceanic peoples as opposed to separating them through imperially and colonially imposed boundaries" (43). I am attempting to respect the decentered view of Oceania by considering the works of Oceanic authors, from different island groups with distinct political and cultural histories, yet with links tying them together as Oceanic peoples, together in one project.

[3] *Vahine* is the Tahitian word for "woman," and is often seen in European texts discussing Tahitian women. *Tāne*, seen much less frequently, means "man."

[4] Bolyanatz remarks that sex for trade was a common Tahitian practice; however, historians do not know if Tahitian women exercised agency in this practice, or if they were forced by their community to engage in sexual affairs with Europeans.

[5] Various forms of *reo mā'ohi* were spoken in the Society Islands, or the islands including Tahiti, Bora Bora, Huahine, and Mururoa. The Tahitian language is actually

translated as *reo tahiti*. Most Tahitian writers and scholars utilize the more general term, *reo mā'ohi*.

[6] It was under the reign of Queen Pomaré IV that France gained control of the archipelago, winning a war waged against the queen from 1844 to 1846. In June of 1880, her son, King Pomaré V, ceded Tahiti and its dependencies to France, despite the majority of native Tahitians' desire to become British, officially making Tahiti and the surrounding islands a French colony.

[7] The English and French words "tribe" ("tribu") and "clan" are the most approximate terms to describe Melanesian social structure, although both terms fall somewhat short. Before European arrival, the distinct groups of Melanesians were organized in villages of about 50 people, which the French government designated as "tribus." The word does not have the same connotations as it does for the tribes of Native America, although it is the closest expression in both English and French to describe Melanesian social organization in New Caledonia. I employ both the terms "tribu" and "clan" in this project, following the example of Déwé Gorodé.

[8] The Kanak population now considers September 24th the Kanak day of mourning.

[9] Kanak is a term that comes from the Polynesian word *kanaka*, meaning man, and was originally used to refer to the Melanesian population before the French adopted an orthography (*canaque*, used derisively) that was more consistent with the French language. When the island became a French overseas collectivity in 1946, the Melanesian population reappropriated the term Kanak. When speaking French, the term Kanak does not take on an "s" in the plural. Significantly, this does not conform to French orthographic or morphological conventions. Additionally, rather than refer to the island

as New Caledonia, the Kanak population has renamed the territory Kanaky. Throughout this project I will often refer to the territory as Kanaky/New Caledonia, as the collectivity currently utilizes both names.

[10] In fact, Leenhardt worked with Déwé Gorodé's grandfather, Philippe Gorodé, who acted as informant to the enthographer. His son, Waia Gorodé, later worked with Leenhardt's disciple, Jean Guiart.

[11] *Wahine* is the Hawaiian and Māori (an indigenous group of New Zealand, which shares similar cultural aspects with the *Mā'ohi* and Hawaiian peoples) equivalent to *vahine*. It is often used in English texts.

[12] The term "littératures d'émergence" has been widely contested by many authors in the Oceanic region, who find the term "emerging" as diminutive, arrogant, and racist, as Chantal Spitz points out in *Pensées insolentes et inutiles* (166). The term insinuates that Oceanic writing is in the process of being birthed, which disconnects it from its past and rich oral history. Rather, the literature emanating from the region is one that is mature, original, and indeed has existed for more than 200 years, even in traditional written form, as the London Missionary Society taught indigenous peoples to write when they settled in the islands. It has also existed in the form of the tattoo, which has inscribed genealogical lineage as well as family stories upon the skins of Polynesians for centuries. While literature in the traditional sense did not exist in the "territories" until less than fifty years ago, Kareva Mateata-Allain reminds us that Tahitian writing has long been established in the islands: "French Polynesians have a strong history of inscribed texts, including tapa cloth, tattooing, sculptures, sand paintings, and glyphs. The English word 'tattoo' is derived from the *reo Mā'ohi* 'tatau,' meaning to tap or strike […] tattooing was

historically an intra-oceanic text that denoted genealogies, tribal affiliations, life roles and accomplishments, and societal standing (20). Therefore, defining the traditional *Mā'ohi* culture as strictly oral, without writing in any sense, is not entirely accurate.

[13] It is important to note Wendt's use of the expression "alongside other literatures." Wendt does not attempt to "refute" or to contradict the images of the body that have endured more than two centuries of literature. Rather, he acknowledges that these images do exist, but that they are not the only representations of the Oceanic body that continue to survive. The authors I have chosen to examine in this study present images that are multiple and sometimes contradictory, demonstrating that there is no singular, "pure," "authentic" image of the Oceanic body. Rather, they depict an Oceanic body *in their own words*, "clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies" (Wendt 411).

[14] The 1970s and 1980s were also a pivotal two decades for Antillean literature in French, as Guadeloupean writers Simone Schwarz-Bart and Maryse Condé, and Martinican writer Édouard Glissant, began publishing more prolifically during this period. Significantly, this productive literary period in the colonies followed the turbulent decade of the 1960s in France, when Algeria, a former French colony, gained its independence, and when doubt about the heavy-handedness of the De Gaulle government caused student and worker protests and general strikes in May 1968.

[15] Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz seldom translate indigenous vocabulary in-text, but they do frequently provide a *lexique* in the back of their works to help the monolingual reader. Significantly, they have found an alternative to translation or glossing, which prevents the colonizer's language from assuming authority over their texts. In fact, in Spitz's more

recent works, the reader is referred to the website for the Tahitian Academy's online dictionary, in order to avoid glossing completely.

[16] The typical terminology for this *métissage* in Tahiti is Demi/e. Spitz recently admitted in an interview with RadioGrenouille that she hates both the terms Demi and *métis*; she refers to herself as simply Tahitian. Spitz often critiques the Demis, and notes that considering oneself a Demi is more of a class mentality than a racial identification.

[17] The title of Jacques's collection of short stories, *Le Cri de l'acacia*, also implies a personification of the land (or nature) and creates a link between the land and the voices of New Caledonia.

[18] In May 2013, French Polynesia elected the pro-autonomy candidate Gaston Flosse, who had previously served as president more than four times, to replace pro-independence president Oscar Temaru, who finished his fifth consecutive term as president. Since 2004, French Polynesia has been considered a "pays d'outre-mer au sein de la République" ("overseas country inside the Republic"), or POM rather than its previous designation of overseas territory, which grants the country significant autonomy. For more information on the status of French Polynesia, see http://www.polynesie-francaise.pref.gouv.fr/.

[19] Notably, Chantal T. Spitz writes in French because it is her first language, since her parents did not permit her to speak Tahitian while growing up. She admits in an interview with Patrick Sultan that she does not master *reo mā'ohi* enough to be able to write an entire text in it (Sultan). In contrast, while Gorodé speaks her mother tongue fluently, she writes in French to facilitate comprehension for the 28 linguistically distinguished Kanak tribes, as well as because writing in her native *paicî* creates problems for publishing. She

remarks that writing in French does not pose a problem of conscience for her, "because when I write in French, I express a Kanak way of thinking. Somehow, by using the French language to achieve my ends, I am engaging in subversion…" (Mwa Vée 24).

Chapter 1:

The Instigation and Perpetuation of the Mythical Oceanic Body

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the French literature written about Oceania, particularly Tahiti and New Caledonia, and about the Oceanic body in order to provide a background for the Oceanic women's literature explored in the remaining three chapters of this project. This literature, written throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, is a literature that defined the Oceanic space in terms of the Western imagination, which initiated and perpetuated the myth of an idyllic, "noble savage," a myth that ultimately led to the objectification of the Oceanic body. The works explored in this chapter were written by mostly male French authors throughout three centuries. My analysis focuses on how the authors of the selected works objectify both the body and the customs of the indigenous societies of Tahiti and New Caledonia. Bougainville's famous *Voyage autour du monde*, Nicolas Bricaire de La Dixmerie's *Le Sauvage de Taïti aux Français*, and Denis Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* are all eighteenth century examples of the exotic genre, and were possibly the most influential works about Oceania for the writers that would follow in their footsteps in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarly, Pierre Loti's *Le Mariage de Loti*, Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, and Victor Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux* are probably the most well known works treating the Tahitian Other from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These works sexualize the Tahitian woman's body, and specifically call into question her capacity for individual agency. Essentially, as I will observe in the twentieth century New Caledonian novels examined near the end of the chapter (the Nervats's novel *Célina*

Landrot, fille de Pouembout, and Jean Mariotti's nostalgic novel *À bord de l'Incertaine*), the (male) Westerner is typically endowed with the gift of thought or intelligence, while the indigenous and female characters are often given merely corporeal existence, implying an absence of thought. My intention in this chapter is to present the ideas disseminated in order to satisfy European preconceptions about the indigenous groups, and especially the women, from the French-speaking Oceanic region. By placing the objectified and fetischized Oceanic woman's body at the forefront of discussion, these works silence the Oceanic voice and dehumanize the image of both Tahitian and Kanak individuals.

A European Fascination with the "Antipodes": Anticipating the Myth

Well before the European "discovery" of Tahiti and its surrounding islands, the myth of an exotic, antipodal world located in the Pacific Ocean existed in the Western imaginary. One can trace the belief in an antipodal world to Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and the Pythagorean School, all of whom believed that the northern hemisphere must be balanced by land in the south. While in the Middle Ages such a belief was considered heretical, in the sixteenth century, the universal predication of the Bible was considered a justification and a motivation for the discovery of new lands. Accompanied by a more scientific belief in the equilibrium of the world, the belief in an unknown continent, the *terra australis incognita*, was reborn. The supposed existence of the antipodal land was one of the most widely disputed geographical theories in the eighteenth century, which contributed significantly to the ultimate "discovery" of Tahiti in the latter half of the century. The centuries-old myth of an antipodal world, the scientific hypotheses

predating the "discovery" of Tahiti, and the literature written about the supposed antipodes profoundly influenced the reading of the reality of the Oceanic region and its inhabitants: a reading that most contemporary Oceanic authors regard as a *mis*reading. Most notably, this literature, written before Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde*, contributed to the mythologized perception of Oceanic women that Bougainville and the men on board his two ships would perpetuate and, essentially, attempt to re-write.

Thomas More's *Utopia,* published in 1516, was one of the first, and certainly the most recognized, contributors to the myth of a paradisiacal, antipodal land. The humanist philosopher's portrayal of an idyllic social and political system on an unknown Pacific island, although fictional, stimulated the European belief in the existence of such an island. Almost a century later, in 1605 the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandes de Queirós departed from Peru with the goal of discovering the alleged *terra australis*, and although he failed to do so (rather, he "discovered" the Pacific islands of Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides), he wrote an *a priori* description of the land in his journal. He insisted on the existence of a perfect, beneficent, and welcoming land situated in calm waters, with a hospitable climate and expansive bays suitable for anchoring ships. Snow did not appear on the mountains, there were neither crocodiles nor venomous snakes, and the light-skinned inhabitants were welcoming and friendly, easily civilizable, and far superior to the indigenous tribes of the Americas. Queirós went so far as to insist on the existence of gold, pearls, and other riches in the *terra autralis,* none of which he had witnessed. Queirós's oneiric descriptions and navigational notations further intensified the belief in an idyllic society located on the supposed lands, and would become particularly motivational to both the French and British explorers of the Pacific.

Following More's *Utopia* and Queirós's travel narratives, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries abounded with philosophical writings treating the discovery of land in the Pacific region. Eric Vibart labels these writings "des odyssées philosophiques" ("philosophical odysseys") due to the tendency to represent imagined voyages in the *terra australis*, and the utopic societies that supposedly existed within this mythical land. These writings, mostly French and British, depicted socially, politically, and religiously perfect, tolerant, peaceful societies. Significantly, like More's *Utopia*, many of these works contain the travel accounts of the fictional voyagers. Included in the category of philosophical odysseys are Denis Veiras's (also, Vairasse) *L'Histoire des Sévarambes* (1677) and Gabriel de Foigny's *La Terre australe connue* (1676).[1] These two fictional travel narratives serve not only to misconstrue the European vision about the austral lands, but they also relate the sexual order to the political order, as Pamela Cheek observes in *Sexual Antipodes: Enlightenment Globalization and the Placing of Sex* (135), and thus contribute to the obsession with sex and the portrayal of women, especially antipodal women, as sexual objects or as monstrous beings. The Tahitian *vahine*, as well as the Kanak woman, are thus predetermined as objects of study in the European imaginary well before actual contact.

In Denis Veiras's *L'Histoire des Sévarambes,* shipwreck survivors on an island in the Pacific Ocean create a polygamous social system in which women are communally owned. The outnumbered women have no choice about their partners, their communal ownership, or their enforced sexual accessibility. However, when the shipwreck survivors meet the natives of the island, the Sevarites, the survivors must conform to monogamous heterosexuality, and the European men are supplied with sex slaves until they are able to

find suitable wives. In Gabriel de Foigny's drastically different colonial odyssey, *La Terre australe connue*, a hermaphrodite, narrator and voyager Jacques Sadeur, is considered a monster in seventeenth-century Europe. He unwillingly journeys from Europe to the "Congo" and subsequently continues his journey to the Austral land, where he finds a society comprised entirely of hermaphrodites. However, these hermaphrodites do not feel sexual desire, as does Sadeur, which again sets him apart as Other. In this novel, Sadeur cannot control his sexual desires and rapes a hermaphrodite with female characteristics. After learning of Sadeur's crime, the "Australians" attempt to force him to commit suicide, but he escapes by seducing a giant sea bird who flies him to safety.

As the two seventeenth-century novels briefly described indicate, sex and sexual penetration was repeatedly linked to the discovery of new lands in philosophical odysseys. As Pamela Cheek observes, sex is indeed presented as constitutive of the political order in both novels (135). In each work, the male characters objectify "indigenous" women and use their power (in the case of Veiras's characters, the males in the shipwreck outnumbered the females, and in the case of de Foigny's novel, Sadeur uses his physical strength) to take advantage of them sexually. Even more significant is the fact that in Veiras's odyssey, the native Sevarites assign "their" women to the shipwrecked European men as sex slaves. Essentially, the Oceanic woman's body becomes a commodity well before the discovery of the Polynesian and Melanesian islands. Almost exactly a century after the publication of *L'Histoire des Sévarambes*, British and French Pacific voyagers would report that native Tahitian men would supply them with young women. These voyagers, especially those accompanying Bougainville,

would (most of them unknowingly) read this story into their own, essentially mirroring Veiras's European shipwrecked voyagers' adoption of female sex slaves.

In the mid-eighteenth-century, the desire to discover antipodal lands in the Pacific Ocean was no less fashionable, although it adopted a more scientific character. Maupertuis commented in his 1752 *Lettre sur le progrès des Sciences* that the discovery of austral lands was one of the most important items of research for France. Similarly, Charles de Brosses, philosophe and man of science, cites Maupertuis, and insists in his *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes* (1756): "L'entreprise la plus grande, la plus noble, la plus utile peut-être que puisse faire un souverain, la plus capable d'illustrer à jamais son nom, est la découverte des Terres australes…" ("The biggest, the most noble, the most useful enterprise that a sovereign can undertake, that most capable of forever illustrating his name, is the discovery of the Austral lands…" 4-5). De Brosses's *Histoire* is a type of anthology separated into five "books," in which he lists and comments upon the voyages made by explorers from Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and Britain towards the elusive austral lands. De Brosses's most significant contribution to the myth surrounding Tahiti and the Polynesian islands is in fact the first use of the name Polynesia. In the *Histoire*, De Brosses separates the austral lands into three regions: la Magellanique, la Polynésie, and l'Australasie. De Brosses lists all the most relevant scientific and commercial reasons to encourage a discovery of the austral lands, and does not fail to fantasize about the utopian nature of the land and its inhabitants. Referring to Buffon's degeneration theory in which the climate plays a role in determining skin color and intelligence (and thus utilizing anatomical hypotheses to encourage geographical discoveries), he writes in his fifth and final "book":

> Si l'on va d'un côté ou d'un autre, ou de tous les deux, il y a grande apparence qu'on trouvera beaucoup d'îles ou de continents qui seront précisément *les antipodes des meilleures contrées de l'Europe, de l'Afrique et de l'Asie, où Dieu a créé entre le 20^{e} et le 60^{e} degré les hommes propres aux lettres, aux armes, à la police, en les plaçant dans la température qui leur convient*. On doit donc s'attendre qu'on trouvera la même disposition dans ce terroir et dans les habitants de ces parages… (359, emphasis mine)
>
> If one goes from one side to another, or to all of them, it is likely that one will find many islands or continents which will be precisely *the antipodes of the best countries of Europe, of Africa, and of Asia, where, between the 20th and the 60th degree, God created men suited to letters, to arms, to police, placing them in the temperature convenient to them*. One should thus expect to find the same disposition in this territory and in the inhabitants of its vicinity…

Like the ancient Greek philosophers, Charles de Brosses insists on a sort of equilibrium, a balancing not only of the "best countries of Europe, Africa, and Asia," but also of the inhabitants of the land, who must be as capable of learning and maintaining a government as satisfactory as the Europeans.

Naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon shared De Brosses's enthusiasm for the discovery of the *terra australis incognita*. Like Maupertuis, Buffon insisted in his famed *Histoire naturelle* that the discovery of the austral lands would put France on a level with the empires of England and Spain.[2] Just before the beginning of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), France had gained little in a peace agreement with Prussia. It also recognized the instability of its colonies in the Americas and was aware of the import of the discovery of new lands. Yet after the war, France had lost the majority of its islands in the Caribbean, retaining only Martinique, Guadeloupe, Marie-Galante, Sainte Lucie, and, until 1804, Haiti. In addition, Britain gained control of the majority of Canada and India, leaving France with little promise of economic gain. The discovery and colonization of islands in the Pacific would help France regain economic and

political prosperity. Scientists, philosophers, and mariners such as Bougainville were thus motivated scientifically, economically, and of course by the myths perpetuated through literature throughout the centuries.

Bougainville and his Companions: Initiating the Myth of the *Vahine*

Louis Antoine de Bougainville was not only a marine voyager. Raised in a family of high society, the brother of an erudite lover of Greek history, a student of d'Alembert, the sea captain was himself considered a philosophe and a mathematician. He was well versed in Greek history, philosophy, and mythology. He was also an avid reader of eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy, and was thus aware of the concept of the Noble Savage and of the myth of the antipodal lands supposedly located in the Pacific Ocean. Upon the discovery of Tahiti, the intellectual sea captain would allow his knowledge of Greek history and Enlightenment philosophy to become evident in his writing.[3]

Bougainville's journey to discover the *terra australis incognita* began in 1766, three years after the end of the Seven Years' War and ten years after his first sea voyage (to Canada). The journey took Bougainville and his crew in the two ships *La Boudeuse* and *L'Étoile* around South America to the Pacific Ocean. Bougainville kept a record of his travels in his navigational journal, which was published separately from the now celebrated *Voyage autour du monde, par la frégate du roi La Boudeuse, La Flûte et L'Étoile* (1771). The author consecrated 50 pages to the description of Tahiti, or the island he christened la Nouvelle-Cythère (Cythera was the mythical island of the goddess

of love, Venus), and its inhabitants in his *Voyage*, the largest quantity of text dedicated to any stop in the entire work.

La Boudeuse and *L'Étoile* arrived at Hitiaa, Tahiti in early April of 1768. In his journal entry dating April 5 and 6, Bougainville prosaically writes: "A great deal of bartering with the Savages who do not seem to be surprised to see us, and are skillful traders but display good faith. A young and fine-looking young girl came in one of the canoes, almost naked, who showed her vulva in exchange for small nails" (Dunmore 60). Bougainville represents the same scene in his *Voyage*:

> …il entra à bord une jeune fille, qui vint sur le gaillard d'arrière se placer à une des écoutilles qui sont au-dessus du cabestan […] La jeune fille laissa tomber négligemment un pagne qui la couvrait, et parut aux yeux de tous telle que Vénus se fit voir au berger phrygien: elle en avait la forme céleste. (46)
>
> …there entered on board a young girl, who came up on the quarter-deck and placed herself at one of the hatches below the capstan […] The young girl carelessly let the loincloth that was covering her fall, and appeared to the eyes of everyone in the way that Venus appeared to the Phrygian shepherd: she had the same celestial shape.

Bougainville's *Voyage*, intended for the public, clearly embellishes the event recorded in the journal, shifting from a register of economic exchange to one of aesthetic appreciation. John Dunmore comments in his translation notes to Bougainville's journal that the author evidently constructed the scene from several incidents (also recorded in the other voyagers' journals) when writing for the public. The *Voyage autour du monde* romanticizes and essentially cements the myth of the island of Tahiti and the sexual bodies found on the island. The author utilizes vocabulary found in Greek mythology, and frequently includes epigraphs quoting Virgil (in Latin) at the beginning of his chapters. Sonia Faessel remarks:

> Les modèles retenus par Bougainville dans son *Voyage* sont ceux de l'idylle et de la description ornementale […] il ne décrit pas ce qu'il voit, il fait sentir une image du Bonheur, celle qu'a évoquée Virgile, créateur d'idylles, dans ses *Bucoliques*. Bougainville a su créer des images s'inspirant des auteurs latins qu'il connait bien…(26)
>
> The models Bougainville utilizes in his *Voyage* are those of the idyll and of ornamental description […] he does not describe what he sees, he makes the reader feel an image of Happiness, that which Virgil, creator of idylls, evoked in his *Bucolics*. Bougainville knew how to create images inspired by the Latin authors he knew well…

Bougainville *invents* images of the island and of Tahitian women as goddess-like creatures in his *Voyage*. He creates and narrates, mirroring the previous examples of fictional travel literature with which he was familiar.[4] He writes about Tahitians within the context of European expectations, rather than including the less favorable aspects of the society (such as human sacrifice, infanticide, and the perpetual state of war with other islanders in which Tahitians were engaged and of which he was well aware). However, the images Bougainville represented in the *Voyage* became reality for French and European readers, due to his adamant assertion about the veracity of his narrative and the other marine voyagers whose own embellished accounts confirmed that of Bougainville.[5]

The hypothesis that there existed an antipodal land in the Pacific that was home to beings as appealing as Europeans was confirmed. Bougainville's invented images of Tahitians, and particularly of Tahitian women, were reminiscent of the descriptions of the gods and goddesses found in Virgil and Homer. Moreover, the islanders' described fascination with sex recalled seventeenth century fictional odysseys. He repeatedly compares the inhabitants of the island of Tahiti to Europeans, insisting upon their aesthetic similarities. He proclaims in Chapter 10 of the *Voyage*: "Je n'ai jamais rencontré d'hommes mieux faits ni mieux proportionnés; pour peindre Hercule et Mars,

on ne trouverait nulle part d'aussi beaux modèles. Rien ne distingue leurs traits de ceux des Européens; et, s'ils étaient vêtus, s'ils vivaient moins à l'air et au grand soleil, ils seraient aussi blancs que nous…" ("I have never encountered better made nor better proportioned men; to paint Hercules and Mars, one would not find more handsome models elsewhere. Nothing distinguishes their traits from those of Europeans; and, if they were dressed, if they lived less exposed to the sun and air, they would be as white as us…" 58). Later, he describes Tahitian women as coquette and delicate:

> [Une grande pièce d'étoffe est] aussi là le seul habillement des femmes, et elles savent l'arranger avec assez d'art pour rendre ce simple ajustement susceptible de coquetterie. Comme les Tahitiennes ne vont jamais au soleil sans être couvertes, et qu'un petit chapeau de cannes, garni de fleurs, défend leur visage de ses rayons, elles sont beaucoup plus blanches que les hommes. Elles ont les traits assez délicats; mais ce qui les distingue, c'est la beauté de leurs corps dont les contours n'ont point été défigurés par quinze ans de torture. (58)
>
> [A big piece of cloth is] also the only clothing of the women, and they know how to arrange it with enough art to render this simple cloth susceptible of coquetry. Because Tahitian women never go outside without covering themselves, and since a little hat of sticks, garnished with flowers, protects their faces from the sun's rays, they are much whiter than the men. They have rather delicate features; but what distinguishes them is the beauty of their bodies, the contours of which have not been disfigured by fifteen years of torture.

Significantly, it is the beauty of the Tahitian woman's body that distinguishes her, a body that has not been "tortured." Thus, the myth of the Tahitian *vahine* was disseminated through Bougainville's *Voyage*. European readers, absorbed in the "Pacific craze" of the time, relished Bougainville's ornamental descriptions of the island, the peaceful, sexually liberal inhabitants, and especially the women.

Although Bougainville is frequently attributed with having initiated the myth of Tahiti and of the Tahitian *vahine* (and indeed he did perpetuate it), it is more appropriate

to accredit the initiation of the myth to several of his companions on the voyage, and particularly to Philibert de Commerson, the naturalist on board the ship *L'Étoile*. In November 1769 he wrote a letter that was published in the *Mercure de France*, two years before the publication of Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde*. Commerson, also influenced by Thomas More's *Utopia*, writes:

> Cette Isle me parut telle, que je lui avois déjà appliqué le nom d'*Utopie* ou *de fortunée*, que Thomas Morus avoit donné à la République idéale: je ne savois pas encore que M. de Bougainville l'avoit nommée *la nouvelle Cythère*[…] Le nom que je lui destinois convenoit à un pays, le seul peut-être de la terre, où habitent des hommes sans vices, sans préjugés, sans besoins, sans dissensions. […] ils ne connaissent d'autre Dieu que l'amour ; tous les jours lui sont consacrés, toute l'Isle est son temple, toutes les femmes en sont les idoles, tous les hommes les adorateurs. Et quelles femmes encore ! Les rivales des Géorgiennes pour la beauté, et les sœurs des Grâces sans voile. (198)
>
> This island appeared to me such that I had already given it the name of *Utopia* or *of fortune*, which Thomas More had given to the ideal Republic: I did not yet know that M. de Bougainville had named it New Cythera […] The name that I destined for it suited a country, the only one, perhaps, on earth, inhabited by men without vices, without prejudgments, without needs, without dissensions. […] they know no other God than that of love; all their days are consecrated to love, all the island is Love's temple, all the women are the idols, all the men the adorers. And what women! The rivals of the Georgians for their beauty, and the sisters of the Graces without veils.

Pamela Cheek notes that the comparison of the Tahitian women to Georgians was significant because it "denoted that they were a rare people who had never degenerated from the original race of humans" (139). Notably, Georgian women were reputed to have been anatomically perfect and white. Darker-skinned women like those encountered later in New Caledonia would be regarded as ugly and defective. In fact, Bougainville uses the term "hideous" to describe the dark-skinned women of the Samoas. Commerson continually emphasizes the whiteness of the Tahitians' skin (a European could not

publicly fantasize about a woman with other than light skin). In scattered notes published posthumously as "Mémoires," Commerson proclaims: "The Savages of this island are all whites. There seem to be no black among them, whom they appear to loathe" (Dunmore 296-297). In a later note Commerson states: "[The women and girls] stand comparison with the finest European brunettes except that they are less white. They have large eyes, blue or black and level, black eyebrows, a coquettish and seductive glance […] in a word all their body is exquisitely proportioned..." (Dunmore 297). Like Bougainville, Commerson employs the term "coquette" to describe Tahitian women's glances. He overtly explores Tahitian women's anatomical features, exclaiming that they are "exquisitely proportioned," and, perhaps more importantly, almost as white as a European brunette.

Commerson's letter to the *Mercure de France* excited his European audience, and certainly contributed to the romantic twist Bougainville adds to his descriptions in the *Voyage autour du monde*. Several other voyagers accompanying Bougainville and Commerson later published their journals, which recounted the sexual activity of many of the sailors with the available Tahitian women (wives were not permitted adultery, but young unmarried women were free to seduce anyone they wished). Vivez, the *Étoile*'s surgeon, exclaims as he describes the encounter with the "Venus" Bougainville so elaborately recounts above: "How could such a charming people be so far from Europe and how is it that in this island they are so white whereas all we had seen in the other islands since the time of our departure were different" (Dunmore 226). Vivez later presumes that the married women must be jealous of the younger unmarried women's ability to spend time with the Frenchmen, who undoubtedly "would make her realize how

weak is the one she enjoys in her home" (Dunmore 233). Vivez makes it clear that sex and power are indelibly linked, as the European men would show the Tahitian women their superiority over Tahitian men via sex. As Foucault would observe, Vivez and the other sailors discursively construct the European body as a representative of power, while they vaunt yet simultaneously diminish the Tahitian body. Fesche, a volunteer on the Boudeuse, describes the famous scene of the unveiling of the Venus-like woman on the ship as an unveiling of an "Indian divinity…a retreat reserved for Love alone…" (Dunmore 225). He later tastelessly states: "As for those [women] who are unmarried or widowed, they are free and prostitute themselves with whoever takes their fancy, and so one can appreciate the kind of life most of the French led in this fortunate island…" (Dunmore 260). The perpetuation of the myth of the Tahitian *vahine* in the European imaginary was therefore a communal effort: Bougainville, Commerson, and many of the voyagers accompanying the expedition portrayed Tahitian women as sexually voracious, as seductive, coquettish, and even as prostitutes. The fictional literature influenced by the navigators' accounts would follow the same route.

Nicolas Bricaire de la Dixmerie: Myth and Morals

Although the Enlightenment period was reputed to be that of an exaltation of reason and scientific fact, many eighteenth century philosophes were unable to prevent the myths of Tahiti and the *vahine* from entering their moralizing, fictional texts. Approximately a year before the publication of Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde* in 1771, a lesser-known philosophe, Nicolas Bricaire de la Dixmerie, published a "letter" from none other than Aoutorou, the Tahitian man who accompanied Bougainville on his

return voyage to France. One of the most important members of the masonic lodge "Les Neuf Sœurs," La Dixmerie was a friend of Voltaire and a critic of Rousseau. Inspired by the stories of Tahiti and concerned about the mores of his own country, the philosophe follows in the footsteps of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, critiquing his own society through the voice of an outsider. Yet La Dixmerie had read only the letter from Commerson to the *Mercure de France*, and had doubtless heard the stories from the sailors, including the British explorers, who had returned from the "enchanted" land. Thus, similar to Bougainville and Commerson, he creates or invents his own Tahitian Other.

La Dixmerie's *Le Sauvage de Taïti aux Français, avec un Envoi au philosophe, ami des sauvages* is composed of three "parts." "L'avis de l'éditeur" briefly recounts the "discovery" of Tahiti and Aoutorou's stay in Paris. The second and principle section of the work, "Le sauvage de Taïti aux Français," is a rather long letter written directly to the French public from "Aoutorou," which comments upon the inutility of laws governing nature (i.e. sexual intercourse), as well as the quest for *bonheur* (happiness) a prevalent theme during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The final part of the book, "l'Envoi au philosophe ami des sauvages," is a blatant critique of the more contradictory aspects of Rousseau's philosophy, specifically his *Contrat social* and his *Discours sur l'inégalité parmi les hommes*.

Having only read the idyllic descriptions of Tahiti in Commerson's letter, La Dixmerie's perspective on Tahitian custom, religion, and social hierarchy was indisputably skewed. Mirroring Commerson's assertion that the island is a "temple" to Love only, La Dixmerie vaunts an egalitarian society dedicated only to the practice of

Love, horrified by the thought of war or bloodshed, with a harmonious, musical language. The descriptive language La Dixmerie employs continues in the vein of Commerson. In fact, he embellishes even more than the naturalist himself. Eric Vibart remarks in *Tahiti: Naissance d'un paradis au siècle des Lumières* that La Dixmerie overstepped the suppositions of Commerson, indulging in a text that favors the Tahitian myth (179). Naturally, the philosophe cannot omit a description of Tahitian women, further enhancing the myth of the exotic *vahine*. Relying entirely on the reports of others, the author extols their incomparable beauty: "La beauté des femmes de cette Isle rend cette préférence encore plus flatteuse. Elles pourraient la disputer elles-mêmes à toutes les Beautés Asiatiques. La liberté dont elles jouissent leur donne, de plus, ces grâces faciles que l'esclavage rendrait timides et concertées…" ("The beauty of the women of this island renders the preference of it even more flattering. They could dispute it themselves with all of the Asiatic beauties. The freedom that they enjoy gives them even more of the easy graces that slavery would render timid and forced" 9). La Dixmerie associates the beauty of Tahitian women with their liberty, uniting the body to the political order at the beginning of his work. While the author insists that he places value on the philosophical merits of Tahitian social practices, his fetishized descriptions of both Tahitian culture and Tahitian women come to the forefront of his work, marking it as an overly sexualized representation of the Tahitian body.

In the second part of La Dixmerie's work, "Le sauvage de Taïti aux français," "Aoutorou" speaks, informing the French public that he has been instructed in their language, culture, and literature, and that he now would like to comment upon the morals of French society. He insists that unlike those of the French, Tahitian laws were never

written, yet never transgressed, nor have they ever caused discontent. Tahitians follow only the laws of nature, he insists:

> Nous mettons les plaisirs au nombre des premiers besoins, et nous ne croyons la nature satisfaite que quand elle n'a plus rien à demander. Nos plus belles Taïtiennes, (et presque toutes sont belles) secondèrent parfaitement nos vues. Leur affabilité surpassa encore la nôtre, et je doute que vos curieux voyageurs en perdent sitôt la mémoire… (33)
>
> We put pleasure at the top of our needs, and we do not believe nature to be satisfied until she has nothing more to ask. Our most beautiful Tahitian women (and almost all are beautiful) second our views. Their affability surpasses our own, and I doubt that your travelers will soon forget that…

"Aoutorou" affirms the beauty of "almost all" Tahitian women, assuring his readership that the rumors about the beauty of Tahitians are true. He later apologizes for his familiarity with French women, as he is accustomed to treating all women in the same manner (according to reports by Bougainville and others that had witnessed the Tahitian's actions, the actual Aoutorou had attempted to greet French women in a sexual manner). He writes:

> Nous croyons qu'une belle femme est le plus beau présent que la nature ait fait à l'homme. Nous recevons ce présent avec reconnaissance; nous en usons, mais nous en connaissons toujours le prix. Nul de nous ne prétend se l'approprier sans réserve. Nous ne croyons pas qu'une femme doive nous aimer toujours, parce qu'elle nous aura aimé quelque tems. Nos chaînes peuvent se rompre… (38)
>
> We believe that a beautiful woman is the most beautiful gift that nature has given to man. We receive this gift with gratitude; we make use of it, but we always recognize the cost. None of us tries to take ownership of it without reserve. We do not believe that a woman should always love us, because she will have loved us some time. Our chains can be broken…

Through the voice of Aoutorou, La Dixmerie propagates the notion that the only deity the Tahitians worship is that of Love, and that to Tahitians, women are essentially commodities. Interestingly, La Dixmerie's attempt at understanding Tahitian sexual

practices through the voice of the Tahitian is linked to his attempt at encouraging a shift in marriage practices in France. Insinuating that in Tahiti women and men are free to divorce at any time in order to choose a different partner, La Dixmerie addresses an issue that Carol Blum examines in an article explaining the defense of polygamy in eighteenth century France. She notes that many authors tried to denounce the idea of Christian marriage as the source of the demographic decline of the country, and encouraged instead the practice of "successive polygamy," which would maximize fecundity (93-94). La Dixmerie's apparent critique of traditional marriage laws is made possible through the utilization and the manipulation of the Tahitian subject. As we know, his suppositions about Tahitian morality were based on little factual evidence: all of his supporting information came from Commerson's letter and Rousseau's hypotheses (which he critiques). Like many French philosophes, La Dixmerie employs the Other society to create a paradigm for his own society, possibly in order to avoid a blatant critique of French marriage and sexual practices. As Michel Foucault remarks in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, eighteenth century authors were hesitant to speak flagrantly about sex:

> … one had to speak of it as a of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses… (24)

La Dixmerie thus employs analytical and philosophical discourse, utilizing the Tahitian body as a system of regulation and utility for the greater good of French society. Similarly, Denis Diderot, one of the most anatomically driven materialist philosophes of

the Enlightenment, would exploit the Tahitian body in order to perform a national and racial comparison promoting a novel conception of marriage and sexual practices.

Denis Diderot: Re-Writing the Myth

Like Rousseau, Denis Diderot believed in the original innocence of man. For the philosophe, Bougainville's "discovery" of Tahiti had proven the reality of the myth of the *bon sauvage* (Noble Savage). Inspired by the *Voyage autour du monde* and by the stories and texts of the other voyagers, Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, *ou dialogue entre A et B sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas* (*Addendum to Bougainville's Journey, or dialogue between A and B on the drawback to binding moral ideas to certain physical actions which bear none*), written in 1772 and published posthumously in 1798, attempts to fill in the "unsaid" of the stories of the marine voyagers in order to discuss moral and social issues relevant to French society in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Namely, like La Dixmerie, Diderot was concerned with the matter of regeneration and marriage practices. France was experiencing a population decline during the latter half of the eighteenth century and, as Carol Blum remarks: "la crainte d'une stérilité nationale, savamment manipulée par les critiques du régime et de l'Eglise, finissait par primer bien souvent sur d'autres valeurs traditionnelles…" ("The fear of a national sterility, knowingly manipulated by the critics of the regime and of the Church, frequently succeeded in taking priority over other traditional values" 93). Diderot's *Supplément,* as the full title suggests, argues for a "natural" stance (i.e. that sexual intercourse should be governed by bodily drives and the laws of nature) versus the traditional moral values

governing the sexual conduct of the European public. Thus, sex and the body obtain political and economic authority in Diderot's text, as sexual intercourse and bodily desire are proven to boost the political and economic position of the Tahitian public, which of course is meant to stand as an example for the French public.

Composed of five chapters, the *Supplément* is written in the form of a dialogue between the characters A and B, who read and discuss Bougainville's *Voyage* on a foggy day. The first chapter, the "Jugement du voyage de Bougainville," serves as an apology for the veracity and clarity of the original *Voyage autour du monde*. Through character B, Diderot defends Bougainville, insisting upon the literary quality of his work and the "true Frenchness" of the author, thereby legitimating the myth of Tahiti (and of the exotic Tahitian body) in the imaginary of his erudite French readership. In fact, the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* was so successful that many who were unfamiliar with the *Voyage* itself were inspired to read it, believing the truth of Bougainville's words, on which Diderot so adamantly insists.

Although Diderot avers, through B, upon the reliability of the mariner's story, throughout the following chapters, the philosophe himself does not remain faithful to the truth. Bougainville remarks in his *Voyage* that he mistakenly assumed Tahitian society was classless. In fact, in the highly stratified society, women were not permitted to marry a man of a lower class, and property as well as better quality food was reserved for the higher classes, the *ari'i*. Nevertheless, like Commerson and La Dixmerie, Diderot ignores these facts in order to propagate the image of an idyllic, egalitarian society to whom the concept of private property was foreign, and whose only deity was Love. Diderot's attempts to moralize by idealizing false images of Tahiti perhaps did more to prevent an

accurate portrayal of the society than any other text in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Two scenes are of particular interest in the study of the treatment of the Tahitian body in Diderot's text. In each scene, Diderot assumes the voice of a native Tahitian man in order to condemn French laws against nature, which inevitably venerates the Tahitian body and Tahitian sexual practices. In the second chapter, "Les Adieux du vieillard" ("The Farewells of the elderly man"), Diderot rewrites a scene from Bougainville's *Voyage*, in which he recounts an elderly Tahitian's negative reaction to the arrival of the Europeans.[6] Diderot's elder complains that the Europeans have brought venereal disease and death to Tahiti (which they did); they have permanently tainted Tahitian blood with their own "sang impur" ("impure blood" 30). Diderot, through the voice of the elder, fetishizes the purity of the Tahitian body before the arrival of the "contaminated" Europeans.

On a seemingly contradictory note, the voice of the male Tahitian, Orou, in Chapters three and four, desires sexual contact between Europeans and Tahitians in order to enhance and enlarge the Tahitian race. In Chapter three, "L'entretien de l'Aumônier et d'Orou" ("The meeting of the chaplain and Orou"), Orou, the male Tahitian head of household, tries to convince a European chaplain to sleep with one or all of his three daughters (and wife). After a discussion of the European's religious beliefs and morals, Orou echoes the article "Population" in the *Encyclopédie*, which insists that celibacy is a law against nature, and in fact premarital sexual intercourse should not be regarded as taboo between consenting, heterosexual adults.[7] According to Diderot, the Tahitians' principle concern is preserving the Nation through procreation, as opposed to the French

Nation's insistence on modesty and the prevention of premarital sex. Orou explains to the priest that the birth of a child is always a joy to the nation, regardless of the child's "legitimacy": "Un enfant qui naît occasionne la joie domestique et publique: c'est un accroissement de fortune pour la cabane, et de force pour la nation: ce sont des bras et des mains de plus dans Tahiti…" ("A child who is born is cause for domestic and public joy; it is a growth of fortune for the household, and for the nation: it means more arms and hands in Tahiti…" 46). More importantly, however, Diderot's Orou essentially explains to the chaplain that in Tahiti, value is organized entirely around the body – the body itself is worth more than any iron or tools the Europeans offer to trade.[8]

Further commodifying the Tahitian body (both male and female), Orou argues, in order to convince the French chaplain to sleep with his daughters, that Tahitians recognize that Europeans are more intelligent than them, and that to enhance the intelligence of their population, their women need to collect European "seed." Pamela Cheek views this argument as a "Tahitian" act of "reading the body"(180): while the Tahitian body is physically superior, the French body will "infuse" the Tahitian body with intelligence. Insisting upon the necessity of ameliorating and increasing the population, Diderot's Orou later comments on the attractiveness of Tahitian female fertility, simultaneously perpetuating the tendency to mythicize the fertile Tahitian body: "Il n'y a presque rien de commun entre la Vénus d'Athènes et celle de Tahiti; l'une est Vénus galante, l'autre est Vénus féconde" ("There is almost nothing in common between the Venus of Athens and that of Tahiti; one is the galant Venus, the other is the fecund Venus" 50).

As the most fecund Tahitian woman is the most valued in Diderot's fantasized Tahitian society, the production of a child between a Tahitian woman and a European man is worthy of recognition, in the form of bodily inscription. In one of the rare moments when a woman speaks in Diderot's narrative, Orou's daughter Thia attempts to persuade the character of the chaplain to sleep with her: "Si tu m'accordes cette faveur, je ne t'oublierai plus; je te bénirai toute ma vie; *j'écrirai ton nom sur mon bras et sur celui de ton fils;* nous le prononcerons sans cesse avec joie…" ("If you grant me this favor, I will never forget you; I will bless you all my life; *I will write your name on my arm and on the arm of your son*; we will ceaselessly profess your name with joy…" 39, emphasis mine). Thia insists on the writing of the man's name on her body, thus inviting him to claim her while invoking the idea of the Tahitian tattoo. Pamela Cheek infers from Diderot's interpretation of the tattoo: "Like calculus, savage writing, or tattooing, is conceived as an expression of what is (or will be) realized in nature. The writing of the chaplain's French name is a sign of the introduction of French *esprit* into Thia's Tahitian body, of his possession of her…" (182). Diderot's Tahitian woman's body represents a tablet upon which the European is able to inscribe himself and assure a continued French presence in Tahiti. Yet the significance of bodily inscription is even more profound: the writing upon of the woman's body implies the superiority of the written word to the traditional Tahitian oral culture. Writing, in the Western sense, did not exist in Tahiti before European contact, except in the form of tattooing. In this fictional colonial endeavor, Diderot usurps the power of Tahitian writing, utilizing the tattoo to convey European influence, foreshadowing the future devastation done to Tahitian oral culture. As Elizabeth Grosz analyzes in *Volatile Bodies*, "Cicatrizations and scarifications […]

form maps of social needs, requirements, and excesses. […] Unlike messages to be deciphered, they are more like a map correlating social positions with corporeal intensities" (140). Diderot's fictionalized tattoo upon a fictionalized woman creates a map, inscribing the Tahitian woman's body of the European imaginary with social codes indicating an unobstructed, inviting pathway for future European colonizers.

Pierre Loti's "Roman exotique"

Born Julien Marie Viaud, the author changed his name to Pierre Loti during his 1872 naval voyage to Tahiti, as the *vahine* he met upon his arrival found his French name difficult to pronounce. The fact that he adopted this name as his pseudonym and would not publish under any other name is symbolic, as his fictional works (all but three of his published texts) are marked with fantasy and a tendency to embellish reality. The majority of Loti's novels are inspired by his life experiences, and especially by his experiences traveling in foreign lands. Irene L. Szyliowicz remarks in *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman*: "Loti's 'foreign' fiction is almost formulaic: in each instance a handsome, usually French, sailor travels to a distant land, there to fascinate, and in turn be enthralled by, an 'Oriental' woman" (15). Indeed, although the author Loti did meet the young Tahitian girl, Rarahu, and have a romance with her, he did not stay an entire year, as his fiction indicates, but rather two months. The narrator and the author are thus not one and the same, and *Le Mariage de Loti* should be considered a fictional novel with sporadic autobiographical elements dispersed throughout the text. It is Loti's power of description, which seems so authentic due to his apparent capacity to quickly learn and

employ the Tahitian language, that sediments the myth of the Tahitian *vahine* in the imagination of his European readership.

Loti's portrayal of Tahitian women in *Le Mariage de Loti* takes on two very different dimensions. Firstly, he uses diminutive language and bestial comparisons to represent the female characters in his novel. He repeatedly refers to Rarahu's "petit cœur sauvage" ("little savage heart"), and in Chapter 8 he describes Tétouara, the Melanesian woman who reminds him of a woman of the Congo wandering among British "misses": "Tétouara avec une inépuisable belle humeur, une *gaité simiesque*, une impudeur absolue, entretenait autour d'elle le bruit et le mouvement…" ("Tétouara, with an inexhaustible good countenance, a *simian-like gaiety*, an absolute immodesty, maintained noise and movement all around her…" 16, emphasis mine). Secondly, he represents women as haunting, enigmatic, fantastic figures. In each case he marginalizes the Oceanic woman by placing her outside of (even fictional) reality but giving her the ethereal, mythical quality that European readers had come to expect.

In Chapter 5 of the novel, the narrator describes the fourteen-year-old Rarahu, who comes from a race that Loti describes as one of the most beautiful races in the world. The girl cannot be anything but beautiful, as in order to explain a white man's marriage to a "savage" girl, she must be of aesthetic value. Yet, Loti writes: "Rarahu avait des yeux d'un noir roux, pleins d'une langueur exotique, d'une douceur câline, comme celle des *jeunes chats* quand on les caresse…" ("Rarahu had eyes of a red black, filled with exotic languor, of a tender sweetness, like those of *young cats* when one caresses them…" 8, emphasis mine). Later in his description he compares her to a marmoset:

> Ce qui surtout en elle caractérisait sa race, c'était le rapprochement excessif de ses yeux, à fleur de tête comme tous les maories; dans les

> moments où elle était rieuse et gaie, ce regard donnait à sa figure d'enfant une finesse maligne de *jeune ouistiti*; alors qu'elle était sérieuse ou triste, il y avait quelque chose en elle qui ne pouvait se mieux définir que par ces deux mots: une grâce polynésienne. (9, emphasis mine)
>
> That which especially characterized her race was the excessive closeness of her eyes, bulging like those of all Maoris; in the moments when she was laughing and happy, this look gave to her child's face a malicious finesse of a *young marmoset*; when she was serious or sad, there was something in her that cannot be better defined than by these two words: a Polynesian grace.

Although his descriptions of Rarahu clearly include comparisons with young animals (it is significant that they are young, since young implies inexperience and naiveté), they also praise her beauty, and he frequently mentions that her education is better than that of many on the island, again constructing her in ways that value her in terms of Western norms.[9] This *va-et-vient* of descriptive language builds up her mythical, goddess-like qualities while preserving her lowly status as a "savage child," satisfying conventional nineteenth century European thought regarding women as inferior. Loti never allows the Tahitian woman to speak for herself: he describes her features and her reactions as seen through his Western perspective.[10] When the woman does speak, she begs him to stay with her, she promises she will remain faithful to him, or after her enunciations the narrator questions her ability to reason.

Another way in which Loti effaces the Tahitian female voice and thereby perpetuates the myth of Tahitian female subservience in *Le Mariage de Loti* is by painting his women characters as ghostlike, mythical, otherworldly entities. In Chapter 23 he mocks Tahitians' fear of the "toupapahou," tattooed ghosts who haunt Tahitian lore. In his eyes, Tahitians live in a paradise neither infested with venomous reptiles nor large, hostile animals and thus have no reason to fear. Rather than explore Tahitian folklore

regarding the "toupapahou," Loti superimposes the image of the ghost on Tahitian women. Before Loti's voyage to Tahiti, his older brother had visited the island, had taken a Tahitian wife, but had died at a young age. His brother's previous experiences in Tahiti are a driving force in Loti's desire to visit the island, and he searches endlessly for his brother's Tahitian wife. Towards the end of the first part of the novel, Loti arranges a time to meet his brother's elusive love interest. He recounts the eerie experience: "Quand, à l'heure fixée, j'arrivai dans ce lieu isolé, j'aperçu une femme immobile qui semblait attendre, la tête couverte d'un épais voile blanc… Je m'approchai et j'appelai: Taïmaha! La femme voilée me laissa plusieurs fois répéter ce nom sans répondre…" ("When, at the designated time, I arrived in the isolated place, I saw an immobile woman who seemed to be waiting, her head covered in a thin white veil…I approached and I called: Taïmaha! The veiled woman let me repeat this name several times without responding…" 96-97). The veiled woman bursts into laughter, as she is not the woman for whom Loti searches, but this experience leads him to think: "il semblait que cette femme fût un mythe…" ("It seemed that this woman was a myth…" 97).

Several other women are constructed as apparitions throughout *Le Mariage de Loti*, described by the author in terms of "visions" and "mystères," yet the most haunting image of a female character is that of Rarahu, whose final portrayal comes to symbolize the decline of the idyllic Tahitian race. Towards the end of the novel, Loti learns that after his final departure from Tahiti, Rarahu began drinking heavily and became a prostitute, sleeping with any sailor she found handsome, and subsequently returned to her birthplace of Bora Bora to die of tuberculosis. In the recounting of a dream that brings the novel to a close, Loti visits the island of Bora Bora, which is described as a "silhouette

effrayante, dans le ciel gris et crépusculaire des rêves…" ("a frightening silhouette, in the grey twilit sky of dreams…" 311). The scene is apocalyptic: the narrator arrives in a black boat, on an inert ocean, looking upon black masses as he approaches the island. Among the trees, ghostlike women surround the spectral form:

> Je m'approchai de ce fantôme endormi, je me penchai sur le visage mort…Rarahu se mit à rire… A ce rire de fantôme le soleil s'éteignit dans le ciel, et je me retrouvais dans l'obscurité. Alors un grand souffle terrible passa dans l'atmosphère, et je perçu confusément des choses horribles: les grands cocotiers se tordant sous l'effort de brises mystérieuses, des spectres tatoués accroupis à leur ombre […] et au milieu d'eux, Rarahu étendue, son corps d'enfant enveloppé dans ses longs cheveux noirs, Rarahu, les yeux vides, et riant du rire éternel, du rire figé des Toupapahous… (312-313)

> I approached this sleeping phantom, I leaned over the dead face…Rarahu started laughing…At this phantom's laugh the sun set in the sky, and I found myself in obscurity. Then a big, terrible breath passed in the atmosphere, and in confusion I saw some horrible things: the big coconut palms twisting in mysterious breezes, tattooed specters squatting in their shadow […] and in the middle of them, Rarahu stretched out, her child's body enveloped in long black hair, Rarahu, her eyes empty, and laughing with that eternal laugh, the fixed laugh of the Toupapahous…

Rarahu's ghost's ironic laughter at the end of the novel will forever haunt the narrator. The laugh, similar to Emma Bovary's ironic "rire atroce" ("atrocious laughter") that marks her death at the end of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, marks the death of not only Rarahu, but in Loti's eyes, it is the symbol of the impending death of Tahitian culture. Loti, like Gauguin and Segalen whose writings follow his own, laments the decline of the "authentic" Tahitian society brought on by his European counterparts. Sonia Faessel remarks: "Loti utilise donc le fantastique pour exprimer sa culpabilité: le fantôme de Rarahu, son rire accusateur, l'atmosphère d'apocalypse de la scène finale sont les manifestations de sa faute" ("Loti thus utilizes the fantastic to express his culpability: the ghost of Rarahu, her accusing laugh, the apocalyptic atmosphere of the final scene are the

manifestations of his fault" 184). In expressing his guilt, however, Loti interprets the formerly idyllic, mythical Tahitian female body as in decline.

Gauguin: Illustrating the Myth

A fan of *Le Mariage de Loti*, it appears that Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin attempted to relive the idealized love affair of the novelist. In 1891 the painter arrived on the island of Tahiti, which by that time had become highly westernized by British, American, and French presence. Tahitians were not completely removed from government: they still owned most of the land on their island and were quite ensconced in every level of the social hierarchy. However, mixing Tahitian blood with European blood had become highly valued by native Tahitians, whose interest in preserving their Polynesian heritage equaled their desire to lighten their skin (at least according to the accounts of several American and European travelers to the island). Gauguin articulates his disappointment that Tahiti had become so westernized in his short novel and somewhat autobiographical travel log *Noa Noa*, published in 1888. Despite his expressed nostalgia for a more "authentic" Tahitian culture, the painter unquestionably took advantage of the apparent Tahitian desire to have the young girls of the community sleep with European men, and paints an exotic, idealistic portrayal of Tahitian women and culture in his novel. *Noa Noa* (which means fragrance in Tahitian) is not a faithful autobiography of the painter's sojourn in Tahiti. Rather, it is a compilation of poetry written by his friend Charles Morice, mixed with Gauguin's prose including some autobiographical elements and the painter's knowledge of *Mā'ohi* religion about which he had read in Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout's *Voyage aux îles du Grand Océan* (*Journey*

to the Islands of the Great Ocean, 1837). Like Commerson or Bougainville, rather than recount what he in reality experienced, Gauguin's writings satisfy the dream of a mythical Tahiti in the European imagination, perpetuating the myth of a land in which the European can live out his sexual fantasy. Like Edward Said's Orientalist, Gauguin seems to want "to confirm [Tahiti] in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions" (Said 65).

The opening line of the novel is actually written by Charles Morice, a symbolist poet and the friend to whom Gauguin turned in order to make his work publishable. Morice writes: "Téhura, j'inscrirai ton nom d'ébène et d'or à l'aile du poème, à l'heure de l'essor, Car mon désir séduit par ta belle pensée a bien souvent tenté la longue traversée vers toi…" ("Téhura, I will inscribe your name of ebony and gold on the wing of the poem, at the point of departure, Because my desire, seduced by the beautiful thought of you has often attempted the long journey towards you…" 1). Sex, desire, and interestingly, inscription introduce the novel to the reader and foreshadow the sensual exoticism of the text as a whole. In the first of twelve chapters, Gauguin describes the life of a "Maorie" (Gauguin, like Loti, misuses the term Maori, which refers to indigenous tribes in New Zealand and Australia, rather than *Mā'ohi*) woman, who, after being afraid of toupapahous during the night, arises with "la volupté d'être" ("the sensual pleasure of being"): "Sa vie s'éveille avec la belle humeur de la terre et du soleil. Le plaisir est la grande affaire, et l'amour n'est que plaisir. Puis, elle danse, elle se couronne de fleurs, elle chante, elle rit, elle joue, et puis elle aime encore, à l'ombre des pandanus, et puis, elle rit encore, et tout n'est que plaisir…" ("Her life awakens with the good humor of the earth and of the sun. Pleasure is the priority, and love is nothing but pleasure. Then, she

dances, she crowns herself with flowers, she sings, she laughs, she plays, and then she loves again, in the shade of pandanus plants, and then, she laughs again, and everything is pleasure…" 3). He repeatedly calls the Tahitian woman in general "L'Ève dorée" ("the golden Eve" 5), and describes his Tahitian paintings throughout the novel, insisting on the beauty and sensuality of the Tahitian female body. The portrait of the Tahitian woman that Gauguin paints, both on canvas and in his text, is of an eternally happy, beautiful, erotic female body.

Gauguin's text is replete with references to superiority, inferiority, and power relations between himself and Tahitians, ultimately culminating in the assertion of his male, European dominance by the taking of a 13-year-old wife. He continually vaunts the Tahitian race, insisting that his own is inferior, yet like Loti, his language oscillates from one of admiration to one of derision. For example, in the second chapter he writes: "J'étais, donc, moi, le civilisé, singulièrement inférieur, dans la circonstance, aux sauvages. Et je les enviais. Je les regardais vivre, heureux, paisibles, autour de moi…" ("I was, then, me, the civilized person, singularly inferior, in the circumstances, to the savages. And I envied them. I watched them live, happy, peaceful, all around me…" 21). While he repeatedly lauds the Tahitian race as superior, he obviously does not view them as such: "'Sauvages!' Ce mot me venait inévitablement aux lèvres, quand je considérais ces êtres noirs, aux dents de cannibales. Déjà, pourtant, j'entrevoyais leur grâce réelle, étrange…" ("Savages! This word inevitably came to my lips, when I considered these black beings, with cannibal teeth. Already, however, I began to perceive their real, strange grace…" 22). Gauguin's ultimate vision of the power he imagines he has over

Tahitian women is evident when he comments that although the young, "pure" Tahitian girls somewhat intimidate him:

> Toutes, pourtant, veulent être 'prises', prises littéralement (maü, saisir), brutalement, sans un mot. Toutes ont le désir latent du viol: c'est par cet acte d'autorité du mâle, qui laisse à la volonté féminine sa pleine irresponsabilité – car, ainsi, elle n'a pas consenti – que l'amour durable doit commencer […] Et j'y rêvais bien; mais je n'osais. (24)
>
> All of them, however, wanted to be 'taken,' literally taken (maü, to seize), brutally, without a word. They all have the latent desire to be raped: it is by this authoritarian act by the male, which gives to the feminine will its entire irresponsibility – because, she has not consented – that durable love should begin […] And I dreamed of it; but I did not dare.

Gauguin admits that he dreams of raping one of these women, of *taking* them, as this is clearly, in his mind, what they desire. As Diderot's fantasy of the Tahitian woman's fantasy is that of European possession symbolized by bodily inscription, Gauguin's fantasy of the Tahitian woman's fantasy is possession via rape.

While he does not immediately act on his impulsions, Gauguin's character later engages in a "marriage" with Téhura, a 13-year-old girl.[11] Gauguin's relationship with Téhura is one in which he can juxtapose his own power and impotence. He describes his first encounter with her: "Cette enfant, d'environ treize années (dix-huit ou vingt ans d'Europe) me charmait et m'intimidait, m'effrayait presque. Que pouvait-il se passer dans cette âme? Et c'était moi, moi si vieux pour elle, qui hésitais au moment de signer un contrat où j'avais tous les avantages, mais si hâtivement conçu et conclu!" ("This child, of around thirteen years old (eighteen or twenty in Europe) charmed and intimidated me, almost scared me. What could be going on in that soul? And it was me, me, so old for her, who hesitated at the moment of signing a contract where I had all of the advantages, but so hastily conceived and concluded!" 51). He recognizes his

advantages, yet fears her power over him; he later states that in her eyes he can read that he should fear the relationship more than she. However, he subsequently remarks: "L'âme maorie ne se livre pas tout de suite. Il faut beaucoup de patience et d'étude pour arriver à la posséder…" ("The Maori soul does not hand itself over right away. One must have a lot of patience and study to succeed in possessing it…" 53). Clearly, Gauguin's obsession is with possessing the Tahitian *vahine*, body and soul, who is in his eyes unable to control her passions. Although he contemplates the inner workings of Téhura's soul, the Tahitian female body in Gauguin's work is one that submits to the will of the European male, an object that he can possess. Similar to T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's observations on the representation of black women in the works of nineteenth-century authors, Gauguin's "ideas surrounding the conjoining of blackness [or "Tahitianness"] and femininity […] always fall back into a discourse on domination and submission…" (8-9).

Gauguin not only views the Tahitian woman as submissive, as desiring European male possession over her body, but he also views her as a portal to an idyllic, mythic Tahitian past. Towards the end of *Noa Noa* he writes:

> Maintenant que je peux comprendre Téhura, en qui dorment et parfois rêvent ses aïeux, je m'efforce de voir et de penser par cette âme d'enfant et de retrouver en elle les traces du lointain passé, bien mort, socialement, mais qui persiste en de vagues souvenirs […] Les Dieux d'autrefois se sont gardé un asile dans la mémoire des femmes…(68)
>
> Now that I can understand Téhura, in whose body sleep and sometimes dream her ancestors, I force myself to see and to think through this child's soul and to find in her the traces of a long-ago past, certainly dead, socially, but which persists in vague memories […] The Gods of the past have taken asylum in the memory of women…

Like Loti, Gauguin is nostalgic for a past in which he neither participated nor witnessed, and women are the vehicles through which he has access to this mythical past. Resembling Rarahu for Loti, Téhura is a means by which the artist can enter into an idealized Tahitian society that no longer exists. However, while Rarahu dies at the end of *Le Mariage de Loti*, symbolizing the impending death of the European's vision of Tahitian culture, Téhura is simply left mourning the narrator's departure: "De distance en distance, d'autres, comme elle, regardaient, fatiguées, muettes, mornes, sans pensées, la lourde fume du navire qui nous emportait tous, bien loin, pour jamais, amants d'un jour" ("From other distances, others, like her, watched, tired, mute, mournful, without thoughts, the heavy smoke of the ship which was taking us away, very far, forever, lovers of one day" 95). While in several moments throughout his text he contemplates his lover's soul, he makes little effort to provide a space for her personal thoughts, and the final image with which Gauguin leaves the reader is one of unthinking, unspeaking women, of short-lived love affairs. Effectively, through his paintings and through his text, Gauguin silences and eroticizes the Tahitian *vahine*.

Victor Segalen: Myth and Memory

It is interesting to note that Victor Segalen was inspired by Gauguin, who had recently died when the young doctor began writing his *Notes sur l'exotisme* (*Notes on Exoticism*) in 1904. In Segalen's eyes, Gauguin, despite having silenced the Tahitian *vahine* in *Noa Noa*, and despite having objectified her body in his eroticized paintings, had defended the indigenous population of Tahiti from both military and missionary forces that were endangering the ancient culture of the *Mā'ohi*. Segalen's interest was in

preserving the memory of the ancient Tahitians. He wanted to do in literature what he felt Gauguin did in art, which was to celebrate difference and represent the Tahitian civilization in the most "authentic" way imaginable. Charles Forsdick observes: "For Segalen, the aesthetic attraction of exoticism is in the struggle to maintain difference rather than in the acceptance of the inevitability of its decline" (104). Rather than follow in Loti or Gauguin's footsteps, however, the author/naval doctor/ethnologist chooses to efface himself, the European male, from his text and write *Les Immémoriaux* (translated in English as *A Lapse of Memory*), published by the *Mercure de France* in 1907, from the perspective of an omniscient (Tahitian male) narrator.

In fact, *Les Immémoriaux* is the only French literary work that is taken seriously by contemporary *Mā'ohi* writers. Rather than portray Tahiti as seen through a European perspective, Segalen attempts to represent the island and its inhabitants in the most "faithful" way possible – by effacing his own experiences on the island and by retelling the story of the colonization of Tahiti by the French and the British using Tahitian vocabulary and references. He does not speak for Térii, the principle character, or any other characters in the novel – he keeps a safe distance from his characters through the use of his omniscient narrator. Robert Nicole remarks that this allows the characters of *Les Immémoriaux* a "complexity of feelings that for the first time appear to enable Maohi agency. This is Segalen's way of resisting the French imperial tendency of assimilating everything and everyone to fit into a French view of the world" (*The Word* 137).

Segalen's text differs dramatically from the eighteenth century texts of Diderot or La Dixmerie, in which the European attempts to speak for the Other in order to condemn European morals. Nor does it resemble the works of Loti or Gauguin, whose images of

the Tahitian *vahine* dominate the texts. Segalen's text is almost scientific in the way he describes the various diseases ravaging the Tahitian population. Moreover, Segalen resists the temptation to undervalue Tahitian oral culture when juxtaposed with the written word. In the beginning of the work, the reader is informed that "u" is pronounced "ou," which immediately trains the reader to focus on the way *Mā'ohi* words are pronounced. The protagonist, a member of the *ari'i* (priestly) class, is introduced as "Térii le *Récitant*" ("Térii the *Storyteller,*" emphasis mine). The importance of orality and memory are the immediate and primary focus of the work.[12] While the protagonist completes a transition from being an *ari'i* to a deacon preaching Christianity, he learns to write and thus symbolizes the shift of Tahitian orality to literacy. Segalen's text is an ode to ancient Tahitian oral culture, a culture he must capture and inscribe.

Although Segalen's novel is considered "authentic" and has been used as a resource for some *Mā'ohi* who are attempting to fill in the gaps of an effaced history, it is essential to remember that not only is this text written by a French ethnographer, but that it is also a novel which minimizes and almost excludes the role of women in Tahitian society. In *Les Immémoriaux*, women are not afforded the freedom and influence they might have experienced prior to European colonization. Men are the primary characters of the text. In fact, any character with remarkable abilities or any sort of authority is a male figure.[13] Women are marginal characters in Segalen's work, and while he may remain as faithful as possible to Tahitian folklore and oral history, his text presents the female Tahitian body in much the way it is represented in the eighteenth century literature discussed above. For example, towards the end of the chapter entitled "Le Récitant" ("The Storyteller") in *Les Immémoriaux*, when the British sailors arrive on the

island, Térii *employs* his wife as a distraction: "il résolut d'employer contre eux son épouse: marquée de signes au ventre et au front, enjolivée de couronnes et de colliers parfumés, et les seins parés, elle irait vers ces hommes en provoquant leurs désirs: sans méfiance, ils dormiraient près d'elle" ("He resolved to employ his wife against them: marked by signs on the stomach and on the forehead, embellished with crowns and perfumed necklaces, her breasts accessorized, she would go towards these men, provoking their desires: without suspicion, they would sleep next to her" 25). In this example, the woman exercises no control over her actions. The narrator utilizes a vocabulary of service or of employment, and it is because of the man's request, and not on her own initiative, that his wife consents to seduce the British sailors, for which she is later beaten and renounced. To be sure, a Tahitian woman's seduction of a European sailor was a known practice in the latter half of the eighteenth century, but it is unclear as to whether this was an action encouraged by the men or if women chose to do so on their own accord. In Segalen's text, it is undeniably the decision of the man, which removes any form of agency that might have existed as a part of the Tahitian woman.

In fact, the omniscient narrator frequently describes women in a manner similar to that of Gauguin and Loti, focusing on corporeal depictions. In the chapter entitled "Les Maîtres-du-Jouir," ("The Masters of Pleasure") the narrator portrays a celebration of the royalty, in which King Pomaré is given three wives and women dance for him. The description of the women in the morning is replete with overt sexuality:

> Dans la fraicheur du matin, des femmes se dressèrent. Leurs yeux étaient pesants; leurs gestes endoloris de fièvres amoureuses. Mêlées aux hommes qui, cette nuit-là, les avaient enlacées, et nues sous les fleurs souillées, elles étendaient les bras, s'écrasaient le nez et la bouche de leurs paumes humides, et joyeuses dans l'air froid, frissonnaient en courant à la rivière. (85-86)

> In the freshness of the morning, women were stirring. Their eyes were heavy; their movements slowed by amorous fevers. Mixed with the men who, the night before, had encircled them, and naked under the dirtied flowers, they stretched out their arms, ran their humid palms over their noses and mouths, and, happy in the cold air, trembled while running to the river.

When women do appear in Segalen's text, they are sensual, semi-mythical commodities, constantly in a position of erotic availability. In the chapter entitled "L'Ignorant" ("The Ignorant One"), Térii invites himself onboard a French ship. His daughter, Eréna and her two friends invite themselves onboard as well (despite protests from Eréna's British boyfriend) and begin drinking and dancing for the French sailors. When Térii realizes his daughter is entertaining the men, he encourages her to use her sexuality to obtain alcohol and nails for him. While Charles Forsdick views this as an action performed by "an individual whose sexuality is a means of liberation," (108) Eréna's intended "good time" becomes a form of prostitution which benefits her father more so than it benefits herself. Although Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux* celebrates Tahitian difference and presents the imposition of literacy and of religion as a means of repression, it remains a text that represents the Oceanic woman's body as void of individual agency. Furthermore, as we can see through the personal correspondence of Segalen that James Clifford cites in *The Predicament of Culture*, the ethnographer did not abstain from writing in stereotypic terms about the Oceanic body: "'The whole island came to me like a woman. And indeed woman out there gave me gifts that whole countries can't give anymore…I knew caresses and rendez-vous, liberties that required nothing more than a voice, eyes, a mouth, and lovely childish words'" (qtd. in Clifford 161). Clifford subsequently observes: "This vision of the other as feminized and childish is an obvious projection. The exotic is

domesticated to male yearning" (161). Similarly, early twentieth-century literature treating New Caledonia and the relations between the Kanak and French communities on the island depicts the Kanak body as one that is both "domesticated to male yearning" and dehumanized, placed in a position of public scrutiny. Interestingly, the Caledonian woman's body is also constructed through the male gaze.

New Caledonia's Twentieth Century Western and Caldoche Literature

Because New Caledonia was not settled until the second half of the nineteenth century, very few works were produced from the area during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Those that were saw little popularity in France, and are not well known in the West: numerous New Caledonian authors and critics still view their literature as in a state of "emergence." In many nineteenth and twentieth century perspectives, New Caledonia was simply conflated with the connotations and stereotypes of Tahiti and the French Polynesian islands. Nevertheless, much of the literature of white French settlers and Caldoches expresses the scorn or fear with which white colonists regarded the indigenous population, or *canaques*. The term *canaque* itself is considered an injurious word. *Canaque,* the "Frenchification" of the word *kanaka* (meaning simply "man" in Polynesian languages), became more commonly used in the nineteenth century to differentiate between the "savage" Melanesians and the more "civilized" Polynesians; cannibalism was implied in the word itself. The author of *Kannibals et vahinés* observes that the word *canaque* had similar insinuations as the word *nègre*, qualifying the most "degrading state of humanity" (21). As Andrew Curran remarks in his analysis of eighteenth century philosophical discourse on blackness and anatomy, the word *nègre*

implied both inferior anatomical and mental qualities. The term *canaque* took on many of the same connotations.[14] Eventually, during the 1980s the indigenous populations of New Caledonia reappropriated the term Kanak as a positive form of cultural identification. Nevertheless, white settler literature from the early twentieth century generally utilizes the term *canaque* to designate the population that it regarded as physically, socially, and morally inferior when opposed to both Westerners and Polynesians. In general, Western and Caldoche literature about New Caledonia seemed fixed to rigid binaries lacking nuances: indigenous groups were either labeled the epitome of absolute beauty, Noble Savages (Polynesians), or they were considered the most horrifyingly ugly creatures, terrifying and hostile cannibals (Melanesians from New Caledonia).

Anne-Marie Nisbet remarks in *Littérature Néo-Calédonienne* that authors from New Caledonia in the twentieth century were anxious to "caledoniser" their literature in the desire to render their writings "exotic" by including folklore, descriptions about tropical plant life, and indigenous dances (20). While Europeans writing about Tahiti fetishized the indigenous body in order to meet European expectations, Caldoche and white settler fiction about New Caledonia lauds the insular space rather than the native inhabitants of that space. In essence, Kanak presence becomes a marginal part of the background in many of the works of Caldoche literature, as it was both threatening and unappealing to an European readership. The Caledonian past, colonization, and *métissage*, along with the ideas of exile, prison, misery, and illusion make up some of the many themes that pervade Caldoche and Western literature about New Caledonia. In both of the novels briefly examined below, the principle characters are white. Kanak individuals take little part in the plots of the novels, and the descriptions of the Kanak

body are laden with deprecating vocabulary. The Nervats's novel and the perspectives of the white population in that of Mariotti denies the Kanaks "ontological resistance in the eyes of the White," in the words of Franz Fanon (*Peau noire* 109). Kanak bodies are described in detail, yet they are given no intellectual or imaginative capacity.

The Nervats: Settler Literature and "thingifying" the Caldoche woman

French settlers Dr. Paul Chabaneix and his wife Marie Chabaneix spent several years of their lives in New Caledonia. Together they wrote two collections of poetry and a novel entitled *Célina Landrot: Fille de Pouembout: roman calédonien* (*Célina Landrot: Daughter of Pouembout: Caledonian Novel*) under the pseudonyms Jacques and Marie Nervat, all of which focused on life in New Caledonia. In a poem published in 1900 in the collection entitled *Les rêves unis* (*United Dreams*), the Nervats paint a rather exotic portrait of Melanesian women:

> Elles se sont drapées pour venir chez les Blancs
> Dans un long pagne de coton aux couleurs vives,
> Qui, malgré la lenteur de leurs mouvements, glisse,
> Et découvre une épaule et des seins arrogants.
> Inhabiles, leurs mains remontent les ceintures
> Et leurs bras, modelés comme ceux des statues,
> Ont des gestes harmonieux comme des rythmes. (qtd. in Fenoglio 30)

> They are clothed to come to the home of the Whites
> In a long cotton sarong made of bright colors,
> Which, despite the slowness of their movements, slides,
> And uncovers arrogant breasts and a shoulder.
> Clumsy, their hands redo their belts
> And their arms, chiseled like those of statues,
> Have harmonious gestures, like rhythms.

While Melanesians were generally portrayed in Western poetry as phantoms or as oddly misplaced when juxtaposed to the exotic scenery of the island, the Nervats compare the

Kanak woman's body to a statue or to rhythms. Essentially, the Kanak woman's body adopts the aesthetic appeal of the Tahitian women described in the works of Loti and Gauguin. However, the images of the Kanak community dramatically change in the Nervats's 1904 publication of *Célina Landrot: Fille de Pouembout*. The novel takes place in fictional New Caledonian towns and recounts the story of Célina Landrot, the daughter of two former prisoners who were forced to marry and moved to the island to begin a new life of relative freedom. Violence abounds in the novel: Célina's mother was raped repeatedly, and her father is a drunkard who frequently beats his wife and children when he has been drinking. Their children, surrounded by liberated prisoners and impervious to the violence to which they are exposed, do not regard murder as an abominable crime but as a minor one that can be easily forgiven.

The portrait of the Kanak community in the Zola-esque narrative is limited, as the novel focuses on the life of Célina (or Lina, as everyone calls her). In the very few descriptions the Nervats paint of the Kanak community, it is evident that the Kanaks are regarded with even more disrespect than the *libérés* (former prisoners). In the first description of Kanak individuals, the Kanak body is constructed as misshapen or unbalanced: "Les premières maisons de Tombouène apparaissaient. Lina croisa des Canaques ivres qui psalmodiaient sur un rythme niais, avec un balancement avachi de leur corps. Des 'popinées' drapées dans de grands pagnes, titubaient aussi, et riaient aux éclats, en montrant leur double rang de dents blanches" ("The first houses of Tombouène appeared. Lina passed some drunken Canaques who were chanting to a stupid rhythm, with an awkward balance to their bodies. Some 'popinées' covered in long sarongs were also staggering, and laughing in bursts, showing their two rows of white teeth" 9).

Interestingly, as in the poem cited above, the "popinées" (a term for Kanak women) are draped in large sarongs, yet in this scene the description of the woman's body has morphed into one of distortion. The women are obviously inebriated, stumbling and laughing excessively loudly, showing their teeth. In fact, in the second portion of the novel, a female settler makes a bestial comparison when she laments her misfortune in having had to hire a Kanak woman rather than a white girl to help in her store: "Elle est engagée pour un an. Je ne peux réussir à en trouver une convenable. Elles sont toutes vicieuses et paresseuses comme des chattes, et ne savent que dormir ou jouer avec les enfants" ("She has been hired for one year. I cannot seem to find a suitable one. They are all vicious and lazy like cats, and know only how to sleep or to play with children" 144).

In addition to being constructed as animals, Kanaks are portrayed throughout the novel as drunken, submissive, and indolent. The settlers must instill fear in them in order to motivate the indentured servants to work: "Il eut fallu exercer sur eux une véritable terreur, pour en obtenir un service régulier, et encore!" ("One would have to instill a great terror in them to obtain regular service, an even then!" 79). Kanaks are powerless against those they are forced to call "masta": "Ils ne pouvaient protester qu'à la façon des bêtes de somme rebelles au travail: en faisant le moins d'efforts qu'il leur était possible" ("They could not protest unless it was in the manner of beasts, rebellious to work: in making the least amount of effort possible" 82). As Adrien Muckle observes in "Killing the Fantôme Canaque," white settlers in New Caledonia were in a perpetual state of fear due to nineteenth and early twentieth century Kanak revolts and reports of cannibalism among the *tribus*. Thus, settlers utilized the perceived threats of revolt to legitimate violence towards the Kanak populations. Additionally, settler literature frequently

depicted Kanaks as indolent in order to exorcise the specter of Kanak violence as well as to validate colonial authority. While the Nervats's novel represents a dehumanized image of the Kanak body, it also depicts the serious threat of settler violence against the Kanak community and provides an example of how colonial literature in New Caledonia was often utilized as a political tool to alleviate settler apprehensions.

Settler violence towards Kanaks is not the only type of violence that governs the plot of the novel. It is important to examine the scenes of implied sexual violence and sexual domination in the novel, as the following chapter will examine scenes of violence (albeit a different type of violence) in the novels of the three contemporary Oceanic women writers on which this project focuses. Interestingly, the portrait of sexual predators is not reserved for Kanak men in the Nervats's novel, but rather it is a white man who fantasizes about the young Lina.[15] In Chapter 10, Jean Ferrier, a stockman who unceasingly implores Lina to kiss him, spies on Lina and her sister bathing. He is surprised and repelled by Françoise's pale skin, but enticed by the darker Lina: "Lina ne le déçut point. Sa peau mate s'harmonisait avec ses longs yeux noirs et sa lourde chevelure d'ombre. Il suivit l'harmonieuse inflexion de la gorge et des reins qu'elle présenta tour à tour un large rayon de soleil qui fusait entre les rameaux" ("Lina did not disappoint him. Her dull skin harmonized with her long black eyes and her heavy, shadowy hair. He followed the harmonious inflection of her throat and waist that she exposed to a large ray of sun that peeked in alternately through the branches" 97). In Chapter 12 his fantasies entail possession: "Comme toutes les fois qu'il la voyait, son désir de la posséder s'accrut, mais son regard passionné n'attira même pas le regard de Lina" ("As with each time he saw her, his desire to possess her increased, but his

passionate look never even attracted Lina's gaze" 132). Ownership is also the fantasy of the Corsican Bastiani, Lina's lover, a *libéré* who was formerly in prison for having killed a man who flirted with his girlfriend. When he convinces Lina to run away from her family and move to Nouméa to live with him, Bastiani revels in his ability to dominate: "Bastiani, sûr de l'avoir désormais toute à lui, exultait, et, dominateur, bourrait de coups de talon le ventre de son cheval" ("Bastiani, certain of having her from then on all to himself, exulted, and, domineering, beat his horse's sides with kicks from his spurs" 192). In fact, Lina realizes that she *belongs* to Bastiani: as he beats Jean Ferrier, she refrains from helping the defeated stockman: "Eperdue, elle obéit…Elle savait que les prières seraient vaines, d'ailleurs. *La volonté de son amant pénétrait en elle. N'était-elle pas sa chose?* Elle l'aimait, elle l'avait suivi. Maintenant elle haïssait Ferrier et acceptait l'inévitable" ("Desperate, she obeyed…She knew that prayers would be in vain, anyway. *Her lover's will penetrated her. Wasn't she his thing?* She loved him, she had followed him. Now she hated Ferrier and accepted the inevitable" 198, emphasis mine). Significantly, the young girl cannot have a relationship in which she is not a "thing" or a "belonging" of a man. Thus, to borrow Aimé Césaire's terminology, both settler and Kanak women in the Nervats's novel are "thingified" (Césaire 42), viewed as instruments or possessions.[16]

The Nervats's novel illustrates the dehumanization that settler literature imposed on the Kanak community, and possibly more importantly, the violence that pervaded both settler and Kanak communities on the island. Over a century later, while nuanced by anti neo-colonialist sentiment and a critique of violence from within indigenous communities, sexual violence and domination remain ever-present themes in the works of New

Caledonian writers Déwé Gorodé and Claudine Jacques. Though violence dominates the turn of the century Caledonian novel, Jean Mariotti's novel published in 1942 alludes to but never fully discloses the prevailing violence of the conflicts on the island in the early twentieth century. Rather, the nostalgic text attempts to reinvent a world of mystery and magic, in which the dream of harmony remains a fantasy of the Caldoche novelist.

Jean Mariotti: New Caledonian Nostalgia

Jean Mariotti was born in Farino, New Caledonia in 1901 to a Coriscan family of twelve children. He left the island in 1923 for *la Métropole*, and revisited New Caledonia for only three years before he returned to France. His works, however, consistently take him back to the island of his childhood. *À bord de l'Incertaine*, originally published in 1942 and written during his time as a prisoner during World War II, takes place entirely in New Caledonia, and is considered by many as the witness to the birth of a Caledonian consciousness. The semi-autobiographical novel recounts a young boy's adventures "in the bush," where he lives with his parents and sister and attends a colonial school. *L'Incertaine*, a boat wrecked on the reef, is the object of fantasy for Jean-Claude and his sister, Camille.[17] For them, the boat represents mystery and a vessel that could presumably take them to the land of their dreams, France. It is in fact France that becomes the object of exoticism in the eyes of the children, as their teacher in the colonial school insists on the superiority of *la Métropole* and its snowy winters.

The principle focus of the novel is on Jean-Claude's disorienting experiences in school and the children's feelings of anguish due to a sense of isolation from both the surrounding Kanak population and the mother country. While France is the exotic locale

of the children's fantasies, the Melanesian world is one of magic and mystery to the children, a world in which man and nature coexist harmoniously. Effectively, Mariotti attempts to re-construct the image of the Kanak population, idealizing the indigenous group's proximity to nature and mystery, and indeed, the author does evoke the Kanak dispossession and the displacements of the *tribus*.[18] Nevertheless, while the children regard the Kanaks with reverence, the white adult characters of the novel refuse to allow them individuality. Like in the Nervats's novel, the whites view the Kanaks as indolent and unmotivated on one hand, and as predators capable of unsuspected bursts of violence on the other. For instance, in the beginning of the novel, the mysterious white settler, Darne, observes a group of three Kanak men working busily: "Il ne correspondait guère à la façon indolente de cheminer habituelle aux Canaques. Et, en général, le guerrier laisse aux popinées le soin de transporter les fardeaux pendant que lui-même, armé de la sagaie et du tamioc ou du sabre d'abatis, ouvre nonchalamment la marche…" ("It didn't correspond at all to the indolent manner of strolling characteristic of Kanaks. And, in general, the warrior gives the popinées the task of transporting cargo while he, armed with a lance and tamioc or a sword, leads the way nonchalantly…" 18).[19] The fact that the three men are not being lazy or forcing their women to do the heavy lifting alarms Darne, and he continues to spy on them, suspecting imminent insurrection. Later, the narrator describes an indigenous man fantasizing about taking Camille as his wife; he reminisces about the time when a man could take any woman he wanted and declare war on the tribe from whom he took her. Effectively, the white characters of the novel ascribe a vocabulary of possession and lustfulness to the indigenous man. As Robert Nicole states in "Resisting Orientalism": "if we are to believe the dominant discourse, the Pacific

Island Other is wild, aggressive, lustful, beastly, and untamed when lying outside European tutelage and childish, undisciplined, static, submissive, indolent, docile, and degenerate when under control" (271). Mariotti, while attempting to idealize Kanak life in which man and nature coalesce, must also represent the extent to which his fantasy of harmony is impossible. In so doing, the Kanak population, viewed through the eyes of the white colonists, is represented through corporeal terminology and implications that the Kanak man dreams only in terms of sexual domination.

The dynamic between the children and their teacher, Madame Boubignan, contributes to the reader's awareness of the clashing of two worlds in Mariotti's text. The French woman regards the Kanak population with disdain, and compares the children's misbehavior to them: "elle leur dit qu'ils avaient agi comme des petits Canaques, comme de véritables sauvages et leur expliqua comment devaient se comporter des gens civilisés" ("She told them that they had acted like little Canaques, like veritable savages and explained to them how they should act like civilized people" 79). The children, however, do not understand this comparison as insulting:

> En eux-mêmes, et selon leur jugement, les enfants ne se sentaient pas humiliés d'être comparés à des Canaques: les Canaques étaient adroits, forts, souples, ils connaissaient tous les secrets des rivières, des forêts et de la mer. Mais le ton de Madame Boubignan leur disait bien que dans sa bouche ces mots étaient des insultes. (79)
>
> To them, and according to their judgment, the children did not feel humiliated to be compared to Canaques: Canaques were capable, strong, flexible, they knew all the secrets of the rivers, of the forests, and of the sea. But the tone of Madame Boubignan told them that in her mouth, these words were insults.

The children, unlike the adults of the novel, view the Kanaks as stronger, more in touch with nature, and more mysterious than whites. Still, the description remains corporeal and

linked to nature: the Kanaks are physically skilled, strong, and able to move their bodies easily through the forests.

Although Mariotti attempts to reinvent an idyllic, magical past, the descriptions of the indigenous women in the novel are also heavily laden with corporeal terminology. In the beginning of the novel, Mandarine, a Kanak woman, fantasizes about adopting the young Jean-Claude and gives up her own son to become the nanny for the white family. The narrator describes her features: "Deux lignes bleues tatouées sur son visage et allant de l'aile du nez vers le saillant de la pommette accentuaient la dureté voulue de ses traits. Elle eut, comme il convient, l'air farouche de celle qui ne s'apprivoise pas" ("Two blue lines tattooed on her face and going from the edge of her nose to the prominent cheekbones accentuated the hardness of her features. She had, as is suited, the fierce look of someone who cannot be tamed" 24). While no time is given to the description of the children's parents, who appear in the novel more often than Mandarine, an entire paragraph is dedicated to the description of the indigenous woman, her desire to have a white child, and her inability to be "tamed" or "domesticated." Interestingly, as Anne McClintock points out in *Imperial Leather*, until 1964 the word "to domesticate" signified civilization and invoked the idea of colonization: "Domesticity denotes both a *space* (a geographic and architectural alignment) and a *social relation to power*" (34-5). Significantly, Mandarine, the "colonized" woman, although unable to be "domesticated," becomes the children's nanny: she becomes a figure in the white family's home, the only location in which she can fulfill her fantasy – the *space* of "domesticity," in which her relation to power is one of servitude. Later, as Jean-Claude and Camille are crossing through a valley on their way to *L'Incertaine*, they walk past two *popinées*, who similarly

are not "domesticated." The narrator describes the younger of the two women: "La jeune, les seins au vent, croquait en marchant une canne à sucre dont elle suçait le jus à grand bruit et recrachait loin d'elle la pulpe blanche" ("The young one, breasts in the wind, crunched while walking, sucking loudly on the juice of a sugar cane, and spit out the yellow pulp far from herself" 53). The stereotypical European view of a Kanak woman, sucking on sugar cane and spitting crudely, is essentially an afterthought: the women have no role in the novel, yet the descriptions of the Kanak woman's appearance exist to remind the reader of the distinctions between the two cultures. The Kanaks are presented as "undomesticated" corporeal entities, while the children, although clearly more open-minded and representative of an evolving worldview which envisions the two groups living together harmoniously, are white descendants of Europeans, and the characters in the novel who embody thought and imagination.

In both of the examples of early twentieth century New Caledonian literature examined above, the authors (or in Mariotti's text, the white adult characters) subscribe to a dominant European discourse that removes authority or individual mental capacity from the Kanak characters. The indigenous tribes of New Caledonia are ascribed corporeal existence in the Nervats's and Mariotti's novels, but little psychological or mental ontology. It is important to examine these novels when beginning a study on contemporary New Caledonian literature because these are some of the works that are included what we might call the "canon" of literature from New Caledonia. Notably, during the thirty-eight years that separate the publication dates of these novels, the European or Caldoche perspective on the Kanak population changed very little: during the Negritude movement, as Antillean and African French-speakers were making

progress in their fight towards the assertion of a unique identity, Kanak people were put on display like animals in the Jardin d'Acclimatation de Paris for the Exposition coloniale in 1931. While anthropologists and ethnographers did attempt to give the Kanak people a voice (Louise Michel published *Légendes et chants de gestes canaques* in 1885, and Maurice Leendhardt published numerous translated oral literature in *Documents néo-calédoniens* in 1932), it was not until after World War II and the 1946 removal of the *régime de l'indigénat* that Kanaks began asserting their identity, pushing for a return to their original land and writing in order to introduce their voices into the political and intellectual sphere.

Similarly, Tahitian literature did not appear until the latter half of the twentieth century due to the prevailing European accounts of life and adventures in the idyllic islands and the privileging of the written word over oral tradition. The literature examined above entrenched two distinct myths regarding the Oceanic body in the European literary tradition. Finally, however, within the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Oceanic literature in French from both New Caledonia and the French Polynesian islands has adopted a multitude of voices: Caldoche, Kanak, Tahitian, and more. Micaela Fenoglio observes in *Des Racines et des ailes* that Kanaks and the descendants of Europeans, "bien qu'héritières de différents parcours historiques, vivent aujourd'hui dans le même *non-lieu* d'une quête identitaire, sorte de passage incontournable vers une identité commune" ("although inheritors of different historic paths, they live together today in the same non-place of an identity quest, a sort of inevitable passage towards a common identity" 13). What Fenoglio calls "le chant Européen" ("the European song") and "le chant Kanak" ("the Kanak song") are both

integral elements of New Caledonian literature. Accordingly, the varied voices of the populations of French Polynesia are essential elements of Oceanic literature of French expression.[20]

To state that the Oceanic literature studied in the subsequent three chapters is only a reaction to the literature examined above would be a limiting and prescriptive assertion. On the other hand, we would be profoundly misled to believe that the European perspective did not make an impact on the texts of Oceanic women authors. Indeed, Chantal Spitz remarks in an interview for the film *La Vahiné: Mythe et réalité*: "Le mythe nous a remplacé, nous. Le mythe fait qu'on n'existe pas en tant qu'être-humain, on existe en tant que mythe" ("The myth replaced us. The myth makes it so that we do not exist as human beings, we exist as myth"). The Oceanic literature of French expression studied in the remainder of this project is both a reconstruction of the past through a specifically Oceanic perspective and an assertion of an identity that has long been overshadowed by European literature about the Oceanic region: it is a literature that endeavors to destabilize the myth. The fact that one of the principle characters of Spitz's novel *L'Île des rêves écrasés* is named Térii, like Segalen's protagonist, or that Mariotti's novel *À bord de L'Incertaine* makes an appearance in Claudine Jacques's short story "Céleste(s)" are not coincidences. These women authors refer to the European literature that objectifies the body examined above throughout their texts, insisting on a reformulation of the representation of the Oceanic body. The texts studied in the following chapters present a nuanced vision of the Oceanic body, one that subverts the European (male) gaze as well as denounces indigenous male-dominated social systems that violate and subjugate the rights of women. The next chapter will examine the theme

of violence and the Oceanic body in the works of Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz.

[1] Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* (1668), and Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) should also be included in the category of fictional philosophical odysseys. These are all works of utopian literature, and as Pamela Cheek points out, are all examples of the sexual nature of fictional South Sea literature.

[2] Buffon would later examine the native Tahitian, Aoutorou, who insisted on accompanying Bougainville on his return trip to Europe. Buffon maintained the notion of the intellectual inferiority of the Tahitian race after having examined Aoutorou, whose body became an object of anatomical study for the naturalist.

[3] In fact, the sea captain was adamant about his intellectual capabilities, and did not want them to go unnoticed in his *Voyage*. In a response to Rousseau's disdainful remark in his *Discours sur l'inégalité parmi les hommes* about the inability of sea voyagers to "philosopher," Bougainville points out how extraordinary it is that men who have not traveled or observed feel it appropriate to write about the observations "borrowed" from the very sea voyagers in whom they refuse to see the abilities to see and to write (10).

[4] Faessel also remarks that Bougainville's *Voyage* reads like a fictional epic narrative, with a heroic author/narrator, the classical figure of travel literature, confronted with a perilous voyage and meetings with Other, fascinating peoples (28).

[5] Bougainville later corrects himself in his *Voyage* (and the journal) about Tahitians' private property and social hierarchy, but his embellished descriptions, as well as those of Commerson and the other voyagers traveling with Bougainville, significantly contributed to the European fascination with Tahiti.

[6] It is interesting to point out the theme of "rewriting" in the works of the eighteenth century writers examined in this study. Bougainville and Commerson borrow from both

Virgil and More, many of the marine voyagers' journals unknowingly rewrite Veiras's sexual slavery episode, and Diderot and La Dixmerie both rewrite Bougainville's text for moralizing purposes. This "rewriting" undoubtedly contributes to the decidedly fictional representation of Tahiti and its inhabitants.

[7] The author of the article "population," Damilaville, writes: "Les cultes européens lui sont encore plus contraires. Leur doctrine porte les hommes à s'isoler, elle les éloigne des devoirs de la vie civile. Chez eux l'état le plus parfait est le plus opposé à la nature, & le plus préjudiciable au bien public; c'est le célibat. […] Comme si le plus grand des vices n'étoit pas de tromper la nature, & de subsister aux dépens de l'espèce envers laquelle on ne remplit aucune de ses obligations" ("European cults are even more contrary [to population]. Their doctrine causes men to isolate themselves, it distances them from the duties of civil life. For them the most perfect state is the one most opposite of nature, and the most harmful to the public good; celibacy. […] As if the worst of vices was not to fool nature, and to subsist at the expense of the species to which one does not complete any of one's obligations").

[8] As Alexander Bolyanatz points out, this is entirely false. There is no evidence indicating that Tahitians feared a population decline. In fact, French and British voyagers were horrified by the Tahitian practice of infanticide as both a religious belief and a means of population control. Tahitians (and many other Polynesian societies) believed that they must sacrifice their second-born to the Polynesian deities they worshipped. Frequently, Tahitians chose to keep male infants rather than female. Many of the sailors remarked that males outnumbered females on the island by about fifty-to-one.

[9] Loti the narrator observes: "Beaucoup de petites filles dans nos campagnes d'Europe sont moins cultivées assurément que cette enfant sauvage. Mais il avait fallu que cette instruction, prise à l'école des missionnaires de Papeete, lui eût peu couté à acquérir, car elle était fort paresseuse" ("Many young girls in our European countrysides are surely less cultivated than this savage child. But this instruction, received from the missionary school in Papeete, must not have been of much value to her, because she was extremely lazy" 14). Loti frequently portrays both male and female Tahitians as lazy and childlike: "Le caractère des Tahitiens est un peu celui des petits enfants – ils sont capricieux fantasques, boudeurs tout à coup et sans motif…" ("The character of Tahitians is a little bit like that of small children – they are capricious dreamers, suddenly broody and aimless…" 46). The assertion that islanders were indolent and childlike was common among eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century Pacific voyagers both in Melanesia and Polynesia.

[10] Nor does he ever allow women to express themselves in any of his novels, as evidenced in *Le Roman d'un Spahi* or *Aziyadé*.

[11] This relationship is based off of the relationship Gauguin had (in reality) with a thirteen-year-old girl in Tahiti named Teha'amana. Interestingly, Teha'amana was not Tahitian, but Rarotongan. One can imagine that Gauguin was attracted to Teha'amana for her darker skin, as he was obsessed with finding a pure Tahitian specimen unadulterated by Western influence.

[12] The importance of orality will be further discussed in the fourth chapter of this project.

[13] As Christine Langevin points out in *Tahtiennes: de la tradition à l'intégration culturelle*, this was largely the case for the lower classes of Tahitian society, due to the

ancient Tahitian belief in the impurity of women and the frequent cases of infanticide upon the birth of a female descendent. However, Langevin also notes that this belief was inversed in the case of female *ari'i*, who were treated as equal to male *ari'i* heirs (26-27).

[14] Curran cites the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos's explanation of the differences between the white man and the *nègre*: "'two men who have blood that is so different as to make them dissimilar on the exterior, will be even more dissimilar in terms of their minds. [What is more,] they will be even more unlike in terms of temperament than in terms of coloring or body type'" (qtd. in Curran 80).

[15] Not coincidentally, Lina is described as having amber skin and dark eyes. The narrator reveals that her mother had an affair with their Corsican neighbor, Nosta. Lina, who is obviously the daughter of the Corsican, has darker features than the rest of the family. Both Jean Ferrier and Lina's lover, Bastiani, fantasize about Lina and specifically reveal that they are most attracted to her darker features.

[16] In the *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire equates colonization to "*chosification*" ("thingification"), and suggests that colonization turned the indigenous man into "an instrument of production" (42), or a "thing." As Robin D.G. Kelley explains in the introduction to the English translation of Césaire's work, the colonial encounter "requires a reinvention of the colonized, the deliberate destruction of the past – what Césaire calls 'thingification'" (9).

[17] Incidentally, the boat wreck reappears a half century later in Déwé Gorodé's *L'Épave*. While Mariotti's *L'Incertaine* is an object of fantasy and a symbol of hope to the children in his novel, the wrecks that appear in Gorodé's text are metaphors for the woman's damaged or violated body.

[18] In the majority of his works, Jean Mariotti celebrates the Kanak people and envisions a harmonious existence for the Kanaks and white settler groups on the island. It is important to note that Mariotti wrote a collection of short stories, *Les Contes de Poindi* in which he recounts Kanak tales related to him by his "adoptive" Kanak "mother." The author often valorizes the Kanak worldview and is careful not to limit a Kanak capacity for thought and agency. *A bord de l'Incertaine*, however, provides a window into the perspectives of the white settlers of the early twentieth century, which, for the most part, was a perspective that considered Kanaks as merely corporeal, incapable of intelligent thought.

[19] According to a website of Caldoche vocabulary designed for a Caledonian comic strip, the word "tamioc" is a distortion of the Algonquin word "tomahawk," imported by Anglo-Saxons during the late nineteenth century.

[20] There is a notable similarity here to the idea of creolization. As the Créolistes remark in *In Praise of Creoleness*, creoleness is not a geographical concept and exists in different forms (a Caribbean Creoleness, a Guyanese Creoleness, a Polynesian Creoleness). Creoleness, in general terms, is a cultural "migan," consisting of "a mix of linguistic, religious, cultural, culinary, architectural, medical, etc. practices of the different people in question" (893).

Chapter 2:

Writing the Damaged Oceanic Body

In "Te tino? Le corps?" an essay examining the relationship between the body, language, and writing in French Polynesia, Flora Devatine articulates the physicality of the need to write:

> Rapport du corps avec l'écriture? L'urgence physiologique! Certes, un plaisir des mots, Du crayon sur la feuille, de la frappe sur la machine, dans un monde du ressenti, jusqu'à la capitation sensorielle du silence, Laissant les mots filer, traverser des frontières, se poursuivre jusqu'à leur limite extrême, Et se résoudre enfin à la question du corps! (21)
>
> Connection between the body and writing? Physiological urgency! Of course, a pleasure of words, of the pencil on paper, of typing on the typewriter, in a world of feelings, until the sensorial tax of silence, letting the words flow freely, traversing boundaries, pursuing themselves until their extreme limit, and finally resolving the question of the body!

Notably, Devatine emphasizes the physical urge to let words run freely and "traverse boundaries, pursuing their extreme limit." In the case of Oceanic women writers, writing the body can prove to be a physical transgression of boundaries, especially in regard to writing scenes of rape and sexual or domestic abuse that take place within their communities. As Michel Foucault suggests in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality,* "If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" (6). Therefore, writing about sex, something that is usually associated with pleasure, that has been transformed into violence, especially explicit rape narratives, and exposing the damaged Oceanic body, creates a double transgression of the boundaries of both European culture and indigenous custom, intentionally creating a dialogue that is only

recently being introduced into the public sphere in the Oceanic region.[1] Writing violated Oceanic bodies challenges the typical narrative of sexual or romantic relations between heterosexual, European males and indigenous women, including many of the narratives examined in the previous chapter. While the literature of Oceanic writers has been traditionally characterized by a response to the violence of colonial histories, recently there has been a body of literature that responds both to colonial violence as well as to the violence within indigenous communities, a violence that is rarely openly discussed. An engagement with the issue of sexual violence is also rife with challenges and is frequently problematic for the indigenous writer attempting to revalorize traditional customs when doing so necessarily entails critiquing the cultural identity she is attempting to venerate.

Sexual and domestic violence have recently appeared as a central theme in the texts of writers from both the Anglophone and Francophone Oceanic regions. The damaged Oceanic body has, to borrow a phrase from Elizabeth Grosz, emerged as a "site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution" (23) in the Anglophone novels of female as well as male writers such as Alan Duff and Keri Hulme from New Zealand, Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt from Samoa, and in the Francophone novels of Nicolas Kurtovich from New Caledonia and Titaua Peu from Tahiti. These writers have dared to transgress the boundaries of the representation of "normative" sexual behavior in their novels, and have exposed sexual violence as a subject that demands to be addressed within contemporary Oceanic societies. The problem is quite substantial outside of the literary realm: a poll conducted in Tahiti for the compilation of Patrick Cerf's 2007 text, *La Domination des femmes à Tahiti: Des violences envers les femmes au discours du matriarcat,* reveals that 37 percent of the

women interviewed admit to having been beaten or having had to endure physical brutalities during their youth. 10 percent of those interviewed divulge that they were sexually abused before the age of 15 years. The survey also indicates that one out of ten women in a couple has fallen victim to conjugal violence, and one out of twelve has been forced to participate in sexual acts she was otherwise unwilling to perform. Cerf attributes these present-day statistics to the valorization of masculine virility and violence inherited from traditional male-dominated warrior societies, stating: "Dans la société tahitienne contemporaine, la force physique et la violence font toujours partie des prérogatives masculines les plus gratifiantes et un homme qui sait se battre jouit d'un respect et d'un prestige réel" ("In contemporary Tahitian society, physical strength and violence are always a part of the most gratifying masculine prerogatives and a man who knows how to fight enjoys respect and a real prestige" 290). Cerf also observes that with the arrival of British colonists and missionaries and the integration of the Christian tradition (the majority of French Polynesians identify as Protestants), masculine domination over women was reinforced, as men were expected to compel respect and control female sexuality (378).

While one third of the women interviewed for Cerf's poll reported domestic violence in Tahiti, in New Caledonia the statistics remain equally devastating. Christine Salomon observes that until the 1992 establishment of the program SOS Violences Sexuelles, European women filed most of the sexual violence complaints against male Kanaks, because Kanak women were either ashamed or accepted violence as part of their lives, an effect of what Pierre Bourdieu would term "symbolic power."[2] The program, whose first president was Marie-Claude Tjibaou, widow of the popular Kanak

independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, encouraged Kanak women to report incidences of rape, and helps women who might otherwise have kept silent express their grievances and persevere during the judiciary process of convicting their rapists. In the interviews conducted during Salomon's study, Kanak women born between the years of 1910 and 1920 recurrently evoke the fear they felt and the severity of the reproaches inflicted on those who disregarded customary rules, such as chosen marriage alliances and more importantly the convention of female subordination to men. Women who did not submit to the principles of hierarchical submission were often publicly beaten ("Les femmes" 4). Since the institution of SOS Violences Sexuelles (and as more recent generations are not as severely constrained to the traditional marriage alliances of the past), complaints of sexual and domestic abuse from Kanak women have risen, as women are becoming more and more dissatisfied with customary penalties for sexual and domestic abuse in their communities ("Les femmes" 3). Sexual crimes have now become the top reason for the appearance of Kanaks in the court system of New Caledonia: a 1996 survey tallies 45 complaints per year out of 100,000 inhabitants, a number that Salomon views as an underestimation. As in Tahiti, the explanation for the prevalence of masculine domination and violence against women is based on ethnological observations: before the arrival of Europeans, women were utilized as instruments of exchange, and frequently taken as tokens of victory during wartime between tribes. As Claude Lévi-Strauss observes in one of the first ethnographic works to comment upon the exchange system of women within what he calls "primitive" societies, the system of exchange was not that of an exchange between a man and a woman, where the woman exerts agency, but "between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not

as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place" (115). Ultimately, women in Kanak society were considered possessions rather than beings with equal human rights, and the relationship of reciprocity between tribes was established not between men and women, but "between men by means of women, who are merely the occasion of this relationship" (Lévi-Strauss 116). More importantly, like in many societies across the globe, violence and sexual violence were employed as instruments to enforce masculine authority.

Indeed, the damaged Oceanic body is a social, political, cultural, and geographical product of Oceanic societies, and has thus made a foray into the realm of contemporary Oceanic literature. As Sabine Sielke insists, "…transposed into discourse, rape turns into a rhetorical device, an insistent figure for other social, political, and economic concerns and conflicts" (2). This chapter purports to examine the representations of the damaged Oceanic body, particularly the female body in encounters of domestic violence and rape in the novels, short stories, and poetry of Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz. While they do denounce sexual crimes against women, the three women writers include scenes of domestic and sexual abuse in their works where the role of perpetrator of this abuse is not always limited to the male characters. Because "narratives of sexual violence ponder not an alien and uncontrollable part of human nature but the power dynamics of a particular culture" (Sielke 2), scenes of domestic abuse and rape are employed to question and complicate the power dynamics of various Oceanic cultures. Claudine Jacques and Déwé Gorodé depict New Caledonians of European descent and Kanak women and men as both victims and culprits, while Spitz includes a scene in which a group of Tahitian men rape a white tourist, somewhat reversing the role of the European violators of the islands. All

three writers provoke a questioning of perspective and of power relations between the sexes (and between the races). This chapter will attempt to understand what it means to represent scenes of abuse and the damaged body in contemporary Oceanic women's literature, and the statements the authors make by pulling the woman's body out of the private sphere and representing domestic violence in a very public manner. The dynamics of the representation of rape and other forms of violence in the Oceanic region force the reader to reexamine the concepts of subjectivity and voice in regard to power relations in the works of these three contemporary Oceanic women writers.

The Representation of Violence and the Enduring Kanak Woman's Body in the Work of Déwé Gorodé

In the aphorism entitled "l'amour et d'autres désastres" ("love and other disasters"), Déwé Gorodé writes: "Du désir au plaisir/le corps désir éclore/et le désir/réduit l'amour au plaisir/On viole/la femme/pour prouver/qu'on est/des hommes" ("From desire to pleasure/the desiring body blooms/and desire/reduces love to pleasure/Rape/of womanhood/to prove/one's/manhood" *Sharing* 135). Throughout her poetry and prose, Gorodé consistently denounces the violence that is accepted as a part of Kanak life in many communities in New Caledonia, a violence that has been silently tolerated and minimally punished. Love is a veritable wreck in Gorodé's oeuvre, desire reduces love to merely bodily pleasures, and men rape women to attest to their manliness and virility. While she clearly demonstrates the attachment to her land and people that she feels throughout her works, Gorodé critically engages with the elements of Kanak

custom that she believes need reformation, specifically through her depictions of the Kanak woman's body.

In *Sous les cendres des conques* (*Under the Ashes of the Conch Shells*, 1985), Gorodé's first collection of poetry and her first published work, the author expresses the consequences of colonialism: the alienation of a culture and people. The collection includes poems written during Gorodé's years abroad at university in Montpellier (1970-1973), when she was home in New Caledonia (1974-1985), and poems written during the time she was imprisoned for her political activism (1974 and 1977). The collection, while written in French, emphasizes her rootedness in Kanak culture. The metaphor of rootedness is literal with Gorodé, as many of her poems adopt the names of trees as their titles, and in the poem entitled "Terre Kanak" ("Kanak Land") she refers to the earth as mother: "terre mère" ("earth mother" 58).[3] While she repeatedly utilizes this metaphor to emphasize the connection with the land, she also recurrently refers to the rapes of Kanak women, paralleling the rape of the earth mother with the rapes that actually occur on the island. In "À la tribu" ("At the *tribu*") European soldiers interrupt the author's reminiscing of her time spent with her clan, going fishing, singing, and dancing the *pilou*: "Certains jours il y a des troupes de soldats/qui traversent la tribu nous montrent un film/couchent avec filles et femmes/Ces jours-là la tribu est envahie" ("Some days there are troops of soldiers/who come into the tribe show us a film/sleep with girls and women/ these days the tribe is invaded" 33).[4] On days when the governor comes to speak to the Kanak *tribu*, the poetess notes "Ces jours-là les enfants de l'école doivent chanter 'la Marseillaise'" ("These days the schoolchildren must sing 'la Marseillaise'" 33). Gorodé essentially depicts the rape of her community, as the soldiers and the members of the

New Caledonian government invade, sleeping with their women and girls, replacing traditional Kanak songs with the French national anthem, insisting that they are in France rather than the Oceanic island.

In the same collection, Gorodé critiques the frequent rapes of Kanak women by Kanak men, placing blame both on the colonial importation of alcohol and on the hyper-masculinized tendencies of Kanak society. In "Réserves Kanakes" ("Kanak Reserves"), while she begins the poem with the imagery of typical indigenous life (cultivating the *igname*, or yams, gathering materials for building the *case* (home), words linking clans in mourning or for weddings 42), she soon contrasts the traditional image of peaceful, daily life with the violence that often takes place at night or during the weekends. Alcohol influences the "soirées 'pop' groupes pour 'faire la chaîne'/virées en bagnole pour draguer/avant de rentrer tabasser la compagne" ("Saturday night parties, hoolies that end with girls on the block/cruising around in the car to pick up some more/then go home and beat up the missus" 42; *Sharing* 18). Significantly, she evokes two violent acts towards women in these lines: the act of "faire la chaîne" ("the line-up") or the collective rape of one woman, and flirting with other women before returning home to beat up the "missus." Christine Salomon explains that *la chaîne*, collective rapes, frequently occur in rural areas as well as in Nouméa, as surprise attacks, on handicapped women or young single women who are known for having had several boyfriends. The girl is generally lured to a secluded area under the pretext of a date, often by a male friend, and, as Salomon notes, the friend commonly participates in the collective rape of the chosen girl. The young men, usually between the ages of 15 and 25, admit to participating because they want to follow their friends, or because they do not see this as qualifying as a rape:

between four and ten of the men interviewed indicate that they do not consider the act criminal, and in fact these rapes are considered more of a sexual initiation ("Les femmes" 5). Salomon also observes that frequently the rape victims are those who are considered to be deviating from the laws prescribed by indigenous custom and the influence of Christianity (such as drinking at parties, when this is an activity only considered appropriate for boys), or who dress in a manner considered provocative (5). As evidenced in "Réserves Kanakes," alcohol is frequently implicated in the explanations of these rapes, and in the Kanak milieu, rapes committed while the culprit is under the influence of alcohol are considered excusable: "celui qui commet un acte répréhensible sous l'empire de l'alcool est tenu pour irresponsable, dans un état de folie passagère qui l'excuse et le soustrait aux possibilités de châtiments coutumiers" ("someone who commits a reprehensible act under the influence of alcohol is considered irresponsible, in a state of passing madness which excuses him and shields him from the possibilities of customary punishment" "Les femmes" 6).

In the poem "Questions," Gorodé evokes the fear Kanak women feel at each "tapéras alcoolisé" (liquor-soaked drinking binge) that incites the "angoisse des coups parfois mortels" ("anxious terror of beatings, blows sometimes fatal" 84; *Sharing* 38).[5] She critiques the male leaders who speak of oppression and of Kanak freedom at meetings after such a night that triggers ideas of suicide in the minds of women, insisting that Kanak and Caledonian collective politics will have to answer the question: whose liberty, whose oppression? Yet in the poem immediately following, entitled "Cicatrices" ("Scars"), the poetess signals the strength of women who for years have remained silent "dans la parenté/dans l'enfantement" ("in kinship/in childbirth" 85), however, all smiling.

Women's strength is emphasized in Gorodé's poetry, and the woman's body, while scarred and ravaged, is valorized as an emblem of strength and continuity, particularly through maternal imagery. The woman/mother is capable of enduring pain in order to ensure the existence of hope for a renewed future. The poem entitled "attente" ("waiting"), which appears in *Dire le vrai* (*Speaking Truth*), a collection of poetry she compiled with Caldoche author Nicolas Kurtovich during a visit to Australia in 1997, utilizes the image of the maternal body to juxtapose the metaphorical and the realistic, hope and despair, compassion and violence, in an attempt to accurately portray the intricacies of both indigenous Kanak and New Caledonian societies. Gorodé employs the image of a mother waiting nine months for the child to emerge "du ventre qu'on caresse/ou qu'on viole" ("from the belly caressed/or violated" 42; *Sharing* 80). She waits for "le bourgeon qui éclot/la tige qui surgit/la pousse qui émerge/de la terre/qu'on soigne/ou qu'on brûle" ("for the bud that opens/for the stem that appears/the shoot that emerges/pushing up/from the ground nurtured/or burned" 42; *Sharing* 80). Maternity is again likened to nature: both have been violated as well as nurtured, caressed and destroyed. Yet the poem ends with a hopeful wish for an effort from all groups living in New Caledonia, "pour trouver/ensemble/le mot qui réconforte/la parole qui apaise/et l'acte qui libère" ("so we may find/together/the word that comforts/the talk that soothes/and the act that frees" 43; *Sharing* 81).

In 1994, almost a decade after the publication of *Sous les cendres des conques*, Gorodé published her first collection of short stories concerning similar themes, specifically the Kanak woman's body, entitled *Utê Mûrûnû, Petite Fleur de cocotier* (*Utê Mûrûnû, Little Coconut Palm Flower*). The opening narrative, whose title shares the

name of the entire collection, is the longest story in the work, and recounts the genealogy of five strong, enduring women, eponymously named Utê Mûrûnû. Peter Brown remarks in an essay centered on this work: "Continuity is ensured by women, representatives of the earth-mother, and the true Kanak values prove to be feminine" ("A Singular Plurality" 137). Although the story opens with the perspective of a male character receiving news that the young Utê Mûrûnû refuses to marry the man her family has chosen for her, the narrative focuses on the enduring and supportive role of the women in Kanak society. In fact, throughout the five generations, each Utê Mûrûnû has refused to follow the tradition of customary marriage alliance with the complete understanding that her actions will result in disapproval or even alienation from her clan.[6] Gorodé cleverly manipulates Western myth as she aligns one of the first Utês with Venus, the morning star: "alors que nous nous préparions pour nous rendre à un enterrement dans une tribu assez éloignée, désignant l'astre resplendissant au-dessus des vagues, je lui déclarai à brûle-pourpoint, '*Gèè*, voilà, j'ai trouvé, tu es Kaatâdaa, l'étoile du matin!'" ("while we were preparing to go to a funeral in a far-off tribe, pointing out the star glittering splendidly above some waves, I abruptly declared, 'Grandmother, there, I found it, you are Kaatâdaa, the morning star!'" 19).[7] Kaatâdaa, which also introduces the story "La saison des pommes Kanakes" ("Kanak Apple Season") in the same collection, is the morning star that guides men to their destination, the first star that appears in the sky as morning approaches. Named Venus after the goddess of love in Western tradition, Gorodé appropriates the myth employed by Europeans to eroticize Oceanic women's bodies to create an image of guiding female light-filled energy, representative of life.

Significantly, she does this with the *paicî* name for the star, emphasizing a uniquely Kanak enduring feminine presence.

Throughout "Utê Mûrûnû," Gorodé continually accentuates the importance of women to Kanak life, who, while corporally subjected to rules prescribed by the men of the *tribu*, are presented as the true bearers of culture. In possibly the most celebrated scene of any of her short stories, she critiques the vision of the culpability of women imported from the Christian religion while explaining the reasons for which women are capable of understanding the voices of the earth mother:

> Porteuses de semences, nous étions lardées d'interdits, marquées de tabous comme autant de pierres pour obstruer la vie. Ornières de plaisir, nous devenions des Eva mordues par le serpent inventé par les prêtres de la nouvelle religion. *Adi*, perles noires du mariage coutumier, nous étions échangées comme autant de poteries scellant une alliance entre deux guerres. Voies et pistes interclaniques, nous survivions tant bien que mal à nos enfances et à nos pubertés trop souvent violées par des vieillards en état de lubricité. Prestige, virilité, guerre, des concepts mâles pour la grande case des hommes bâtie sur le dos large des femmes ! Partage, solidarité, humilité, paroles féminines conçues, nourries, portées dans nos entrailles de femmes battues ! (21)
>
> Bearers of seed, we were bound and gagged by prohibitions, branded with taboos that were like rocks blocking the paths of life. Ruts of pleasure, we became the Eve bitten by the serpent invented by the priests of the new religion. *Adi*, 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 senior men. Prestige, virility, war – male concepts for the Great House of men, built on the broad backs of women! Sharing, solidarity, humility, the words of women, conceived, nourished, and carried in our entrails of beaten wives. (Ramsay, "Sexual Violence and Return" 76)

As Peter Brown points out, Gorodé denounces the view of women as simply receptacles for procreation, "ruts of pleasure" for men to essentially colonize and dominate ("A Singular Plurality" 134). Instead, Gorodé insists that the woman's body is not merely a

repository for male seed nor a commodity, but a location for sharing, solidarity, and nourishment, particularly for other women. The author rejects the conception of women as socially valued bodies of exchange, which Luce Irigaray also critiques in her analysis of marriage practices in *This Sex Which is Not One*: "A commodity – a woman – is divided into two irreconcilable 'bodies': her 'natural' body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values" (180). Irigaray continues, noting that mothers were left out of the system of exchange, because they threatened the existence of social order (due to the incest taboo). Mothers were expected to maintain the social order without intervening in order to change it (185). Yet in Gorodé's "Utê Mûrûnû," mothers do threaten the social order of Kanak society, because rather than being denied participation in the social order, they actively decline to participate as units of exchange – the Utê Mûrûnû with whom the story begins refuses to marry, as she is pregnant by the man chosen to marry her sister. Refusing to become the "black pearls of customary marriage," the Utê Mûrûnûs force a rethinking of Kanak marriage tradition, and draw attention to the woman's body not as a unit of exchange in the manner explained in Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, but rather as a transgressive, empowered instigator of reform.

While Gorodé's early poetry and short stories critique the subjugation of women yet communicate an optimistic vision of the Oceanic woman's body as an instrument of change, her first novel adopts a more pessimistic, almost deterministic dimension. *L'Épave* (*The Wreck*), published in 2005, is similar in structure to "Utê Mûrûnû": haunted by characters again eponymously named, it recounts the successive rapes through the various perspectives of the women on whom the novel focuses its attention.[8]

The central story, that of young Léna and her relationship with young Tom, is surrounded by interweaving narratives of related women, which help the young Léna to bring to the surface the repressed memories of being raped during her childhood.[9] In fact, all of the female protagonists of the novel are victims of sexual violence, as most of them were raped by a metaphorical and literal "ancêtre," Old Tom, tripled in the figures of "the fisherman" and "the orator," who takes control even of the women's dreams at night: "[Léna] ne voit pas du tout ce que vient faire le vieux pêcheur dans ses rêves. Même si lors de leur conversation près de l'épave, une note de sa voix l'a interpellée, comme le maillon d'une chaîne de souvenirs oubliés" ("Léna does not see at all what the old fisherman comes to do in her dreams. Even if during their conversation near the wreck, a note of his voice called out to her, like the link in a chain of forgotten memories" 92).[10] Symbolically, the rapes all occur near the wreck of an old canoe (*pirogue*), or, in a short side narrative, on the boat of a colonial naval captain who enters into an incestuous relationship with a woman who is perhaps his daughter.[11] Elizabeth DeLoughrey observes that the figure of a marine vessel, whether a canoe or a naval ship, is indicative of claims of sovereignty to a region, and significantly, masculine sovereignty, as men were those who occupied the feminized vessels (43). DeLoughrey explains that while both indigenous and Western males were typically associated with the masculine capacity for navigating the feminized waters of the ocean, the fact that the indigenous canoe is constructed from the trees native to the islands is equally emblematic of the conceptualization of gendered space. The woman, the bearer of true culture and representative of tradition, is associated with roots and trees, an intimate tie with the land which also indicates a certain stability and specificity. When converted into a canoe, the

feminine symbol transforms from one of stability and rootedness to one of guide, enabling masculine voyaging. DeLoughrey analyzes of Oceanic travel narratives: "…Pacific women function as the roots to stabilize transoceanic masculine routes. This is why it is no coincidence that the voyaging canoe in these modern narratives is often referred to as 'she,' even though Polynesian languages are not gendered" (134).[12]

The canoe, as DeLoughrey observes, is a marker of genealogical and historical continuity, and represents a capacity to navigate the future. Gorodé's *L'Épave*, however, portrays the feminized voyaging canoe as damaged, a wreck in the "cemetery of canoes," mirroring the damage that sexual violence has caused to the Oceanic woman's body.[13] Masculine violence and domination have prevented the canoe from navigating a Kanak/New Caledonian future that includes women's rights. Gorodé demonstrates that the male-dominated traditions of "la coutume" have chained women to the status of sexual object, object of exchange, on whom men prey, utilizing sex as an instrument of power. As Éva explains to the first Heléna: "Tu lui appartiens parce qu'il t'a prise toute petite sur leur pierre du cimetière des pirogues […] Et il t'a laissée grandir jusqu'au jour où il t'a soumise à nouveau à sa volonté. Et il a fait de toi sa chose…" ("You belong to him because he took you when you were very young on the rock of the cemetery of canoes […] And he let you grow up until the day he submitted you again to his wishes. And he made you his thing…" 106). *Taken* at the cemetery of canoes, Heléna no longer has control over her own body (if indeed she ever did) and is consumed with a need for the incestuous ancestor. Gorodé's novel, a spiral of fatalistic, hereditary determinism, paints a powerful image of the ways in which innocent young women can be

manipulated, sexualized and forced by older male relatives who employ their sexual dominance to maintain possession.

In the seventh chapter of the novel, however, Gorodé almost cedes to optimism as she paints a portrait of women, raped in the past, who find sexual liberty and solace in a homoerotic relationship. For Gorodé's women, the body, once a site of repression, here becomes a site of resistance to patriarchal hegemony in both Kanak and Christian traditions. In "Le paradis des femmes" ("The paradise of women") Heléna returns to Éva's house, where they first discovered their passion for each other while Heléna was pregnant with her rapist's child. After giving birth and ensuring that her baby is taken care of, Heléna returns to engage in a passionate love affair with Éva, who had been introduced to the love of another woman, Maria, while she was entrapped in a relationship with Old Tom, the ancestor. The author recounts Éva's discovery of freedom in a Sapphic romance:

> Seules, en situation clandestine et hors-la-loi face à l'univers masculine, leur unique marge de manœuvre résidait dans cette intimité raflée à une vie de soumission à ciel ouvert […] Sachant qu'au matin, il leur faudrait encore vendre leur âme amazone à la folie guerrière des hommes et à la violence inhérente à leur pacte social d'écrasement des femmes, elles nageaient en plein bonheur nocturne… (127)
>
> Alone, in a clandestine situation and outside of the law in the masculine universe, their only refuge rested in this intimacy swiped from a life of submission under the open sky […] Knowing that in the morning, they would again need to sell their amazon souls to the warlike madness of men and to the inherent violence of their social pact of destroying women, they swam in nocturnal happiness…

For Maria, Heléna, and Éva, lesbian love is an overt undermining of male authority, a deliberate transgression of customary laws as well as Christian tradition forbidding homosexuality. The women are thus "Libres. Libres face au quotidien et à l'habitude qui

usent. Libres face à la passion et à la possession qui aliènent…" ("Free. Free in the face of the quotidian and the tradition that consumes. Free in the face of the passion and possession that alienates" 128). Constructing men as unreal or fantastical, Éva insists that the prince charmings from fairy tales are just that: fictions. In reality, the ogres or sorcerers who appear in the stories are more likely to take the form of overly touchy grandfathers and violent, sexually abusive fathers (130). As the characters are free to do with their bodies what they choose in Éva's decidedly feminine space, Gorodé creates a feminine textual space in the chapter "Le paradis des femmes," a textual space where men are discussed yet in which they are not allowed to penetrate. Gorodé clearly delineates a type of "counter-society," in which defiance against heterosexual normativity and masculine domination is safe, a space that is rendered protective by the very absence of male characters. Julia Kristeva describes a female "counter-society" in "Women's Time": "A 'female society' is then constituted as a sort of alter ego of the official society, in which all real or fantasized possibilities for *jouissance* take refuge" (479). Kristeva explains that many radical feminist currents refuse to identify themselves with the existing (masculine) power, and construct a harmonious, fulfilling society free of prohibitions and from which the existing power is completely excluded. While Kristeva maintains that this sort of radical feminism leads to an "inverted sexism," in Gorodé's textual space, this counter-society built upon the exclusion of men remains a safe, harmonious, feminine, fulfilling space.

With the exception of the feminine space evoked in "Le paradis des femmes," *L'Épave* depicts a shockingly negative view of the male authority figures of Kanak society, and an equally fatalistic vision for the women of the island, who are either

complicit with or unable to escape the savage brutality of men. Indeed, even Éva, who formerly abhorred the Christian religion and provided a protective female space for the other women in the narrative, renounces her former way of life and joins a religious cult, separating herself from her female friends as well as from men: "Se prenant pour l'Ève biblique du paradis perdu, elle voyait maintenant en chaque homme une incarnation possible du serpent séducteur prêt à vous étouffer dans ses anneaux de boa constricteur" ("Taking herself for the Biblical Eve of the lost paradise, she now saw in each man a possible incarnation of the seductive serpent ready to suffocate you in his boa constrictor rings" 151). As the reader subsequently learns, Éva, "stolen" by a corrupt pastor of the sect and taken as his mistress, must be interned in a psychiatric institution. Similarly, Gorodé represents the demise of another figure of feminine agency and strength, Lila, a streetwalker and storyteller, who was also raped as a child. Towards the beginning of the novel, the outspoken female character openly denounces her male family members, who passed her around and took their turns raping her for years. She compares her body to a shipwreck as she laments the brutality of her past: "Une éternité de souffrance et d'humiliation où mon corps de douleur et mon cœur en deuil se sont transformés en pierre. Oh, je suis devenue un cœur de pierre, mamie. Oui, un cœur de pierre, dans un corps humain en dérive pour la vie. Une épave, mamie. L'épave. L'épave en dérive…" ("An eternity of suffering and humiliation where my pained body and my mourning heart were transformed into stone. Oh, I have become a heart of stone, mammie. Yes, a heart of stone, in a human body drifting for life. A wreck, mammie. The wreck. The drifting wreck…" 34-35). The female characters who defy masculine domination in the novel, however, all suffer the consequences: while Éva symbolically rejoins her rapist on the

pirogue, turned into a black rock representing death, Lila is raped and murdered for her candid public opposition to male authority. Gorodé's novel effectively responds to the question posed by the editors of *Rape and Representation*: "What happens to women who go public about their violation? If they escape the dominant fate of silencing and erasure, what price do they pay? Will their speech, their protest, be reinscribed in the patriarchal economy as figures of a female violence even worse than that perpetrated against them?"(4). Gorodé's answer is a firm yes: in the context of Kanak societies, when women go public about their violation, the price they pay is death.

L'Épave is an explicit engagement with the disturbing issue of sexual violence that infiltrates the lives of women living in Oceania. While perhaps deterministic, it is also a realistic depiction of the complexity of the female Kanak's situation in contemporary New Caledonia. As Raylene Ramsay opines, Gorodé writes violence as counter violence, as a form of refusal of patriarchal violence, and exposes the tragedies of sexual violence in often-incestuous Kanak relationships ("Indigenous" 1). Her text is a clear denouncement of violence and in particular sexual violence against the Kanak woman's body. The imagery of rape in Gorodé's work – of active male dominance and passive female compliance – becomes a paradigm for denouncing sexism in Kanak/New Caledonian society. Indeed, while Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin observe that fewer and fewer Kanak women accept and make excuses for male violence against women, the statistics show that it is still a challenge for the Kanak community to release the mind-set of conformity to all elements of custom ("Challenging" 31-32). Clearly, the unfavorable economic conditions into which the Kanak populations were forced by colonial history contribute to these statistics. However, sexual and domestic violence in

both the Kanak and New Caledonian communities of European descent continue to be issues with which other Oceanic writers engage.

Questioning Power and Subjectivity in Claudine Jacques's New Caledonian Rape Narratives

While the texts of Déwé Gorodé specifically denounce the violence in the Kanak community of New Caledonia, Claudine Jacques engages with a critique of sexual and domestic violence as a phenomenon that permeates all of the (fictional and nonfictional) communities of the Oceanic islands. Her stories and novels, like Gorodé's, represent rape as an everyday occurrence in Kanaky/New Caledonia, and indeed in other island communities in the Pacific region. Rape in her texts performs a metonymic function, similar to that of two African Francophone texts that Eileen Julien analyzes:

> Rape, these texts suggest, is not an aberration, not a singularly sick act, nor an individual problem in an otherwise healthy society. […] It is portrayed rather, as the French term *viol* makes clear, *metonymically*, as a *quintessential* act of violence in a context of rampant abuse, both political and sexual. (161)

Jacques's narratives contextualize rape through varied Oceanic perspectives. In her works, the victims are neither uniquely Kanak nor always women, and the culprits of the violent crimes depicted are similarly culturally and ethnically varied. Jacques interweaves textual voices so that the representation of rape and violence varies constantly. In so doing, she questions the construction of sexual violence as a breakdown in the social order in a community. As Henrietta Moore points out, shifting our view of sexual violence as "something gone wrong" in the social order to "seeing it as the sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power" (154) enables a

change in the way violence is represented in literature. The characters who enunciate their perspectives of their individual traumas are thus all given subjectivity in Jacques's texts in order to enable a discourse about gender difference, race, identity, and power in Oceanic literature.

In "L'alibi" ("The Alibi"), a short story that appears in Jacques's first collection *Nos silences sont si fragiles* (*Our Silences are So Fragile*), a Caldoche adolescent, Joseph, struggles between his loyalty to a childhood friend, Marco, and his attachment to the victim who accuses Marco of raping her. The representation of rape in this text is specifically masculine: the rape victim herself does not speak (although the vision of her body can be argued to speak to Joseph), while the rapist, in fact, recounts the rape at the end of the narrative. Believing that his friend is innocent and that allowing the police to focus on Marco as the culprit is permitting the true criminal to run the streets of Nouméa, Joseph provides a false alibi for his friend. Affected, he visits the young victim, Armelle, in the hospital. The narrator describes the impression the young damaged body has on the adolescent:

> Il est saisi par la transparence de son teint, par sa chevelure noire qui s'étale autour d'elle sur l'oreiller en mèches désordonnées. Il s'approche encore un peu, tremblant devant l'extrême fragilité qui se dégage de ce visage, de ce corps gracile. Son cou porte des marbrures bleues et jaunes, sa main gauche inerte disparait sous un lourd pansement plâtré. (99)
>
> He is seized by the transparence of her complexion, by her black hair that spreads out over her pillow in disorganized locks. He moves a little closer, trembling before the extreme fragility than emanates from this face, from this frail body. Her neck has blue and yellow bruises, her inert left hand disappears under a heavy plaster cast.

While Claudine Jacques depicts a body in degradation, this damaged female body manages to influence the character of Joseph in a manner that profoundly alters his life.

As he returns home from his failed attempt to visit Marco in prison, this image provides him with the incentive for which he has been waiting, and the degrading female body becomes conflated with the image of the city of Nouméa. Joseph regards the city with a different perspective, significantly utilizing a corporeal metaphor: "Nouméa fait peau neuve…" ("Nouméa takes on a new skin…" 102). Now seeing the potential of his city, as well as his own, the adolescent realizes that his "thing" is architecture, and finally, in the third repetition of his sophomore year in high school, finds his motivation via the image of the damaged, violated female body. The author's attempt at constructing something beautiful out of pain, however, results in failure. The optimistic, youthful dreams of a productive future are muted as the protagonist discovers that his friend did, indeed, rape Armelle. Marco brags: "…Cette fille est une salope. Voilà des mois que j'essayais de l'avoir […] Je l'ai un peu forcée. Mais ce n'est qu'une fille. C'est fait pour ça. Elle s'en remettra" ("That girl is a slut. I've been trying to have her for months […] I forced her a little bit. But it's just a girl. They're made for that. She'll recover" 111-112). The rapist himself concedes that his virile power was threatened by the victim's constant refusal, and thus he forced her in order to reinstate his power. Stunned and burdened with his own culpability, Joseph drives their motorcycle off a cliff, killing both himself and Marco. With this story, Jacques reveals that if gender discourse and violence among the youth in New Caledonia does not change, Caledonian society will remain stagnant and incapable of progression.

A similar pessimism about the condition of women and male-female power relations occupies many of the author's short stories. Jacques shifts from a rape narrative in the Caldoche community of Nouméa to a violent reaction to an adolescent indigenous

girls' sexual actions in the subsequent story in the same collection, entitled "Secrets amers" ("Bitter Secrets"). Sarah, the daughter of a Ni-Vanuatu chief, succumbs to the allures of a French officer visiting with a group of French businessmen who intend to build a Club Med in the Vanuatu islands. As the indigenous group leads the French men on a touristic climb of the volcanic mountain Yasur, the narrator ominously foreshadows the clash of the two cultures through a description of the surrounding nature:

> Vision d'enfer rendue plus terrible encore par le bruit des explosions incessantes, l'odeur soufrée des fumées parfois blanches, parfois noires, le danger des projections de lave. Contraste saisissant dans cet univers paradisiaque: à vol d'oiseau l'étendue paisible de l'océan, plus près les forêts traversées et là, ce dôme de pierres, de roches et de laves. (119)
>
> Vision of hell rendered even more terrible by the noise of the incessant explosions, the sulfuric odor of sometimes white, sometimes black smoke, the danger of the projections of lava. Captivating contrast in this paradisiacal universe: as the crow flies, the peaceful stretch of ocean, closer, the traversed forests, and there, this dome of stones, of rocks and lava.

The peaceful ocean, typically gendered as feminine, is juxtaposed to the phallic imagery of a mountain spewing "dangerous projections of lava," clearly implying the danger that is to arise from the relationship between the girl and the white officer. Sarah, enticed by the romantic Martial, allows him to take her virginity. The narrator remarks: "En quelques heures l'enfant insouciante s'était muée en femme déchirée. Elle faisait l'apprentissage de l'amour, de la souffrance…" ("In a few hours the carefree child became a torn woman. She became the apprentice of love, of suffering…" 122). Similar to the treatment of love in Gorodé's works, Claudine Jacques depicts love as suffering, especially the love and the corporal union of indigenous and white bodies. Sarah's body is now "torn," damaged by the burden of a forbidden relationship.

Indeed, the love between an indigenous girl and a white man is met with violent disapproval in Jacques's Vanuatu, a now independent set of islands formerly colonized by the French and British, located close to New Caledonia. When Sarah's brother, Harry, discovers her transgression, he beats her until their grandmother intervenes, leaving his sister with a swollen face and a limp noticeable upon their father's return several days later. As the older man and his daughter develop a closer relationship while he aids in her healing process, Sarah discovers she is pregnant with the son of the white officer. Reluctantly, Molly, the grandmother figure, recounts the story of Sarah's mother's disappearance to the pregnant daughter, who learns that she has followed in her mother's footsteps in becoming pregnant with the child of a white man. When Tomass, Sarah's father, learned about Sarah's mother's infidelity, he reacted violently, dragging her by the hair up the volcanic mountain, and throwing her into the magma. Sarah thus understands "the call of the volcano," (127) a warning sign from her mother. Ultimately, the violent brother Harry, who overhears the conversation between Sarah and Molly, attempts to kill Tomass, which results in Harry's own death. Resolving never to see the white Martial again, Sarah encourages her father to accept her son as his own. Implying an incestuous outcome, the story closes with the image of Sarah sleeping next to her father.

Jacques's short narratives frequently culminate in death or disaster, very rarely allowing for an ending in which cultural differences are embraced and transgressions forgiven. Rape and domestic violence pepper her short stories, as in "La faute" ("Fault") a narrative in the first collection that recounts two brothers' realization that their father raped and left an impregnated seventeen-year-old to fend for herself in the dangerous New Caledonian bush. When the younger brother attempts to reunite with his sister and

her now adolescent daughter, he arrives at a closed, locked home: reconciliation and reunion are impossible after the violence that has destroyed the family. In her 2001 collection *À L'Ancre de nos vies (The Anchor of Our Lives)*, Jacques depicts a rape in the story entitled "L'Impatience du cœur" ("Impatience of the Heart"). Back in Nouméa, Marielle, a mother whose teenage son is in France preparing for the baccalaureate exam, encounters a former friend of her son's, a "lourd wallisien aux jambes couvertes de bobos infectés" ("a heavy Wallisian with legs covered in infected lesions" 88). Taking pity on Jiro, she takes him to a hospital to be treated for drugs, and allows him to stay in her home in order to watch him carefully. While the majority of the story represents a courageous, compassionate woman who is willing to sacrifice her comfort to care for another human being, the narrative, which is also the final narrative of the collection, terminates in disaster. Jiro, fearing the arrival of Marielle's son Antoine, enters Marielle's room by the light of the moon and stares at her naked body breathing peacefully. The narrator informs us: "…il a toujours rêvé de s'enfouir tout entier dans un ventre chaud. De s'y enfermer, de n'y plus bouger […] qu'il entre juste un peu dans ce mystère, qu'il connaisse une fois, une seule, l'émotion d'être happé, saisi, enveloppé, empoigné par ce mollusque aux milles ventouses, ce poulpe qui le tiendra serré jusqu'à l'agonie suprême…" ("…he had always dreamed of burying himself completely in a warm belly. To enclose himself, to never move again […] to enter just a little in this mystery, so that he may know one time, just once, the emotion of being snatched, seized, enveloped, grabbed by this mollusk with a million tentacles, this octopus that would keep him clamped down until the supreme agony…" 105). The young man compares the woman's genitals to a mollusk with tentacles, implying that it will be the woman who takes or

captures *him*. The discourse of power is manipulated and projected onto the victim, creating a fantasy of the rapist's incapacity to control his urges and the victim's Medusan "seduction" of her rapist. The narrative concludes with yet another perspective-shift to the newspaper article announcing Jiro's suicide, and Marielle contemplating her own culpability in the death of the young, homeless drug addict.

Claudine Jacques's pioneer novel, *Les Cœurs barbelés* (*Barbed Hearts*), published in 1999, follows a similar trajectory to her short narratives, in which the protagonists seldom achieve reconciliation and in which guilt manifests itself in the victim's psychology. The novel, which depicts the impossible relationship between a Kanak militant engineer, Sery, and the apolitical Caldoche schoolteacher, Malou, essentially chronicles the turbulent decade of the 1980s in New Caledonia. While the focus is on the relationship between the couple, *les Evénéments* are constantly represented in the background of the novel: the couple first meets during a protest march, Sery repeatedly attends meetings concerning Kanak independence, and in fact he meets his Kanak mistress at a rally for Kanak sovereignty.[14] In an attempt to reveal both sides of the story, Jacques's novel interweaves the perspectives of Sery and Malou, Kanak and Caldoche, male and female, to provide a "hybrid" view on New Caledonian identity and independence. Although the author seems to want to maintain a common consciousness and represent each side, Kanaks and Caldoches, faithfully (which she does through the use of italicized poems, epigraphs, short articles or narratives, citing various authors such as Déwé Gorodé and Jean-Marie Tjibaou), she does engage in a critique on the woman's condition in New Caledonia. Towards the end of the novel in the section entitled "Un si grand amour" ("Such a great love"), the omniscient narrator provides a window into the

lives of Kanak women via a conversation between Kalia, Sery's Kanak mistress, and her friend, Sylenna. Sylenna mentions that she would consider marrying a white man, an assertion that her friend rebuffs angrily, calling white men "[des] voleurs de terres" ("stealers of land" 226). Sylenna defends her argument, steering the conversation away from politics and towards domestic issues: "Tu sais les Métropolitains sont gentils avec les femmes. Ils restent avec la journée et la nuit. Ils n'ont pas honte de faire la vaisselle ou de passer un coup de balai. Beaucoup ne boivent pas. Et ils ne frappent pas leurs femmes non plus. Chez nous c'est pas pareil" ("You know Metropolitans are nice to women. They stay with them day and night. They aren't ashamed to do the dishes or to sweep. A lot of them don't drink. And what's more, they don't hit their wives. In our community, it's not the same" 225). Later, as she admits that she would marry a man that she loves, black or white, she also laments the fact that "la coutume" prevents her from choosing her own husband, and that women still, in 1985, do not have the right to speak nor to act in the Kanak clan system (225-226). Sylenna desires to leave the island of Lifou, and move to Nouméa in order to escape the traditional social structure that circumscribes women, but she remains silent regarding the true reasons for her desire to flee the *tribu*: the previous year, she was a victim of *la chaîne*. The narrator explains: "Elle a réagi un peu vite. Parce que la faille est là, en permanence, en elle. Une blessure qui la fend en deux, de son sexe à sa tête. Une salissure qu'elle lave encore aujourd'hui à grand renfort de savon carré" ("She reacted a little quickly. Because the flaw is there, permanently, inside her. A wound that splits her in two, from her sex to her head. Dirt that she washes still today, a great effort with square soap" 228). Her body has been

permanently torn, flawed due to masculine whim, and she is both physically and psychologically scarred.

Jacques's victims of domestic violence and rape frequently express feelings of being physically torn and disgust with their bodies, and often they express feelings of guilt. Guilt, however, is often determined from without, and functions as a questioning of authority in Jacques's tales of rape. Sylenna, for example, remains silent about her rape, but instead eats to forget a misplaced guilt: "Sa façon à elle de nier ce corps qui la dégoûte" ("Her own way to deny this body which disgusts her" 228). In "Aveuglément l'amour" ("Blind Love") a short narrative that appears in the 2009 collection *La Chasse et autres nouvelles* (*The Hunt and Other Stories*), a woman faces trial for having murdered her violent lover, the man who, she says, "…me bouffait de chaque seconde. Will! Il était entré en moi comme un ver dans un bancoulier […] Il m'a grignotée […] puis s'est nourri de chaque fibre de mon corps, a habité mon ventre…" ("…he ate me every second. Will! He entered me like a worm in a candlenut […] He snacked on me […] then nourished himself on every fiber of my being, he lived in my stomach…" 205). We learn at the end of the narrative that Myriam, one of the rare women who fights against the violence of men, is found guilty and sentenced to seven years in prison. As the editors of *Rape and Representation* remark in the introduction to the collaborative work, "Whether in the courts or the media, whether in art or criticism, who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as 'truth' determines the definition of what rape *is*" (1). In this short narrative, it is the court system and the defense of the male perpetrator that is obviously considered "truth," and the violence that the woman suffered is given little consideration. Guilt is thus projected onto the victim, who is left devoid of individual

agency. Indeed, the first-person narrator of the short story, who "exercises a man's job in a women's prison" (214), claims her as his possession, and in the disconcerting last lines of the narrative states: "je la garde, je la tiens. Elle est à moi" ("I keep her, I have her. She's mine" 214). Ironically, the relationship between Myriam and the narrator of the story itself calls into question the notions of "truth" and of "guilt," as the reader determines at the end of the account that the narrator himself is not trustworthy.[15]

Guilt, or a sense of responsibility, is also the reason for which many of the victims in Jacques's narratives remain with violent men. In "La blouse" ("The Blouse") a short story that appears in the collection *Le Cri de l'acacia* (*The Call of the Acacia*), Yolaine Brinou, faithful wife and mother, learns that her youngest son is finally leaving the house, releasing her from her duties and from the conjugal bed in which every day of her life as a wife, she was abused (80). Yet, while the female victims of rape in Claudine Jacques's narratives often encounter configurations of guilt or responsibility, many remain capable of escaping male violence. Yolaine Brinou is last seen on a bus to Nouméa; Myriam murders her violator, and Malou, in *Les Cœurs barbelés*, finally leaves Sery, accused by his female friend as being "Ré-tro-gra-de" (278), at the close of the novel. While these empowered women succeed in escaping violence, the author reveals through the cynical conclusions to her novels and short stories that reconciliation still remains beyond reach: the politics and aesthetics of rape and of gender power relations are emblematic of New Caledonian political culture.

In her stunning 2003 dystopian novel, *L'Âge du perroquet-banane: Parabole païenne* (*The Age of the Parrotfish: Pagan Parable*), Jacques again shifts perspectives and chronology in a futuristic depiction of a New Caledonia a decade after the "Grand

désordre" ("Great disorder") of 2018. The choice of year for the great disorder is significant: 2018 is the projected date for the third referendum on independence for the island. Jacques's novel can therefore be interpreted as a projection of the isolation future independence might bring to New Caledonia, and a premonition of the violence that threatens to return to a group of communities that has not yet learned to accept the Other. In *L'Âge du perroquet-banane*, rapes and murders abound, education and knowledge are forgotten but for a small group of intellectuals who live in an old library (significantly lead by a female librarian, reaffirming the author's faith in female empowerment), where they retain and protect books, the memories of life before "le Grand désordre." Grey clouds reign over the island, while the inhabitants (the "Êtres sans mémoire," or "beings without a memory") separate themselves into three groups or "races," distinguished by their three different territories on the island.[16] Underground, a kingdom is presided over by "L'Obèse" ("The Obese One"); "savage women" and their children run around unprotected in the valleys and forests, suffering from the violence of the "gens des Cimes" ("the people of the Heights"), those who live in the mountains and practice the most violent forms of cannibalism and torture. It is in fact in the land of the Cimes where a woman rapes Titew, the fourteen-year-old grandson of the librarian. The woman, Meameï, saves the young intellectual from her violent family and returns with him to the library, where his grandmother and the rest of the guardians of memories attempt to restore his health. As he recovers, he becomes determined to marry Meameï, despite his grandmothers' protests that she is "so different" (198). Upon his insistence that she stay with Titew, Meameï reveals that she is pregnant with his baby, admitting that while he was unconscious:

> Lorsque je t'ai aperçu, j'ai pensé que ton membre avait de l'odeur et tes reins de la puissance. Voilà. […] Je suis parfois la femme de mon père. De lui, j'ai eu trois fils, aucun n'a survécu. C'est pour cette raison que je t'ai sauvé, toi l'étranger au duvet du vent, en te posant sur la fourmilière, là, j'ai profité de ta semence. Tu dois te souvenir. (200)
>
> When I saw you, I thought that your member had fragrance and your organs had strength. That's it. […] I am sometimes my father's wife. From him, I have had three sons, none of them has survived. It is for this reason that I saved you, you, the foreigner, in placing you on the anthill, there, I took advantage of your semen. You must remember.

Meameï reveals, in this rape narrative in which the typical gendered roles of victim and perpetrator are reversed, that rape is undeniably prompted by a desire for power, and that power and value are structured around the body in this fictional future society. Her discourse recalls that of Diderot's Orou in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, in which indigenous Tahitian women desire the power and intellectual capacity implicated by European se(a)men and attempt to "ameliorate" their race by becoming impregnated. When Titew suggests that Meameï escape with him to live elsewhere, other than the "grey world," she refuses, insisting that her place is with her own kind (201). Meameï's rape of the young man is not motivated by love, anger, or sexual desire, but simply by a desire to propagate and strengthen her own race. She candidly admits: "j'ai ce que je voulais, un enfant au sang neuf. Je t'ai sauvé, c'est mon prix" ("I have what I wanted, a child of new blood. I saved you, that's my prize" 201). Jacques's "pagan parable" reverses the typical roles of rape narratives to reveal that the underlying threat to the reconciliation of multiple communities is unquestionably the desire for power, regardless of race, class, or gender.

In Jacques's most recent novel, *Nouméa mangrove* (2010), a novel that, like Camus's *La Chute*, descends circularly into a Dante-inspired inferno, the desire for power

again plays a significant role, and men as well as women manipulate bodies in order to maintain a sense of authority.[17] In this novel of interlaced narratives, marginalized youths on the outskirts of Nouméa face violence in the squats, a "Miss Sunshine" dressed only in white will sleep with men for cans of powdered milk, a Don Juan-esque police detective falls in love with the wife of a murder victim, and a young nurse becomes completely entrapped in the sexual exploitations of a dangerous "broussard."[18] Jacques alternates perspectives and linearity throughout the novel to create a "hybrid" narrative, a *métissage* of the voices of the various cultures and classes that exist in the "mangrove" of Nouméa and the clashes that ensue, emblematizing the difficulties of attaining the shared goal of a "common future" laid out in the 1998 Nouméa Accord. The novel is split into four parts and fifty-two chapters, with asides and, beginning in the second "part" of the novel, interspersed sections written in italics entitled *Quelque chose qui fait mal*, in which the perspective shifts to that of Emma Salvatore, a blond French nurse who begins work in a clinic in the brush. The reader is first introduced to Emma in an aside, in which she begins writing the "TRYPTIQUE" that summarizes her passion: "Jouir, Adorer, Haïr" ("Pleasure, Love, Hate" 138), interestingly recalling the well-known triptych novel of the Haitian writer Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Amour, Colère, et Folie*. Similar to Claire in Vieux-Chauvet's primary narrative of the novel, "Amour," Emma (whose name as the author of this piece of writing is not revealed until the very end of *Nouméa mangrove*) must write in order to "free herself from her infernal passions"(139), in order to exorcise Samy from her skin (140).[19] As Hélène Cixous writes in the celebrated "Rire de la Méduse," woman must write not only in order to liberate her voice, but also in order to liberate her body from phallogocentric parameters. Writing, according to Cixous, requires every part of a

woman's body, and enables her to realize her voice and her strength: "Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps, qu'elle invente la langue imprenable qui crève les cloisonnements" ("The woman must write from her body, she must invent the impregnable language that bursts through boundaries" 48). It empowers the woman to move beyond enclosures fixed by phallocentrism. For Emma, writing provides a medium through which she can eventually escape from the boundaries imposed by the sexually abusive and possessive Samy, because, as she discovers, her involvement with Samy (and other men) becomes figuratively inscribed on her body. The only way to escape this encoding is through the cathartic act of writing.

Seduced by her exotic surroundings, the independent Emma is warned before beginning her post: "En Calédonie, nous explosons les records, une femme sur trois est battue par son mari ou son concubin, et ils ont la main lourde croyez-moi, les cas d'inceste, de viol, collectif ou non, atteignent des proportions alarmantes, toutes ethnies confondues…" ("In Caledonia, we are crushing the records, one out of three women is beaten by her husband or boyfriend, and they have heavy hands, believe me, the cases of incest, rape, collective or not, reach alarming portions, all ethnicities included" 159). She encounters a battered woman within her first month of work, who refuses to tell the authorities that her husband beats her because she believes that it will not change anything, and that alcohol is to blame for men's violent actions (162). After meeting and sleeping with a young Kanak man at a birthday party, Emma learns that he was engaged to the girl for whom the party was thrown, and that Emma was the object of a bet, a game that the young men of the area play when a new woman comes to the region, especially a "zoreille" (a white Frenchwoman). Horrified, she realizes that her reputation has been

inscribed on her body: “Cette erreur allait lui coller à la peau” (“This mistake would stick with her” 197).

In the subsequent portions of the italicized narrative, Emma meets Samy Tyres, a stockbreeder who easily seduces her and insists that she live, secluded from the outside world, with him. Although she remarks on multiple occasions that he inspires fear, she inexplicably cannot resist him. While making love in a nearby lake, Samy nearly drowns her, holding her head under the water until she shows signs of suffocation. When she asks if he did this so that she would remember him, he replies: “Quelle autre raison, à ton avis? Je veux te marquer” (“What other reason, in your opinion? I want to mark you” 224). Again, Jacques employs the metaphor of bodily inscription, indicating that the man takes possession over the woman by marking her, or by imprinting a memory on her.[20] In fact, he insists that she belongs to him, and does not allow her to see anyone or participate in any activities, including her job, until he becomes bored with her and forces her to undress and allow his elderly, unhygienic friend to fondle her. After this humiliating incident, she decides to leave him: “Elle partait sans rien prendre. D’ailleurs elle n’avait plus rien, il lui avait tout enlevé, elle n’était plus rien qu’un objet de désir et de luxure. Oui, Samy lui avait enlevé toutes ses certitudes, l’avait déconstruite, manipulée, salie” (“She would leave without taking anything. Anyway, she didn’t have anything anymore, he had taken everything from her, she was no more than an object of desire and lust. Yes, Samy had taken all of her certainties, he had deconstructed, manipulated, dirtied her” 241). Like Malou in *Les Cœurs barbelés*, Emma refuses victimization and successfully escapes from the sexually abusive Samy when he becomes too ill to keep her cloistered. In fact, as the reader learns near the end of the novel, the

victimized Emma transforms into the beautiful and fascinating Emmanuelle Cartier, wife of the murdered ecological terrorist Philippe Cartier, and object of obsession for the handsome Kanak detective Joseph Vinimo. Refusing the inscriptions that have influenced the way others "read" her body, Emmanuelle lures Samy to Nouméa, and after poisoning him, commits suicide. However, along with the information implicating her deceased husband in the design to poison the water system of the city of Nouméa, she sends her manuscript, *Quelque chose qui fait mal*, to the distraught detective, instructing him to donate it to the program SOS femmes battues. While she cannot envisage a positive future for herself, she is nevertheless able to provide help to other women suffering similar atrocities through the transcription of her personal narrative (another refusal of male inscription, as she "takes up the pen" to write her own story in this instance), offering a brief indication of hope towards the conclusion of Jacques's deterministic novel.

The Metaphorical Representations of Rape in the Works of Chantal T. Spitz

While Déwé Gorodé and Claudine Jacques write about the damaged female (and male) body in order to challenge colonial representations of Oceanic women, as well as to critique the myth of an idyllic return to custom and reveal the dangers of the myth of racial "purity," Tahitian writer Chantal T. Spitz writes the Tahitian body as a form of catharsis, in order to expose the "naked violence" (Fanon, *The Wretched* 23) that has occurred and continues to occur in Tahiti as a result of colonial history. For Spitz, writing the damaged Oceanic body challenges the typical narrative of sexual or romantic relations between heterosexual, European males and exotic, indigenous *vahine*. Spitz's

damaged female bodies rarely appear as rape victims (at least compared to the characters of the women writers from Kanaky/New Caledonia in this study), but rather as victims of an exotic myth and a colonial violence that is represented generally figuratively, as rape or violation of the land. The French term for rape, *viol*, can also be interpreted as "violation," and can therefore function metaphorically when utilized to describe the violence done to the land in the works of Chantal T. Spitz.

In *Mā'ohi* societies, when a *Mā'ohi* infant is born, the parents of the child bury the *püfenua*, or the placenta, in the earth and plant a breadfruit tree over the placenta to ensure that the child is forever connected to his/her land, and that his/her soul will always return to their island.[21] In *L'Île des rêves écrasés* (*The Island of Shattered Dreams,* 1991), a novel that recounts the violent colonial history of Tahiti spanning approximately a century, beginning from before the First World War, in which Tahitians were urged to fight on behalf of *la Métropole*, and several decades after the installation of the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique, an omniscient narrator recounts the saga of three generations of a Tahitian family. The narrator explains as Maevarua, Tematua's father and part of the first generation, buries the placenta of his son in "le ventre de la mère nourricière" ("the belly of the bountiful mother" 32; *Island* 24): "Union de l'homme à la terre dans laquelle il plonge ses racines, union de la terre à l'homme qui fait jaillir de son ventre la nourriture de l'homme. Pour chaque naissance d'homme, mise en terre d'arbre nourricier" ("This is the union of man with the earth into which he thrusts his roots, the union of the earth with man who makes his food spring forth from her belly. For every birth, a bountiful tree is planted in the earth" 33; *Island* 24). The land, constructed as a feminine life-source that unites all *Mā'ohi*, is thus intimately tied to the body, and the

children of Tematua and Emere experience an "attachement irrationnel" ("unreasoning attachment" 100; *Island* 75) to their island. When they are able to understand the history of colonial violence to which their land has been subjected, they experience a visceral sensation in their bodies: "Quand leur esprit comprendra le monde des Blancs, leur âme criera la douleur de leur terre et de leur peuple. éternel déracinement de l'esprit. Immortel enracinement du ventre" ("When their minds and spirits come to understand the world of the white people, their souls will cry out with the pain of their Land and their People. Eternal uprooting of the spirit. Immortal anchoring of the belly," 95; *Island* 72).

In *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Spitz repeatedly utilizes the language of rape as a metaphor for the damage done to her land and the spirits of her people. When French officials announce their plans to design a nuclear missile base in the islands, Tematua launches into a speech in church. The narrator describes the impact of this speech on the listeners: "paroles éternelles faites de leur monde, celles qui font se tordre les entrailles de la douleur de leur *Terre violée*, celles qui font monter du ventre la passion de leur vie d'étoiles et de mer" ("eternal words made in the image of their world, words that wring the gut with pain for their *violated Land*, and make their passion for their life of stars and sea smoulder in bellies" 113; *Island* 86, emphasis mine). Later, when describing the instruments and plans at the missile base that takes over the family's land: "C'est là que sont tous les secrets top secrets: plans d'aménagement avec emplacement des silos, matrices bétonnés des missiles, greffes monstrueuses implantées après *le viol sauvage de la matrice de la Terre*…" ("Here are kept all the really top-secret secrets: construction plans showing the placement of the silos, the concrete wombs nurturing their missiles, hideous objects implanted after *the rape of the belly of the Land*…" 123; *Island* 94,

emphasis mine). There is, as Titaua Porcher remarks, an isomorphism of the symbols of the earth and the mother, and a veritable violence committed against the Tahitian body is represented through this isomorphism: "Le lien viscéral à la terre a été mis à mal par les méfaits de la colonisation et les mécanismes destructeurs qui l'accompagnent. La terre est une mère en deuil…" ("The visceral link to the land has been hampered by the crimes of colonization and the destructive mechanisms that accompany it. The earth is a mother in mourning…" 146). The Oceanic body itself suffers via the suffering of the land, and, like the victims of rape, this suffering is both physical – in an immediate sense – and psychological – as in cases of post-traumatic stress experienced by rape victims. The narrator comments towards the end of the novel:

> La violence commence à sourdre des entrailles fissurées de ceux que le développement a laissés à l'écart, ceux à qui l'école a appris qu'ils ne sont rien, ceux qui n'ont aucune chance de promotion, ceux dont la vie n'est qu'une lente agonie. Ceux à qui la nouvelle société fait violence en leur volant dignité et liberté. (200)
>
> Violence is beginning to well up in the wounded bellies of those cast aside in the development process, those who learned in school that they are nothing, those who have no chance of advancement, those whose lives are a long slow death. Those whom the new society is brutalizing, taking from them their dignity and freedom. (*Island* 155)

Specifically, French education is represented as the instrument of colonial violence, instilling in the hearts of Tahitian youth the belief that they have no value, contributing to the long-lasting devastation felt by an entire community.[22] As Frantz Fanon points out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Values are, in fact, irreversibly poisoned and infected as soon as they come into contact with the colonized. The customs of the colonized, their traditions, their myths, especially their myths, are the very mark of this indigence and innate depravity" (7). Likewise, when educated in the neocolonial school system, now

regulated by the corrupt Demi class ("nouveau colonisateur de son propre peuple," 'new colonizer of their own people,' *Île des rêves* 200), Tahitian children learn to accept the fact that they cannot succeed in the world without assimilating to the ways of the colonizer. The author writes in a 2001 essay that school became to her "une monstrueuse institution génératrice de souffrances" ("a monstrous institution which generates suffering"), "une école au centre d'un système déculturant responsable de la faillite d'une société dérivant dans une multiple misère modernes hères pour un insidieux totalitarisme" ("a school at the center of a deculturizing system responsible for the failure of a society drifting in a multiple misery modern wretches for an insidious totalitarianism" *Pensées insolentes* 72).

In her second novel, *Hombo, transcription d'une biographie* (*Hobo, Transcription of a Biography,* 2002), Chantal T. Spitz continues her critique of the violent colonial school system, a system that until recently physically punished Tahitian students for speaking in their native tongue. In this novel, recounted through the voice of a generally subjective omniscient narrator, the reader follows the trajectory of the life of Yves/Ehu. In a version of the *Bildungsroman,* in which the protagonist departs for *la Métropole* at the end of the novel rather than completes his journey to maturity, Spitz depicts the difficulties of the lives of doubly marginalized adolescents (*taure'are'a* in *reo mā'ohi*) growing up in a Tahitian society that is increasingly losing its memory and becoming progressively Europeanized. Christened Yves on the day of his birth, this name, a French name, separates him from his own people and from his native land: "Nous voici aujourd'hui avec ce petit/Sans nom pour l'unir à l'arbre de la vie/Tu as perdu le feu de l'identité/Tu as privé ton fils d'éternité" ("Look at us today with this young one/without a

name to unite him to the tree of life/you lost the fire of identity/you have deprived your son of eternity" 16).[23] Deprived of a name that will connect him to his land, the young Ehu (as he is nicknamed by his grandfather) drifts through his adolescence and in school, "l'univers familier des interdits et des gronderies des punitions et des coups" ("the familiar universe of prohibitions and reprimands of punishments and of blows"), he experiences "un gouffre dans lequel il s'enfonce qui le happe et le lamine" ("an abyss into which he thrusts himself which hits and annihilates him" 56). When Ehu's friend Tane quits school, realizing that he cannot live up to the expectations of either the French institution or their ancestors, both "lost" boys become entangled in the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Their lives are characterized by violence:

> Ils sont enfants des frustrations sans espérance qui ont enflé leur violence embrasée par les remous de leur cœur humilié, fragmentée par les douleurs de leur essence saccagée. Inépuisable source de destruction à laquelle ils mutilent leur âme outragée. Violent feu de désunion dans lequel ils consument leur humanité dévastée. (77)
>
> They are children of frustrations without hope whose violence has become swollen, embraced by the flurries of their humiliated hearts, fragmented by the pains of their ravaged essence. Inexhaustible source of destruction in which they mutilate their outraged souls. Violent fire of disunion in which they consume their devastated humanity.

The *taure'are'a* are rejected from all aspects of society: they cannot fully identify with the older generations of the *Mā'ohi* community because of the forced French language and education they receive at school, yet neither can they identify with the elite Demi class, descendants of French and British colonizers. Thus, they are given a new name: "'hombo' nouveau mot pour une nouvelle réalité jeunes gens à la lisière de la société que la société renie" ("'hombo' new word for a new reality young people on the margins of

society which society rejects" 80).[24] They are "fragmented," mutilated souls, their humanity devastated, "amputated" (82) from their society.

Due to this violent psychological disunion from their people, violence and indiscriminate sexual exploits rule the lives of the hombos. Ehu participates in numerous meaningless *mōtoro*, a tradition in which young men enter clandestinely into the home of a young woman (usually with her consent) with, as the dictionary of the Académie Tahitienne notes, "gallant intentions." As Patrick Cerf observes, the *Mā'ohi* term *mōtoro* is occasionally confused with the word *māfera*, which equally implies secretly entering into the home of a young woman, but as opposed to *mōtoro*, *māfera* suggests surprising the young woman herself while she sleeps – in other words, operating without her consent (298). Furthermore, the dictionary of the Académie Tahitienne defines *māfera* as: "violer une femme pendant son sommeil," 'to rape a woman while she sleeps,' and equates the term with *rave 'ino*, which means to mistreat or to cause corporal harm to someone. While Spitz utilizes the term *mōtoro* when referring to Hombo's initiatory sexual experiences, she indicates that the brutal repression of sexuality of the "nouvelle religion" ("new religion" 83) has removed all pleasure from the Tahitian tradition, transforming the formerly innocent teenage sexual initiation practice *mōtoro* into what can be viewed as a variation of *māfera* committed against all parties involved: "Ils ne font pas l'amour. Hombo vole son plaisir. Violent. Bref. Trop violent. Trop bref. A jamais individuel. La communion est impossible. Pas le temps de s'apprivoiser de se dévoiler. Rencontre solitaire de deux corps" ("They do not make love. Hombo steals his pleasure. Violent. Brief. Too violent. Too brief. Never individual. Communion is impossible. No time to get to know each other to reveal themselves. Solitary encounter of

two bodies" 83). Spitz demonstrates that every aspect of traditional Tahitian society, even and especially sex, has been corrupted and made violent by colonization, rendering Hombo isolated despite his attempts to unite with another's body. Indeed, his only attempt at a true, fulfilling relationship with Miri ends in dissatisfaction, as she discovers she is unable to tame ("apprivoiser" 97) him.

Towards the conclusion of the novel, in which Hombo decides to join the military and travel to *la Métropole* in what will inevitably prove to be another failed attempt to understand himself, the narrator recounts the rape of a white French tourist by a group of hombos.[25] Interestingly, Spitz's omniscient narrator allows both the victim and the perpetrators to describe their perspectives to the Tahitian authorities, and, according to the male hombos, this incident was not rape: the girl had danced provocatively, wearing nothing but a *pāreu* (sarong) and her panties, exciting them with her "indecency" and "impudeur" ("shamelessness" 109). She drank with them, and according to the men, she was looking for a man for the night: "elle était venue et n'avait pas refusé qu'ils l'emmènent sur la plage. Ils ne l'avaient pas forcée. En embarquant sur la vespa elle acceptait la suite. Ils ne comprenaient pas" ("she came with them and hadn't refused when they took her to the beach. They didn't force her. In leaving with them on the vespa she accepted the rest. They didn't understand" 109). The *vahine papaâ* (white woman), however, recounts the entire incident to the police, describing the incident in detail: "si, elle avait eu peur mais ils étaient les plus forts…oui chacun à son tour…pendant que l'autre la maintenait à terre…oui il regardait le viol…" ("yes, she had been afraid but they were stronger…yes one after the other…while the other held her down…yes he watched the rape…" 108). In *Hombo*, both the victims and the culprits speak,

complicating the notion of gender relations and the typical discourse of rape as narrating instances of male domination and power. The presence of masculine perspective in this rape narrative also obscures the notion of subjectivity and voice in Spitz's text, rendering this literal rape narrative a figurative portrayal of the colonial encounter: undeniably, the European's voice is the voice that carries weight, and the Tahitian men, although indisputably sexual violators, become victims of the dominant European narrative. As opposed to Africa and the Caribbean during the early twentieth century, where the sensationalized media accounts of white women raped by black men appeared as symptoms of a "black peril" hysteria, Tahiti in the early twentieth century was still portrayed as an idyllic island where European men took advantage of young Tahitian women (as seen in the previous chapter in the study of Loti, Gauguin, and Segalen). This, of course, was not constructed as rape, but rather as consensual relationships that often left the young woman involved destroyed after her lover departed from the islands (at least, this is what happened according to the perspective of the former lover). The Tahitian man, however, was effaced from the majority of these exotic narratives. In the rape narrative found in *Hombo*, Spitz reverses the gender roles characteristic of the exotic narrative, but not those of race: the European tourist with an idyllic vision of Tahiti is raped, while the Tahitians do not understand what they did wrong and are left behind, their lives destroyed. The tourist leaves "pour tenter d'oublier la souillure et pleurer le mythe perdu du paradis peuplé de bons sauvages. Sans avoir compris" ("to try to forget the soiling and to lament the lost myth of a paradise inhabited by noble savages. Without having understood" 110). Despite the fact that gender roles are complicated, the consequences for the Tahitians remain unchanged, blurring the lines between victim and

victimizer. The tourist is able to return to her country, and the accused will be imprisoned, suffering for a crime they do not understand for years to come. This misunderstood crime could be interpreted as an allegory for Tahitian acquiescence or assimilation with the colonizers. Ultimately, the tourists' narrative is, symbolically, the only one that is given validity in the eyes of the government.

Frantz Fanon explains the psychological ramifications of the negated validity of the colonized subject's perspective:

> Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: 'Who am I in reality?' The defensive positions born of this violent confrontation between the colonized and the colonial constitute a structure which then reveals the colonized personality. (182)

The hombos are consistently denied existence, and constantly forced to ask the question: "Who am I in reality?" The rape narrative found in *Hombo* functions allegorically to emblematize the negation of the hombos' existence, revealing the "colonized personality." Similarly, the protagonist of *Elles, terre d'enfance: roman à deux encres* (*They, Land of Childhood: A Novel in Two Inks*) Spitz's more recent novel, struggles with the same question.

In the only novel in which Spitz's narrators are the characters themselves, Spitz gives voice to two female narrators: Victoria, the protagonist, who recounts her life growing up caught in the battles of race and class in Tahiti, and Marie, Victoria's Tahitian nanny, who does not speak French but is not permitted to speak *reo mā'ohi* to Victoria. The narrative focuses on the identity struggles of Victoria, and emphasizes the violence and even the sexual implications of her incomprehension. For example, the opening line of the novel, "Longtemps mes mémoires sont restées vierges" ("For a long

time my memories have remained virginal" 11), underlines the sexual implications of writing, of "consummating" her memory by writing to "enfin donner sens à mon existence" ("to finally give a sense to my existence" 14). Victoria emphasizes the violence of her feelings by calling each psychological tragedy in her life one of her "deaths": "Elles [les mémoires] se sont épanouies longtemps après ma dernière mort" ("They [the memories] blossomed a long time after my last death" 11). Similar to the characters in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Victoria appears as a victim of the remnants of colonialism, as a character constantly asking "Who am I, in reality?" In this sense, she has suffered a psychological violence inflicted by cultural and social forces, that outwardly manifests itself through physical damage.

In fact, Victoria continues to impose violence upon herself, through risky and violent relationships that do not fulfill her. After a tragic break-up with the love of her life, Lex, she meets "Brutus" in a bar where she tried to "noyer mon inexistence dans tous les flots alcoolisés que je trouvais" ("drown my inexistence in all the alcoholic streams I could find" (252), but she admits: "en réalité il s'appelait Julius mais sa brutalité m'avait inspiré son surnom" ("in reality his name was Julius but his brutality had inspired his nickname" 252). Later, when Lex visits her in the hospital she confesses that she became pregnant once, and due to the abortion she had performed she can no longer have children. She continues:

> J'ai eu encore plus d'amants. J'ai fini par vivre avec mon dernier mec mais à la fin je ne voulais plus qu'il me touche il m'a violée plusieurs fois il voyait que je m'en foutais de ce qu'il me faisait tu vois il a fini par me taper peut-être pour me forcer à lui donner une existence je crois qu'il voulait me tuer peut-être pour se donner une existence. Je crois que je voulais qu'il me tue. Tu veux toujours de moi? (258-259)

> I had even more lovers. I ended up living with my last boyfriend but in the end I didn't want him to touch me he raped me several times he saw that I didn't care about what he did to me you see he ended up hitting me perhaps to force me to give him an existence I think he wanted to kill me perhaps to give himself an existence. I think I wanted him to kill me. Do you still want me?

In her vague testimony, Victoria admits effectively being complicit in the rape and violation against her own body. She realizes that the fact that she no longer wanted him to touch her provoked the rape. The boyfriend desired not sexual pleasure, but rather he wanted to assert his masculinity and dominance, to demonstrate, as Déwé Gorodé writes, "On viole/la femme/pour prouver/qu'on est/des hommes" ("Men rape/women/to prove/that they/are men" *Sharing* 135). Essentially, the fact that she attempted to remove authority over her body from her boyfriend was actually the motivation for it. She also recognizes that his desire for power, "to give himself an existence," was behind his brutality.

As Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz demonstrate via the use of metaphorical, metonymical, and literal rape narratives and testimonies in the texts examined above, power is intimately tied to a corporeal discourse in Oceania. Rape is the assertion, the prerogative of power in many of these narratives – it complicates the notion of authority in a colonized society because it emphasizes the corporeal and psychological ramifications of colonial history, but it also demonstrates, specifically through the works of the two writers from Kanaky/New Caledonia, that the dispute over sovereignty is not going to be resolved simply by gaining political independence. It is more complicated than that. It is also more complicated than straightforward gender relations in which male domination and female submission are critiqued, because, as all three authors show, dominance can also be ascribed to women. While Déwé Gorodé creates a safe space, "le

paradis des femmes," over which women rule in *L'Épave*, Claudine Jacques and Chantal T. Spitz complicate gender and race roles in *L'Âge du perroquet-banane* and *Hombo, transcription d'une biographie*, assigning a discourse of dominance to women who, while they are neither principal nor particularly likeable characters, are nonetheless women. These three writers challenge the concept of authority by placing women in positions of power in some of their rape narratives – narratives in which women are almost always subjugated into a position of submission. This is perhaps because, as Eileen Julien remarks, "from women's position of marginality they see the nakedness of power" (179). Yet, through their critiques of power relations via the damaged Oceanic body, Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz elicit a critique of the romantic valorization of the Oceanic body by refusing to define and fix the identity of Oceanic men and women. In the following chapter, I will examine how Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz continue to employ the representation of Oceanic bodies to facilitate a commentary on the politics of their still colonized islands, especially in regards to ecology and the institutions that rule the lives of those living in the French-speaking Oceanic region.

[1] In Kanaky, Custom, or "la coutume," is defined as the reconstruction of a set of norms and practices that regulated life before the arrival of Europeans, and is considered to constitute the core of life and identity. The representatives of "la coutume" are notables that were originally chosen by the colonial administration to organize indigenous society. Notably, these representatives were all male.

[2] Bourdieu explains in *Masculine Domination* that symbolic power is "durably embedded in the bodies of the dominated in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions…" (40). Women recognize the domination and inherent unfairness in the violence of men towards women, but they are "unable to describe it in the language of consciousness" (40). There is thus, according to Bourdieu, an unacknowledged relationship of complicity in regard to symbolic power and violence, which can only be broken through a "radical transformation of the social conditions of production" (42).

[3] Another poem in the collection, entitled "Kanaky mère rebelle" ("Rebellious mother Kanaky") depicts the island of Kanaky as a rebellious mother whom the colonial government desires to rape in order to obtain her precious metal, nickel. (66)

[4] The *pilou* is a traditional dance ceremony that lasts for several days. It is held to commemorate important events in Kanak society, such as the death of a chief or the end of a period of mourning. The dances during the *pilou* hold a significant performative function, as they represent everyday life, as well as recount historic or legendary events.

[5] The translators and editors of *Sharing as Custom Provides*, a compilation of Gorodé's poetry, note that "tapéras" is taken from the English word "temperance," ironically corrupted to mean "drinking binge" (38).

[6] Similarly, in the following story of the collection, "la cordyline," Gorodé depicts a young woman who, impregnated by an irresponsible and largely absent man, refuses to marry the man chosen for her by her family. The symbolism from the title is quite suggestive: cordyline plants are extraordinary for the fact that fragments of the trunk can be replanted to form whole plants. Indeed, the young woman in the story is able to lead a fulfilled life, despite facing alienation from her clan and being considered immoral and "broken."

[7] *Gèè* is the term in *paicî*, Gorodé's native tongue, for "grandmother."

[8] Interestingly, although they share names throughout the generations, each female protagonist and rape victim in the novel also borrows her name from seductive women of the Bible or of Greek mythology. Éva is clearly a representative of Eve, the woman who fell to temptation in Genesis; the three Lénas, short for Héléna, borrow their name from the beautiful Helen of Troy, for whom the Greeks and Trojans fought a deadly battle; and Lila is short for Dahlila, the infamous woman who tempted and betrayed Samson of the Old Testament. Furthermore, Maria, who appears relatively infrequently in the novel, is compared by the born-again Éva to Marie-Magdalene, the famous prostitute who cleaned the feet of Jesus with her hair.

[9] Equally painfully, the young Léna remembers the occurrence of her rape as having been observed and possibly encouraged by her mother, Heléna, who is never able to escape the psychological clutches of the old orator. At the end of the novel, as the young Léna pushes Old Tom off a cliff into the rough waters of the ocean, the complicit Heléna rushes off the cliff to die with her lover.

[10] The figures of the orator, the fisherman, and the ancestor are all significant. In Kanak society, the orator, or the "maître de la parole" 'master of speech,' is an authority figure, and was typically a chief of Kanak *tribus*. As ethnographer Maurice Leenhardt points out, "Sa parole situe l'acte et le met dans le temps […] Cette tâche délicate exige compétence et art" ("His speech situates the act and places it in time […] This delicate task demands competence and art" 195). The orator is thus a figure commanding great respect. The fisherman is symbolic, because in Kanak oral tradition, "to go fishing" is also "to go in search of wives." Additionally, Kanaks related their ancestors to deities, and ancestors are said to live on in their progeny (which also explains the tradition of naming each generation after the last). Gorodé employs commanding, respected male figures and destabilizes them through her denunciatory fiction.

[11] While brief, this side narrative reveals that all men, white as well as Kanak, in Gorodé's texts, are capable of using their masculinity to dominate and damage women.

[12] Interestingly, Gorodé continues the imagery of women as representative of roots in her 2009 novel, *Graines de pin colonnaire* (*Seeds of Pine Trees*), which again eliminates the masculine voice and relates the lives of four women.

[13] Similarly, the wrecked boat is representative of the woman's body in *Pensées insolentes et inutiles* (*Insolent and Useless Thoughts*). Chantal T. Spitz writes in an untitled poem: "je suis comme ces vieux bateaux/éclatés sur le sable/battus par les rouleaux/inutiles…abandonnés" ("I am like these old boats/busted on the sand/beaten by the rolling waves/futile…abandoned" 19).

[14] *Les Evénéments* is the term used to refer to the turbulent period between 1984 and 1988 in New Caledonia, in which, discontent with the political decisions made involving the

colony, a militant Kanak group, the Front de liberation nationale kanak socialiste (FLNKS), boycotted elections, staged barrages and strikes, and put in place a provisionary Kanak government. The period turned violent with the deaths of Kanak leader Éloi Machoro and a young Caldoche Yves Tual, and culminated in even more violence when a radical pro-independence group took hold of a police station and murdered four police officers in Ouvéa. This violent period pushed the French government and the Kanak leaders to come to an agreement in the Matignon Accords in 1988. The Accords set up a ten-year period of development in which institutional and economic provisions were made for the Kanak community, and were followed up with in 1998 with the Nouméa Accords. Under the Nouméa Accords, New Caledonians of all races are still considered French, but a referendum on sovereignty is scheduled to occur between the years 2013 and 2018.

[15] It is interesting to note that it is impossible to determine the gender of the narrator, as the author avoids using French verbs that would give the reader any such indication. This deepens the level of suspicion that the reader develops towards the narrator of the story.

[16] The separation of three territories in Jacques's fictional future New Caledonia is an unmistakable reference to the actual present-day separation of the three provinces of the island: the *province des Îles* (Island province) which includes the Loyalty Islands and is itself divided into three communes; the *province Nord* (Northern province), which is composed of mainly indigenous Kanak communities; and the *province Sud* (Southern province) where the capital city of Nouméa is located.

[17] Indeed, each "part" dividing the novel is preceded by epigraphs citing the third Canto of the "Vestibule of Hell" of Dante's *Inferno*.

[18] "Broussard" is the term used to define those living in the bush of New Caledonia. Essentially, "broussard" broadly designates anyone living outside of the capital city of Nouméa, but the term also contains connotations of roughness or a harshness of character.

[19] In fact, the notion of keeping an intimate diary, of writing in order to salvage one's sanity, is a common image in Francophone women's literature, particularly in Caribbean literature. In *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Viera, Juletane's journal helps both her as well as Hélène, the young woman who discovers the journal, to find solace, away from their own devastating and oppressive relationships.

[20] This metaphor of bodily inscription recalls the importance of tattoos to traditional Oceanic island societies, as emblems of social position or as of symbols of belonging to a particular group or family. In "marking" Emma, Samy claims her as his belonging.

[21] As Bruno Saura points out, the *Mā'ohi* term *püfenua* is constructed from the base words *pü*, meaning "center" or "heart," and *fenua*, "land" or "country." Saura remarks that the most interesting aspect of the term is the fact that it evokes the idea of a part of the earth enclosed in the body of the woman, seemingly destined to return to the earth when the child is born (*Entre nature* 11).

[22] This critique of the colonial school system is not unique to Oceanic literature in French, but can also be found in Francophone literature of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean. Simone Schwarz-Bart of Guadeloupe, for example, writes with irony in *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*: "Nous étions à l'abri, apprenant à lire, à signer notre nom, à respecter les couleurs de la France, notre mere, à vénérer sa grandeur et sa majesté, sa noblesse, sa gloire qui remontaient au commencement des temps, lorsque

nous n'étions encore que des singes à queue coupée" ("We were safe there, learning to read and sign our names, to respect the flag of France our mother, to revere her greatness and majesty and the glory that went back to the beginning of time, when we were still monkeys with their tails cut off" 43; *The Bridge of Beyond* 52). Schwarz-Bart's characters have little use for the school system, which has no practical value in their rural Caribbean society, and like the characters of Hombo, they leave school at a young age.

[23] Fanon points out that this separation is the most difficult for any colonized people: "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity" (*The Wretched* 9).

[24] The term "hombo" is a sort of adaptation of the English term "hobo," meaning drifters, or people on the margins of society.

[25] The placement of the rape narrative is particularly interesting: it is enveloped by and appears to abruptly interrupt the account of Ehu and Miri's separation. We must question here what the author's intentions were in creating such a rupture of the principal narrative, and in giving the rape narrative such a marginal existence within the novel itself. The rape narrative and arrest of the hombos charged with rape takes only three pages to describe, and, ten pages later, the novel ends, also abruptly.

Chapter 3:

Writing Ecological and Institutionalized Bodies

Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa notes in *We Are the Ocean* that the history of Oceania is commonly structured on the temporal or linear division of the past into pre-contact, early contact, and postcolonial or neocolonial periods: "In this formation, Oceania has no history before imperialism, only what is called 'prehistory': before history. […] As it is, our histories are essentially narratives told in the footnotes of the histories of empires"(62). Hau'ofa proposes a reconstituting of the history of Oceania, remarking: "How one reconstructs the past, as history or whatever, is a political act – a choice from valid alternatives made for particular purposes" (63). The three Oceanic authors considered in this study each choose to reconstruct the past in unique – yet distinctly Oceanic – perspectives in their short stories, essays, poetry, and novels. While the manners in which the three authors construct the past, present, and future of both their communities and of individuals within those communities differs (not only from author to author, but also from text to text), the common theme of the body as an agent of political action or as a unit upon which politics acts frequently arises.

In this chapter, I examine two facets of the politics of bodies in the extremely politically engaged works of Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz. I will begin with an analysis of the treatment of land, economic exploitation, and ecological engagement, tied tightly to the concept of identity, which all three authors address in their various works. As noted in the previous chapter, the land and the body are frequently considered indivisible in Oceanic communities, a fact that draws the

politics of land close to the politics of the Oceanic body, and especially the woman's body. In an informal lecture addressed to a graduate level class at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, professor of Polynesian civilization Bruno Saura of the Université de la Polynésie Française stated: "Tout le monde est d'accord que Tahiti le pays soit une femme" ("Everyone agrees that the country of Tahiti is a woman"). Land has in fact played an integral role in the political narrative of both French Polynesia and New Caledonia, because it was the appropriation of indigenous lands by colonizing forces that incited and shaped the rethinking of cultural identity in both communities. While in Chapter Two I drew attention to the metaphor of the land and the violated female body, this chapter highlights the political and ecological concerns that accompany an Oceanic discourse on land, identity, and corporeality. As Val Plumwood notes in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, "human relations to nature are not only ethical, but also political," (13) and "human relations to non-humans are as political as human relations to other humans" (17). The first section of this chapter therefore takes into consideration the human, corporeal relations to the land and nature that all three Oceanic authors address in various manners throughout their texts. The second section also considers the bodily relationship to the land with regard to ecocriticism, as Claudine Jacques in particular warns of the dangerous implications in the confrontation between environment and globalization in Oceania.

Subsequently, I will address the political implications of the various institutionalized settings that appear throughout the three authors' texts and which facilitate the notion of my reading of these texts as corporeal writings. These settings constitute "disciplinary apparatuses," as Alphonso Lingis refers to them: the schools,

factories, prisons, and hospitals in which bodies are inserted (68). Each author in this study addresses the notion of the school system, which figures as a pivotal point in the discussion of politics and identity in French-speaking Oceania. Prisons and hospitals are also often settings for many of the short stories, poems, and novels examined in this chapter, especially in the works of the two authors residing in New Caledonia. As Michel Foucault observes in *Discipline and Punish*, in the classical age, the use of such institutions "discovered the body as object and target of power […] the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (136). Bodies are circumscribed, traced, subjected, and managed through their confinement in disciplinary apparatuses or institutions, the most significant of which is the colonial school system for the authors in this study. Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz write confinement, ironically, in order to break free from the political and customary ideologies that circumscribe and define Oceanic bodies. Their varied representations of institutionalized bodies, quite different from Foucault's ideas of docile or tractable bodies, enables a critique of these practices, and disentangles Oceanic bodies from limited and stereotyped perspectives. More importantly, the authors appropriate the notion of confinement in order to create an overture towards the Other, as well as to create a more open space for the reception of the "emerging" literature of the region.

Ecological Bodies

As previously mentioned, land and politics in the island communities of New Caledonia and French Polynesia are intimately and inextricably bound. In Kanak societies in particular, while communities linguistically and culturally differ from region

to region, each Kanak group has in common the fact that the genealogical itineraries of their clans are inscribed in the landscape. Béniéla Houmbouy notes: "[…] it is difficult for a Kanak to speak of identity without specifying the bonds which connect him to the *tertre* where his ancestors were buried, or to the tree beside which he put his hut, as well as to Nature in general […]" (qtd. in Sinclair-Reynolds 123).[1] In the Kanak clan system, each clan is named after its *tertre* of origin, and divided into different lineages. Additionally, similar to practices in French Polynesia, after giving birth it is customary for Kanak women to bury the umbilical cord close to a tree, located in proximity to their child's birthplace, essentially enforcing the maternal nature of the earth-body connection. Accordingly, identity, from birth until after death, is derived from the topography, not only because Kanak bodies share with the land an eternal resting place, but also because they share their names.[2]

It stands to reason, then, that when France annexed the territory of New Caledonia in 1853 and began establishing a settler and penal colony on the islands, the indigenous Kanaks, pushed violently from their lands onto reserves, felt a corporeal separation that essentially prevented them from full access to their identities and, nearly a century and a half later, are still struggling to regain their ancestral territories and to re-establish Kanak identity.[3] After the period of settlement and *cantonnement*, and following the infiltration of the island by the American military during World War II, the nickel boom in the 1960s and '70s further contributed to the dislocation of the indigenous tribes due to an increasingly diversified demographic. The boom attracted not only French industry, but it also enticed Wallisians and Polynesians to immigrate to the island in order to seek opportunities in the nickel industry, thus shifting the demographic even more in disfavor

of the Melanesian autochthonous groups. This caused land distribution to Kanak groups to slow, and forced many younger Kanaks to move to Nouméa to seek employment, reducing their commitment to the rural economy. Not surprisingly, following the nickel boom, Kanak politics became more radical and led to the period during the 1980s known as *les Evénéments* which lasted from 1984 until 1989 and polarized the Caldoche, French, and Kanak societies.

Despite more than a century and a half of land struggles and juggling, however, the relationship of the Kanak individual to his or her land still remains quite visceral and has survived due to a rich Kanak oral tradition, which has recently transformed into writing. In a poem entitled "la terre" ("the earth") published in the collaborative work of poetry *Dire le vrai*, Déwé Gorodé reinforces the notion of the relationship of the Kanak individual with the earth: "sur une tige d'igname/ou un cœur de taro/où palpite mon être/au rythme de la terre" (on the stem of yam/or a taro heart/where my being beats/to the rhythm of the earth" 39). Land cannot be disentangled from the discourse on Kanak identity.

Meanwhile, after over 150 years of occupation in the islands, the Caledonian population of European descent has also established a relationship to the land. In his version of the equally entitled poem, "la terre" ("the earth"), Nicolas Kurtovitch, descendent of a family of Europeans who established themselves at the very beginning of the French presence in New Caledonia, writes: "Terre multiple/La mienne est un bout de béton/mais dans la respiration du sol/qui traverse cette couverture temporaire/je sens monter par mes pieds/ventre cœur bouche/jusqu'aux montagnes/la vie millénaire que je reconnais" ("Multiple earth/mine is a bit of concrete/but in the breathing of the ground/as

I cross this temporary cover/I feel growing in my feet/stomach heart mouth/up as far as the mountains/the ancient life that I recognize" *Dire le vrai* 41). For Kurtovitch as for many Caldoches, the connection to the earth, which sometimes even includes the concrete streets of Nouméa, is also a physical bond. Raylene Ramsay observes that Kurtovitch's writing "asks for pardon for the dispossession of Kanak and shows that settlers, often more mixed than they recognize, share Kanak communion with the land, or even with the ancestors" ("Rethinking Hybridity" 258). Similarly, Claudine Jacques articulates the complicated sociopolitical relationship between Kanaks, the descendants of settlers, and land in a Caledonia in political and social transition.[4] Her works adopt the perspectives of Kanak peoples, of immigrants from other French-speaking Pacific islands, and of Europeans all living in New Caledonia. Her literature is an amalgam representing the mélange of the various cultures and political positions living on one island, all attached to the land in an immutable manner.[5] In fact, her writing can be characterized by its insistence on an attachment to the land, particularly with regard to ecological concerns that affect the multitude of the communities in Oceania.

In "Une terre de lumière" ("A Land of Light"), a story in the collection *À l'ancre de nos vies*, Jacques depicts a man living in the *brousse*, but provides little description of his physical appearance, indicating that the color of the man's skin and his ethnic background are inconsequential to the trajectory of the narrative.[6] Instead, the intense, comprehensive descriptions of the land and ocean surrounding the man constitute the principal plot. In the middle of the narrative, the reader discovers: "Mais il 'est' le paysage qui l'entoure, son âme vive, il sait l'embellie prochaine: les herbes couchées, lourdes de pluie, se relèveront, le soleil touchera la terre, sèchera les rigoles une à une,

une brume légère stagnera quelques jours sur les mares…" ("But he 'is' the countryside that surrounds him, his soul alive, he anticipates the next clear spell: the sleeping grass, heavy with rain, will wake up, the sun will touch the earth, will dry the streams one by one, a light mist will linger a few days on the ponds…" 31). The usage of the verb "to be," especially underscored by the use of quotation marks, recalls the shared title of an article and a book by anthropologist and "Oceanist" Jean Guiart, *La terre est le sang des morts* (*The Earth is the Blood of the Dead*). In the article so entitled, the opening lines resume the conviction of the Kanak people: "La terre est faite du sang des morts, et nous voulons cette terre parce que nous devons pouvoir nous retrouver face à face avec nos morts qui constituent, avec le lien qui nous lie à la terre qu'ils composent, le soubassement de notre société et notre tradition essentielle" ("The earth is made of the blood of the dead, and we want this earth because we must be able to find ourselves face to face with our dead who constitute, with the link that connects us to the earth that they compose, the foundation of our society and our essential tradition" 99). Claudine Jacques parallels the Kanak assertion that the Caledonian earth belongs to them because it is made of the blood of their dead with the idea that the man *is* the countryside that surrounds him. Yet, the reader discovers at the end of the narrative with the description of a lock of yellow hair that the man who feels this profound attachment to the land is in fact Caldoche.

While New Caledonia and Tahiti and the surrounding Society Islands share somewhat similar colonial histories, the political histories of the two archipelagos differ quite profoundly, especially in terms of land disputes. As with Nouméa and the Grande Terre in New Caledonia, the European population settled primarily in one area, Papeete

of the big island of Tahiti, leaving the other areas, especially the surrounding islands, populated principally with autochthonous peoples. In contrast to Kanaks and the European settlers in New Caledonia, many *Mā'ohi* populations were able to exist in relative harmony with the European population until 1963, when the French government began the project of building the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (Center of Pacific Experimentation) on the atoll of Mururoa. *Mā'ohi* communities became significantly more distrustful of European settlers when they were removed from the area to create room for the testing base.[7] While the Polynesian independence movement protested, it was constantly hindered by the fact that the nuclear testing site brought revenue to the territory and enabled thousands of islanders an economic livelihood. Although the CEP was shut down for a brief period during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in 1995 then-president Jacques Chirac declared there would be one final round of a dozen nuclear tests, which caused the capital city of Papeete to erupt into riots. In 1996, France detonated its last nuclear test.

In her most politically engaged novel, *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Chantal T. Spitz emphasizes the *Mā'ohi* attachment to the land and the loss of identity that occurred to the *Mā'ohi* populations through colonization and subsequently, in a more literal manner, through the installation of the nuclear experimentation plant.[8] When the character Emere-Emily hears the news that the French government has decided to install a nuclear testing plant on the fictional island of Ruahine, she feels ashamed of her "white blood" (99) that she has transferred to the children of Tematua. She writes a poem dedicated to the memory of the children of Maeva (the village in which Tematua was born and in which he and Emere raise their own children) in which she lauds the land: "Terre surgie de la

magie de l'océan/Pour qu'enfin je me connaisse/Terre d'amour, Terre de beauté/Terre de rêve, Terre de folie/Toi qui as accueilli mes racines/Aidant mon âme à grandir" ("Land risen from the ocean's magic/So that at last I might know myself/Land of love, Land of beauty/Land of dreams, Land of madness/You who welcomed my roots/Allowing my soul to grow" 99; *Island* 74). Indeed, as poet and scholar Turo a Raapoto explains, the word *Mā'ohi* alone is emblematic of a *Mā'ohi* epistemology of rootedness, as it refers to a sprout which has already taken root. "From a sprout, an *ohi*, tracing back its roots, one always gets to a trunk. Mā'ohi is the community of all those who claim to be of the same past, culture and language, which constitute the common trunk and which still have the same destiny" ("Te Ao Mā'ohi" XII). The land is incontestably a land that has helped Emily-Emere form her identity, and, as is indicated through the use of apostrophe, one that has helped her understand herself in a way that a person might. Spitz clearly indicates that *Mā'ohi* epistemology does not distinguish between culture and nature. In the same poem, she laments the loss of Maeva, a land "défigurée par les fils d'une autre race" ("deformed by the sons of another race" 99) to the Centre d'Expérimentation: "Maeva éternelle/Aujourd'hui nous te perdons/Te prostituant à l'étranger" ("Eternal Maeva/Today we lose you/Prostituting you to foreigners 99). Significantly, the land is likened to the body of a prostitute, "tainted" by the money of a stranger (99). Despite a "futile combat" to save the land of Maeva, the local government in "Rahiti" ultimately collaborates with the French government, eagerly yielding its territory in order to prevent the "Nation" from forgetting them. Spitz mimics the language used when Tahiti ceded its land and forced its own people to relocate in order to appease the French government: "Collaborons par ce geste à ses recherches fondamentales pour la Défense nationale,

scientifiques et technologiques, afin que jamais elle ne nous oublie et que nos enfants restent à jamais fils de cette Nation" ("Let us collaborate in this way in its research programmes, both scientific and technological, which are vital to the National Defence, so that the Nation will not forget us and our children may forever remain her sons" 116; *Island* 88). In ceding its land, Tahiti essentially cedes a part of its corporeal identity, turning, in Spitz's words, its people into orphans, strangers to themselves (197).

While Chantal T. Spitz's first novel contains a critical condemnation of the French as well as those in French Polynesia to whom she refers as the "singes dressés" ("trained monkeys" 28) who agreed to surrender their land, she includes the perspective of a French woman engineer, nominated by the "Général-Président" (a character we can assume to be the representation of Charles de Gaulle, under whose presidency the construction of the CEP took place) to take part in the nuclear experimentation. In fact, Spitz grants the reader access to Laura Lebrun's intimate journal, which is set apart from the principal narrative in italics. It is peculiar that in a novel whose goal is to subvert a colonial history in order to recount the Tahitian perspective of the infiltration of the land by the colonizer, that the author would include the perspective of a European woman in such a manner, effectively giving Laura Lebrun's character the authority to manipulate the reader's perception.[9] Typographically juxtaposed to the principal narrative, the intimate journal permits the chosen character to say "I," essentially to speak directly to the reader without the added lens of the omniscient narrator. Writing a diary functions as a tool for auto-analysis, and in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, this self-exploration permits the European woman to discover what matters in life through her romantic experience with Teri'i and with his family. Effectively, the intimate diary of the French woman aids in the

valorization of the *Mā'ohi* way of life, culture, compassion, and especially *Mā'ohi* communion with the land.

The first image of the French character is one in which she, like the *Mā'ohi* characters, regrets the destruction of the *motu* (small island):

> Laura Lebrun contemple tristement par le hublot les gros engins qui dévastent la cocoteraie, transformant peu à peu cette terre en une immense plaie béante, se demandant si les palmes luisantes des cocotiers produisent elles aussi de l'oxygène. Elle n'a jamais imaginé une telle perfection, et voilà qu'elle participe à la destruction de la terre d'hommes qu'elle ne connaît pas. (119)
>
> Laura Lebrun gazes sadly through the window at the huge machines flattening the coconut grove, gradually transforming this land into an immense open wound, and wonders whether the shiny leaves of the coconut palms also produce oxygen. Never in her wildest dreams has she imagined such perfection, and now here she is joining in the destruction of the land of people she doesn't know. (*Island* 91)

While portraying a sympathetic and ecologically aware Western character, Chantal T. Spitz simultaneously engages in what many would label a feminist agenda. The only character to literally say "I" in the novel, Laura Lebrun is proud to prove to men that women are capable of working in settings other than in the home, and furthermore, proud that she is the only woman chosen personally by the Général-Président to work at the installation. As she adapts to life working among men in a paradise foreign to her body, however, she realizes that the perceived parity she has experienced throughout her life in France is indeed simply a perception: "Elle est dans un monde artificiel fait par l'homme pour un monde d'hommes" ("She is in an artificial world, made by men, for men" 122; *Island* 93). When she admires the compassion of her colleagues to have kept photographs of the *motu* before the European take-over (in reality the photographs are witnesses of their "progress"), her colleagues chastise her for her "sensibilité typiquement féminine"

("typically female sentimentality" 123-124; *Island* 94) over such an "inconsequential" piece of land, remarking: "La rêverie poétique n'a pas de place dans le sanctuaire du progrès technologique militaire" ("There's no place for poetic day-dreaming in this sanctuary of military technological progress" 124; *Island* 94). Spitz delineates a clear distinction between the French woman, who is aware of the invasive nature of her work and remorseful over the destruction of the land, whereas her male colleagues appear as arrogant and macho with neither concern for the land nor for the indigenous population, whom they view as ungrateful for the education they have "been gifted" from the colonizer. Ultimately, Spitz's Laura Lebrun, a successful French woman working as an engineer during the 1960s (a significant time period due to the feminist movement that gained so much ground in France), is able, in some ways, to empathize with the destruction of the land and the *Mā'ohi* plight because of her own struggle as a divorced, working woman in a "man's world." Chantal T. Spitz engages in what Val Plumwood would identify as a feminist critique that is particularly relevant to environmental ethics, as phallocentrism and the exclusion of women's experience can be paralleled with the exclusion of nature and the land as valid subjects. Plumwood explains: "The domination of women is of course central to the feminist understanding of domination, but it is also a well-theorized model which can illuminate many other kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both feminized and naturalized" (18). Through the character of Laura Lebrun, Spitz effectively critiques the multiple layers of domination, that of women, of colonized peoples, and of nature, that ultimately enabled the destruction of the land in Oceania.

The nuclear experimentation that took place in Mururoa beginning in the 1960s did not only affect the areas closely surrounding the atoll. Indeed, Déwé Gorodé criticizes the plant and the devastation it caused to the land and its peoples in a poem in her first collection of poetry, *Sous les cendres des conques,* entitled "Zone Interdite" ("Forbidden Zone") written during her incarceration in the *Camp-Est* prison in 1974. After naming the ensemble of the Polynesian atolls constituting the nuclear testing zone, Gorodé reminisces about the beautiful coral and the *vahine* that typically appear on postcards, the frangipanier (breadfruit) and tiarés (gardenias) that put forth a scent so powerful that they could "drug" someone. She continues: "car la monstrueuse plaie nuageuse/déverse sa lie nucléaire/empoisonnant l'Océanie/minant le Pacifique maintenant enfer" ("because the monstrous cloudy wound/dumps its nuclear residue/poisoning Oceania/undermining the now hellish Pacific" 117). The nuclear experimentation conducted in French Polynesia not only destroyed Polynesian land, but, according to Gorodé, it also empoisoned the waters of Oceania, ultimately affecting all Oceanic peoples. In critiquing the nuclear experiments, Gorodé reiterates the difference between viewing Oceania as "islands in a far sea" versus as "a sea of islands" (Hau'ofa 31), enforcing the concept of the interconnections between Oceanic peoples and lands.

Gorodé frequently engages in environmental politics in her poetry, short stories, and novels, especially with the issue of the nickel mining industry of New Caledonia. In 1956, the colonial government put in place "la Loi-Cadre," which encouraged all ethnicities to participate in local elections. Faced with a political freedom unprecedented in New Caledonia since 1853, *broussards*, workers, and Kanaks alike formed the first oppositional political party, l'Union Calédonienne (U.C.), which was firmly controlled by

both the Catholic and Protestant churches. The U.C. formulated a program reclaiming for Kanaks the possibility of rising to the status of government worker, the equality of salaries, the construction of schools, and community clinics. According to the U.C., the government should have established parity between Kanaks and whites, and restored the dignity of the Melanesian people (Bensa 109). Yet, when the Union Calédonienne proved capable of commanding local politics in 1953, the colonial government accused it of illegal operations in order to maintain power. The French government recognized that it was in its best interest to keep New Caledonia under its tutelage, considering the territory's nickel mining potential, and essentially reversed "la Loi-Cadre" with the "loi Jacquinot." Subsequently, in 1969 as the nickel boom was looming, the "loi Billotte" assured that *la Métropole* would have strict control over the Caledonian mines. The success of the nickel boom turned Nouméa, frequently called "la ville blanche" ("the white city"), into a bustling capital city, but left the Kanak population out of the wealth, and further away from retrieving the land from which they had been removed throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Gorodé's *Sous les cendres des conques* contains a chapter dedicated entirely to the subject of nickel, entitled "Terre Nikel" ("Nickel Land"). The poem entitled "Et les prospectus" ("And the Prospectus") laments the "mal de la terre natale/qui nous colle à la peau" ("evil of the native land/that sticks to our skin" 52) on the "island of nickel." Gorodé critiques the greed that has "pillaged" her island and forgotten its people, the "barbelés des réserves kanakes" ("barbed-in of the Kanak reserves" 52). In the following poem, entitled "Nickel," she writes: "Nickel rush/Implantation outrancière des grosses sociétés/Concessions minières de tout aloi/Expropriation impitoyable/de la terre du

peuple kanak," ("Nickel rush/excessive implantation of large societies/Mine concessions of every quality/Pitiless expropriation/of the land of the Kanak people" 54) clearly blaming European greed for the increased Kanak loss of land. She furthers the corporeal metaphor at the end of the poem when she depicts a dying man in a ravine, speaking directly to an ambiguous "you": "Toi tu entends un râle brisé dans le ravin/tu vois un corps calciné dans le four/tu sens le sanglot le sursaut de vie qui agite/le dernier souffle…" ("You hear a rasping sigh in the ravine/you see a burnt body in the oven/you feel the sob the sudden burst of life that moves/the last breath…" 55). In "Fer Rouge" ("Red Iron"), another poem in the same collection, she criticizes the Société Le Nickel, a company founded in 1880 in Nouméa and run principally by Europeans or Caledonians of European descent. The poem, written during another imprisonment in the *Camp Est* in 1977, compares the impact of the SLN to scars, ineffaceable letters on the "skin" and the "entrails" of the earth: "S L N / trois lettres incandescentes indélébiles/dans la chair les entrailles du pays/à pouvoir au plus offrant/perle rare de toute l'Océanie à l'agonie/dont les maîtres se pourlèchent les babines/Océanie continent éclaté/des marques et marquettes futuristes…" ("S L N/three incandescent indelible letters/in the flesh the entrails of the country/to the highest bidding power/rare pearl of Oceania in agony/whose masters lick their lips/Oceania divided continent/of marks and futuristic markets" 59). The SLN's mines, as they mark the earth, mark the body in Gorodé's poem: "la cicatrice d'indignité me souille tout le corps/ô mon île flétrie" ("the scar of indignity dirties my entire body/oh my withered island" 59).

Twenty-seven years after the publication of *Sous les cendres des conques*, Déwé Gorodé published her most recent novel, *Tâdo, Tâdo, Wéé! ou "No more baby,"* a novel

that provides a panorama of the history of the Kanaks throughout the twentieth century, beginning after World War II and ending with the rise of the Arab Spring, via the perspective of principal character, Tâdo. In the beginning of the novel, as Kanak Tiapi and his Muslim brother-in-law discuss the atrocities of colonialism in Algeria, Vietnam, and Oceania, as well as the American "invasion" of their island during World War II, the two men also mention the "loi Billotte" and the impending construction of the nuclear testing site, highlighting the "coincidence" of the timing of the nickel boom and the nuclear testing in Polynesia (both in the 1960s and 70s). Indeed, Tiapi, Tâdo's father, condemns the *popwaalé*: "ils voudront récupérer notre minerai stratégique, le nickel, pour continuer à étendre leur pouvoir économique et militaire à travers la planète" ("they want to recuperate our strategic mineral, nickel, to continue spreading their economic and military power across the planet" 30).[10] The men remark that they have planted a tree "pour sceller notre promesse de défendre notre peuple et notre pays" ("to seal our promise to defend our people and our country" 31), essentially imprinting the land with their own political promises. Meanwhile, in another *tribu*, one of their cousins engages in a similar political discussion with an elderly woman of European descent. He enlarges the metaphor of the body and the earth, remarking that politics and history leave indelible markings on both the body and the land: "C'est incroyable comme l'histoire peut marquer les lieux parfois! – C'est l'histoire des peuples qui la font et qu'elle entraine dans sa marche forcée. C'est ce qui laisse *ces traces indélébiles en eux et sur les lieux*" ("It's incredible how history can sometimes mark places! – It's the history of the people who make it and whom history brings in her forced courses. That's what leaves *indelible*

traces on them and on places" 33, emphasis mine). The elderly woman takes a critical position against the conduct of Europeans as she responds:

> Et pourtant, lorsque nous nous sommes imposés ici chez vous, il n'y a pas eu un seul colon à qui vous n'ayez pas donné le nom, selon votre coutume, du lien à la terre, du lieu qu'il occupe. Vous l'avez d'emblée intégré dans votre espace, qu'il a cru posséder, mais qui l'a, en réalité, *envahi corps et âme*. (33, my emphasis)
>
> And however, when we imposed ourselves here in your home, there was not a single colonist to whom you did not give a name, according to your custom, of the link to the earth, of the place he occupies. You immediately integrated him into your space, which he thought he possessed, but which, in reality, *invaded him body and soul*.

As the Caledonian woman remarks, although the colonizer invaded Kanak space, Kanak space has also succeeded in invading the souls and bodies of European settlers. With this textual gesture, Gorodé acknowledges the impact that New Caledonia has made on European settlers and their descendants. In contrast to her earlier, more accusatory poetry, the author and former vice-president of the New Caledonian government recognizes that the corporeal link to the land is no longer a uniquely Kanak sentiment, but indeed it is also felt by many Caledonians of European descent.

Similarly, Claudine Jacques envisions a *shared* New Caledonia, a land that has become part of the equation in the framework of New Caledonian identities, both Kanak and Caldoche. In her first novel, *Les Cœurs barbelés*, Jacques includes an excerpt taken from the fictional "confidences" of an old Caledonian, who insists that his people have not exploited the Kanak population, but rather that they have a sense of mutual respect. The old man contends that he and his people have worked the land and have become as close to it as the Kanaks:

> Le travail de la terre te prend toute ta vie mais on l'aime pour ça cette vache de terre, on s'y attache à cause des heures ingrates, de la sueur qui

> coule. […] Nous les Calédoniens nous sommes des cultivateurs, des éleveurs et même si nous sommes un peu frustres, nous existons, nous sommes à notre place ici. Les indépendantistes, ils disent 'reconnaissez le peuple Kanak pour qu'à son tour il vous reconnaisse'. Je suis complètement d'accord. (142)
>
> The work of the land takes all of your life but we like it, this extent of land, we're attached to it because of the thankless hours, the sweat that runs. […] Us Caledonians, we're cultivators, breeders, and even if we're a little dispossessed, we exist, we're in our element here. Pro-independence people, they say 'acknowledge the Kanak people so that in turn they acknowledge you'. I completely agree.

Jacques effectively brings to light the intricate political discourse that characterized New Caledonia during the decade of *les Evénéments* and that continues to typify, although to a less extreme degree, the discourse surrounding New Caledonian independence today. *Les Coeurs barbelés* recounts a common history, a history in which both Kanaks and Caledonians of European descent assert a profound connection to the land yet cannot seem to come together as a whole; the communities remain divided.[11] In the continuation of the novel following the old Caledonian man's confession, the principal male character, Sery, meets with a Caledonian engineer, whom he later learns attended the same engineering school as himself in Toulouse. When Michel invites Sery to dinner, Sery is shocked to be invited to the home of a Caledonian family. As he prepares himself for the unexpected experience, he reminds himself: "J'aime Rimbaud et Picasso […] Leur œuvre m'appartient aussi"("I like Rimbaud and Picasso […] Their work also belongs to me" 146). Heavily involved in the fight for Kanak independence, Sery soon learns that Michel, a white Caledonian, is also engaged in a fight for New Caledonian independence as a whole, as opposed to uniquely Kanak independence. Michel explains that the idea of Kanak independence excludes the Caledonians of European descent who have made "le Caillou" their home,[12] and who know no other:

> Oui, tu peux t'étonner, je suis pour l'indépendance de 'mon' pays, une indépendance pluriethnique où chaque communauté apporterait son intelligence et son savoir-faire. Je suis d'ici et à ce titre je revendique ma part d'avenir. Non à l'indépendance kanak socialiste dont on nous rabat les oreilles depuis peu. Elle fait peur. Elle ferme, elle exclut. Oui à une indépendance mûrement réfléchie dans une économie sereine, avec des accords de partenariat avec la France. (149)
>
> Yes, be shocked, I'm for the independence of 'my' country, a multi-ethnic independence where every community would bring its own intelligence and know-how. I'm from here and I reclaim my part of the future. No to Kanak socialist independence that we've been hearing about for some time. It causes fear. It closes, it excludes. Yes to a long-reflected-upon independence in a serene community, with partnership agreements with France.

While he asserts that the works of European artists and writers constitute a part of his identity as a Kanak, Sery cannot envision a New Caledonian independence that includes the Caldoche population. He remains firm, insisting that independence will be Kanak, returning to the argument on the original proprietors of the land: "Ce pays est à nous. Chaque rocher a un nom dans nos langues" ("This country is ours. Every rock has a name in our languages" 150). Yet Michel persists, reiterating that the original Caledonian population of European descent, those who were in prisons in France but removed to New Caledonia, suffered a similar displacement and feelings of exile: "Vivre là, ce n'était pas vraiment un choix, c'était un destin, parfois le dernier espoir" ("Living here, it wasn't really a choice, it was a destiny, sometimes a last hope" 150). At the end of the dinner shared by the Kanak militant and the Caledonian, the narrator describes the mutual feelings of desperation, of a desire for a seemingly impossible reconciliation:

> Il y a ce retour commun aux sources du désespoir, ces mots échangés qui ouvrent enfin le silence amnésique. Tous les deux sur le fil de l'équilibriste, face à face, entre passé et avenir, un seul balancier et quatre mains.
> - Mon Caillou, souffla Michel presque tendrement.
> - Le pays, répondit Sery en écho. (151)

> There is this mutual return to the sources of desperation, these exchanged words that finally open the amnesiac silence. Both of them on the thread of equilibrium, face to face, between the past and the future, one pendulum and four hands.
> - My Pebble, breathed Michel almost tenderly.
> - The country, responded Séry in echo.

An Ecocritical Oceanic Literature

While *Les Cœurs barbelés* adopts fictional, individualized accounts in order to accurately recount the history of politics and land disputes from both sides of the populations in New Caledonia, *L'Âge du perroquet-banane, Parabole païenne*, which equally addresses land distribution, shifts to the depiction of an imagined or hypothetical future for the island. Set in the year 2028, ten years after an ambiguous "Grand désordre" ("Great Disaster"), the novel takes place in a "gray world" where a small group of "sages" occupies an old library hoping for the "blue" or the "light" to return. As 2018, the year of the "Great Disaster," is the set date for the final referendum on New Caledonian independence, a simple interpretation of the novel could be that the "gray world" is the representation of this independence, or rather, of the isolation and separation from Europe as well as other Oceanic islands, that ensues after independence. Or, according to critic Dominique Jouve, the "Great Disaster" of 2018 could equally be interpreted as an ecological catastrophe that punishes human beings for their violence towards nature and the societies of the Pacific ("Conférence").

The novel begins with the definition of the perroquet-banane, or "parrotfish" (Callyodon oviceps), in which Jacques clarifies that she is referring to the gray-yellow fish that populates Oceania rather than to the tropical bird. By making this distinction, the author ensures that her reader understands that the diegesis unfolds specifically in

Oceania, and could refer to any Oceanic island (although throughout the text the reader recognizes that New Caledonia is the model for this fictional future island). Following this clarification, the author includes as an epigraph to her first chapter a quotation from ancient Greek poet Pindar:

> [Éclipse]
> Apportes-tu l'annonce de quelque guerre,
> la ruine des récoltes,
> quelque tempête de neige inimaginable,
> une sédition funeste,
> un débordement de la mer venant se perdre
> dans nos Plaines,
> le gel de notre sol?
> Vas-tu inonder la terre et renouveler
> l'humanité en faisant naître une nouvelle race?
>
> [Eclipse]
> Do you bring the news of some war,
> The ruin of harvests,
> Some unimaginable blizzard,
> A fatal sedition
> An inundation of the sea returned from losing itself
> In our plains,
> The freeze of our soil,
> Are you going to flood the earth and renew
> Humanity, provoking the rebirth of a new race?

This reference not only announces the imminence of war, it also mentions multiple environmental atrocities that can be attributed to the earth's human occupants. In Jacques's novel, the division of the island into three territories, a demographic segregation of the 'races,' represents the challenge, almost the impossibility, of the coming together of the various island communities. Yet the land plays an even more significant role in Jacques's third novel. As Édouard Glissant argues in his *Caribbean Discourse*: "the individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be

understood" (105-6). Similarly, while the land is inextricably connected to the creation of history according to Glissant, Jacques's novel portrays the land as a character in the process of creating a future, albeit conjectural. When one of the "Êtres sans mémoire" ("Beings without memory") miraculously retrieves his memory of the days leading up the "Grand désordre," he explains that men "from elsewhere" arrived on the island and began cutting down the "taboo banyans," despite a caution from a tribal elder. The forewarning from the tribal elder can be taken as that from the author herself: "…chez nous, si tu déterres un os tabou, tu rends la mer houleuse, si tu le touches sans respect tu appelles un cyclone, si tu jettes les os de nos vieux, tu provoques un…raz-de-marée" ("…in our country, if you remove a taboo bone, you disrupt the sea, if you touch it without respect you invite a cyclone, if you toss the bones of our elders, you provoke a…tidal wave" 54). Effectively, the author informs us that the land is not ours over which to argue, but that it belongs to everyone and human beings are on a path to the destruction of both the land and the culture with which the land is indelibly linked. The destruction of the land initiates the loss of memory, except for that of the elite few who must reside in the library, guarding knowledge (books) and the collective memory (through oral storytelling) of the island. The editors of *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* remark that the land becomes a crucial recuperative site of postcolonial historiography, since colonial powers tend to conceal the history of their own violence. Essentially, they note, the land is the "only true guardian" of the past, which "makes the process of conservation and sustainability all the more ontologically powerful, because a gesture of destruction against land, then, simultaneously becomes an act of violence against collective memory" (8). While in *L'Âge du perroquet-banane* the "guardians of

memory" are capable of conserving and protecting the legends and rich oral history of their people, they are unable to prevent the destruction of the land and thus the violence against collective memory. The "Êtres sans mémoire" cannot recall the colonial violence done to the populations or the lands of Oceania, nor the attempted steps toward reconciliation amongst the various communities. Throughout the novel, the "guardians of memories" disappear one by one, and "L'Auteur inconnu" ("The Unknown Author") reports to the librarian towards the end of the novel: "J'ai tourné, hier, la dernière page de notre livre. Il n'y a plus de place pour écrire. […] Nous sommes à la fin de notre histoire. Tout a été dit. Je dois cacher le livre sacré" ("Yesterday I turned the last page of our book. There is no more room to write. […] We're at the end of our history. Everything has been said. I must hide the sacred book" 214). Via the "Unknown Author," Jacques associates the end of the era and the destruction of the earth with the tragedy of the demise of intellectual pursuits. As the island enters into "L'Âge du perroquet-banane," a new manipulator manifests himself in Titew, the grandson of the librarian, who vows to make his half-sister (Meameï, the girl who rapes him to impregnate herself) his "queen," choose his own elite, and "cultivate the amnesia" (230) of those without memories. History is thus condemned to repeat itself, Jacques warns us, if the earth continues to be regarded as a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings and removed from the constructs of culture and "reason."[13]

If in *L'Âge du perroquet-banane*, Claudine Jacques engages in ecocriticism in her depiction of the destruction of the earth from which ensues the absence of memory, in *Nouméa mangrove* she further engages in the discussion of "postcolonial ecologies" when she warns us of another extreme: deep ecology. Deep ecologists tend to prioritize

the environment over all human needs, and, as Ramachandra Guha remarks, demonstrate a "lack of concern with inequalities within human society" (qtd. in *Postcolonial Ecologies* 21). In the first two chapters of *Nouméa mangrove*, Ruddy, a young Rasta unsure of his future begins work in the fields on the outskirts of Nouméa, but an ecological "apocalypse" pushes him to move to the city: "Bouleversé, le paysage se modifia. Il vit la terre se fendiller, puis se fendre, se morceler comme après une grande sécheresse. Les oiseaux s'envolèrent ainsi que les guêpes et les essaims d'abeilles. Il entendit le cri des arbres qu'on arrache" ("Shattered, the countryside changed. He saw the earth crack, then split, divide like after a long drought. The birds took off, as well as the wasps and the swarms of bees. He heard the cry of the trees being pulled up" 24).[14] Jacques evokes the disaster, although on a smaller scale than that portrayed in *L'Âge du perroquet-banane*, demonstrating that environmental violations inevitably affect the humans living on the land and refuting a dualistic conception that separates the natural from the human.

Yet, as the novel progresses and Jacques introduces us to the interweaving mini-narratives that finally culminate in an over-arching master plot, she reminds us that while protecting the environment is necessary (after all: humans are animals as well), there are limitations to environmental engagement. Detective Joseph Vinimo slowly uncovers the plans of ecological conspirators to poison the water system of Nouméa as a form of protest against increased industrialization. When a man is forced to ingest pesticides, Vinimo becomes involved in the investigation of multiple murders traversing the city of Nouméa, including that of the Goro Nickel plant engineer Philippe Cartier.[15] As the narrative unravels, Vinimo learns that the Canadian Cartier was not only involved in a

group called “Les Guerriers de la Terre” (“Warriors of Earth”), a group whose mission is to protect the planet, but in fact that his involvement went even further. Cartier was a member of the “Front de Libération de la Terre” or the “Earth Liberation Front,” believers in deep ecology, and as another character explains to Vinimo: “La *deep ecology* prône l’écoterrorisme” (“Deep ecology advocates ecoterrorism” 262). Vinimo discovers that the ecologically engaged engineer was in fact an ecoterrorist, whose plan succeeded because he was paying a poor “métis sans coutume, sans terre, sans loi, que rien n’effarouchait” (“metis without custom, without land, without law, whom nothing frightened” 17) to poison the reservoirs of Nouméa, provoking an epidemic of catastrophic proportions. At the end of the novel, Vinimo learns that thousands of liters of sulfuric acid have been overturned into the creek near the Goro site, killing fish, shrimp, and many other living organisms. Upon hearing the news, Vinimo knows “que le temps *de la terreur* était arrivé,” (“the era of *terror* had arrived”) and, referencing Dante, he murmurs: “Nous entrons dans le vestibule de l’enfer” (“We enter into the vestibule of hell” 296).

It is interesting to consider the choice of title for Jacques’s most recent novel, especially in the discussion of environmental engagement. As opposed to the ambiguity of location in *L’Âge du perroquet-banane*, Nouméa, of course, serves to situate the narrative and anchor the intrigue in the capital city of New Caledonia. Nouméa is a city frequently referred to as a “melting pot” of diversity, a city that is home to Caledonians, Kanaks, Indonesians, Polynesians, Asians, and numerous other ethnic and cultural groups. The second part of the title, mangrove, is also indicative of diversity. Mangrove forests have one foot on land and one in the sea: they are among the most dynamic and

biologically complex ecosystems on Earth, home to birds, fish, snakes, and crocodiles. In addition to providing food for a variety of marine and land animals, they protect land from the erosive power of waves. Mangrove forests support an abundance of life, and may be more fundamental to the condition of the planet than scientists ever realized.[16] In combining the two highly diverse milieus, both the city of Nouméa and the concept of the mangrove, Jacques emphasizes the importance of biodiversity and reinforces the idea that human life and ecology are interdependent. *Nouméa mangrove* reminds the reader to embrace what Édouard Glissant calls in *Poetics of Relation* an "aesthetics of the earth": "The politics of ecology has implications for populations that are decimated or threatened with disappearance as a people. For, far from consenting to sacred intolerance, it is a driving force for the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth" (146). Jacques encourages a view of an ecological self, which Val Plumwood describes as "a type of relational self, one which includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends" (154) rather than one that views nature as nonhuman, irrational, and therefore exploitable. Jacques's *L'Âge du perroquet-banane* and *Nouméa mangrove* textualize both Glissant's "aesthetics of the earth" and Plumwood's theory of a relational, ecological self in order to create a possibility to re-conceptualize the politics of the Oceanic body, as not separate from but rather in relation to ecology.

Institutionalized Bodies

While Jacques's *Nouméa mangrove* contains a critique both of the destruction of the earth by its human occupants and the destruction of human bodies by proponents of

deep ecology, the author brings to light an important notion. Bodies are governable through operations of force. By contaminating the water reservoirs, ecoterrorist Philippe Cartier and his henchmen demonstrate the ease with which one can exercise power over a multitude of bodies. The bodies of the people of Nouméa thus become subjected bodies, to borrow the phrase from Michel Foucault. Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*:

> […] This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination […] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (25-26)[17]

Foucault later continues an account of the "new" political anatomy that entered discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in France, but this politically driven corporal discourse also circulated in the colonies. He explains that through discipline, punishment, and surveillance, docile bodies, or subjected and practiced bodies, are produced. Schools, military organizations, prisons, and later hospitals thus became "disciplinary institutions" (139), organizations that practiced the subjection of bodies through a "micro-physics of power" (139). Essentially, any institution in which a certain order is to be followed, where bodies are confined in a partitioned space and made to function in a productive and tractable manner, constitutes a "disciplinary space."

When considering the notion of subjected bodies and "disciplinary spaces" as seen through Western perspectives, one might perceive the island communities of Oceania as doubly confined or institutionalized, due to the geographic and economic situations of the Oceanic islands and the history of colonialism and neocolonialism within the region. Indeed, Déwé Gorodé was imprisoned for her political militancy on multiple occasions, and has written numerous poems from her position of confinement in the

Camp Est prison. However, the short stories and novels of Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz portray institutionalized bodies in order to effectuate a critique of the limiting and confining spaces put in place by the politics of the colonial system, and to fracture the conception of the islands as isolated, micro-communities separated from the continental world and from each other. As Epeli Hau'ofa notes in the essay "Our Sea of Islands," colonial discourse emphasizing the smallness of the Oceanic islands has transformed the manner in which many scholars and Oceanic peoples have conceptualized their communities for over a century. He observes that before the infiltration of the islands by the "continental men," Oceanic peoples viewed their world as an immense expanse of a universe, comprised not only of land surfaces, but also of the surrounding, navigable ocean, as well as the heavens, with specific cosmologies uniting the stars and the planets to the island communities. Yet:

> Nineteenth-century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, transforming a once boundless world into the Pacific Island states and territories we know today. People were confined to their tiny spaces, isolated from each other. […] This is the historical basis of the view that our countries are small, poor, and isolated. It is only true insofar as people are still fenced in and quarantined. (34)

Hau'ofa insists that the supposition that Oceanic peoples are still confined is no longer tenable, as the development of the world economy following World War II has enabled them to move and to expand, as their ancestors did, broadening their world. Certainly, the notion of small islands in a vast ocean limits the worldview and the freedoms of Oceanic communities, and essentially performs the role of reinforcing the neocolonial perspective that the islands are dependent upon Western (namely, European and American) countries. Hau'ofa remarks: "If this very narrow, deterministic perspective is not questioned and checked, it could contribute importantly to an eventual consignment of whole groups of

human beings to a perpetual state of wardship wherein they and their surrounding lands and seas would be at the mercy of the manipulators of the global economy…" (31). He encourages the Oceanic community to return to a vision that is "a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships" (31). In the same vein, Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz manage to appropriate the confining spaces of the colonial institutions to create spaces in which an encounter with the Other is, while never perfectly harmonious, at least non-threatening and promises a potential of sharing. Through a critique of confining, "disciplinary" spaces, the authors succeed in creating "a more holistic perspective" of their own communities, and effectively liberate Oceanic bodies from the hegemonic views that have attempted to regulate and subject them for more than a century.

The school system was (and can still be argued to be) one of the major instruments of economic and social colonial domination contributing to the confinement and belittlement of Oceanic islanders. Déwé Gorodé comments in an interview with *Île en Île*, an online index of writers of French expression from the numerous colonized and formerly colonized archipelagos, that for her school was a confined, militarized space:

> On devait se mettre en rang chaque matin. On nous disait '*À vos rangs, fixe!*', comme on dit à l'armée et, comme les militaires, il fallait lever le drapeau français. Dans la classe, il y avait un papier sur le mur du fond de la classe où était écrit que l'on devait parler en français dans la classe et à la recréation. Dans l'espace scolaire, on devait parler français. On n'était plus autorisé à parler dans notre langue…
>
> We had to line up every morning. Someone told us 'In line, now!' like one says in the army, and like the military, we had to raise the French flag. In class, there was a paper on the wall in the back of the class where it was written that we had to speak French in class and during recess. In the scholarly space, we had to speak French. We were no longer authorized to speak our language…

In *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé!*, Gorodé's principal character Tâdo echoes the author's comments as she stands up to speak at a rally for the mobilization of Kanak independence: "Cette école où l'obligation de parler en français en classe et en recréation était gravée en lettres rouges sur le mur. Et si on n'obéissait pas, c'était 'À genoux!' sur le béton et les coups de règle métallique sur la tête" ("This school where the obligation to speak French in class and in recess was engraved in red letters on the wall. And if we didn't obey, it was 'on your knees!' on the concrete and blows of a metallic ruler to the head" 86). Physical punishment was a method by which the colonial schools manipulated Oceanic bodies so that they became, as Foucault suggests, docile and tractable. Tâdo cites the "rupture du lien avec la mère" ("the rupture of the link to the mother" 86) as one of the principal reasons for which Kanak children have so much trouble succeeding in the colonial schools, where they are taught the history of France and the concept of four seasons rather than subjects that are relevant to New Caledonian existence. Because they must leave their homes in the *tribu* to attend the colonial schools in the larger communities, they are literally physically removed from the spaces that house their identities and their cultural ties.

Likewise, Chantal T. Spitz's character Victoria/'Aiū reflects the author's experience as she describes her morning routine at her primary school in *Elles, terres d'enfance*: "tout notre temps scolaire était régi par un rituel inflexible qui commençait avant même le coup de sifflet du matin qui nous précipitait en rang accompli accolé au mur de la classe" ("all of our scholarly time was ruled by an inflexible ritual that started even before the morning whistle blow that hurled us into a perfect line glued to the wall of the classroom" 86). Her grandmother, the teacher of her primary school, not only

ensured that all the children adhered to this strict schedule, but she also ensured that they were all immaculately clean. Every morning the children were inspected for their cleanliness, and forced to trim their nails and dip their fingers in lemon to remove any dirt from their fingernails. As the schoolteacher insists: "vous devez être propres vous ne pouvez pas apprendre si vous êtes sales" ("you have to be clean you cannot learn if you are dirty" 87). The students must meet certain physical criteria in the school environment if they expect to gain knowledge. Similar to Tâdo's experience in Kanaky/New Caledonia, if the students speak Tahitian in school, they are reprimanded and humiliated, forced to carry around a stone ("symbol of colonial terrorism" 89) and wear a "un bonnet d'âne" ("dunce's cap" 89) around school the entire day. Essentially, beginning in primary school, the students are made into tractable, docile bodies, forced to follow a routine and confined by both physical and linguistic regulations defined by the French colonial power.

In New Caledonia the formulation of the écoles populaires kanak (EPK) in February 1985 became one of the most significant forms of Kanak resistance to colonial rule, second only to land reform. David Small explains: "French colonial education was seen not as a vehicle for progress and development, but as an instrument of domination and control" (3). In 1985, the FLNKS (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front) encouraged the boycotting of the territorial elections as well as the colonial schools, sending Kanak children to the 46 popular schools created under the FLNKS Provisional Government. As the Minister of Education in the FLNKS Provisional Government stated: "We know the French aim is to imprison our children's minds; to make them think in a straight line to France and nowhere else" (qtd. in Small 6). Reflecting the Minister of

Education's sentiments, in *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé!*, Gorodé's narrator describes the EPK as an attempt "pour protéger les enfants tout en les instruisant et en leur apprenant leur coutume, leur langue et leur culture" ("to protect the children all while instructing them and teaching them their custom, their language, and their culture" 187). Tâdo opens the popular school of her *tribu*, and as the narrator remarks: "l'EPK est une école qui dérange […] Tous ceux que l'EPK dérange n'auront de cesse que de l'isoler jusqu'à l'obtention de son démantèlement" ("The EPK is a school that disturbs […] Everyone that the EPK disturbs will not cease to isolate it until they obtain its ruin" 188).[18] Indeed, the EPK National Structure failed due to outside attacks from supporters of continued French colonial rule, conflicts and mistakes internal to the EPK, and opposition, including financial obstruction, to the EPK even from within the pro Kanak independence camp (Small 8).[19]

In the collection *À L'Ancre de nos vies*, Claudine Jacques's short story "Mourir n'est pas succomber" ("To Die is not to Succumb") represents the dissenting view of the EPK as seen through the eyes of a Kanak man. As he passes by a group of younger Kanaks, he laments that their generation is "lost" (42), that they believe in an independence that may not come. In awaiting the Kanak independence promised in the Nouméa Accords, the Kanak youth have decided to attend the EPK (at this point no longer a national structure but rather individualized schools run locally by a select few *tribus*). The man reflects:

> Alors, ces gosses-là, ils attendent. Ils ne sont pas allés à l'école coloniale, les écoles populaires kanak, c'était mieux. On y apprend la vie des champs, de la tribu. L'idéal coutumier. Démission des parents incapables de transmettre le savoir? Dépassés? Ou traîtrise absolue des dirigeants? Formidable pour se battre dans la vie, dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. Pas d'études, pas de formation. Pas de métier. (43)

> So, these kids, they wait. They did not go to the colonial school, the Kanak popular schools, that was better. There they learn the life in the fields, of the *tribu*. The customary ideal. Resignation of parents incapable of transmitting knowledge? Overlooked? Or absolute treachery of the directors? Great to fight through life, in today's world. No studies, no education. No occupation.

The Kanak man's lament demonstrates "an internalization of the colonial definition of development being a process of making Kanak society more like that of France" (Small 12). The character's remark embraces the colonial conception of education and reinforces the belief that Kanak reliance on the French system and language is the only path towards success in Kanaky/New Caledonia. Unfortunately, while the colonial education system confined the bodies of Kanak students (as well as Tahitian students), the popular schools failed to bring students to an educational level considered "on par" with that of colonial schools. Until the appearance of the Université Française du Pacifique in 1987 (now separated into the Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie and the Université de la Polynésie Française in Tahiti), Kanak and Tahitian students who wanted to pursue collegiate level degrees had to go abroad, principally to France.[20] If students attended the EPK and did not pass the baccalaureate exam, in the French language and structured along French educational parameters, their hopes for furthering their education were diminished, and in an increasingly globalized community, their hopes for employment were similarly suppressed, especially if they were unable to speak French. Essentially, whether or not they attended the colonial school in the past, Kanaks are confined by the limitations put in place by the enduring French school system. As the narrator informs us in *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé!*, "d'autres tractations plus directement politiques se poursuivent pour ramener les Kanak dans le giron des habitudes et vers une gestion plus institutionnelle. Certains

disent ‘dans le paddock’ et un vieux coutumier parle de retour ‘dans le parc à cochons’” (“other more politically directed discussions persist to bring the Kanaks back to the heart of habit and towards a more institutional management. Some say ‘in the paddock’ and an elder speaks of a return ‘to the pig pen’” 189). The Kanaks view the institutionalized educational system as a form of animalization, recalling the prevalent discourse at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries discussed in Chapter One.[21]

Likewise, in Tahiti and the surrounding Society Islands, continued French colonial education reinforces class (and racial) disproportions.[22] Chantal T. Spitz writes in *L’Île des rêves écrasés*: “Vingt ans d’irresponsabilité politique ont creusé des inégalités révoltantes entre le peuple *mā’ohi* qui se prolétarise et s’analphabétise…” (“Twenty years of political irresponsibility have opened up a revolving gap between the Mā’ohi people, increasingly proletarian, increasingly illiterate…” 191; *Island* 148-149). The governments confine families unable to compete with an increasing influx of immigrants from France to “social housing,” while the growing Demi population occupies the key positions available only to those with (French) educations. Spitz derisively refers to the Demis as “souvent instituteurs ou infirmiers, détenteurs du savoir et de la raison, chefs de service ou secrétaires, détenteurs de pouvoirs” (“They are often teachers or nurses, keepers of knowledge and reason, managers or secretaries, people with power” 192-3; *Island* 150). The students, made into tractable, docile bodies under the watchful eyes of the colonial school system, are not the only docile bodies manipulated by the institution. Those who do not or cannot attend school are also bodies confined by the sociological and political ramifications of the lack of education that renders them unable to compete in the colonial market. Indeed, the teacher in *Hombo:*

transcription d'une biographie restricts the usage of Tahitian in the school and insists that those who do not speak French will "stay in the darkness of ignorance" (57). When the young Hombo enters the school, "il entre dans une organisation aux règles incohérentes qui le désoriente et l'ébranle, insurmontable détresse qui désunit son être et bouleverse son identité…" ("he enters into an organization of incoherent rules that disorient and shake him, insurmountable distress that disunites his being and shatters his identity…" 56). The narrator remarks that the universe of the school encloses Hombo in a restrictive and even violent environment, calling it a "univers familier des interdits et des gronderies des punitions et des coups" ("familiar universe of prohibitions and reprimands of punishments and of blows" 56). Because he is so physically encumbered by the repressive and racist colonial school system, and later confronted with the impossibility of combining tradition and modernity as his community changes around him, Hombo (and many of his friends) leaves the school system as well as their own village to live in an "exiled" community near the beach. They are thus confined to the margins of society, reviled by both their Tahitian village and the elite community who speak French and maintain control over the job market: "Ils en sont la plaie. Ils atteignent la communauté au plus profond de sa fierté, vivants symboles de l'échec d'une antique civilisation. Leur échec" ("They are the wound [of society]. They strike the community at the deepest part of its pride, living symbols of the failure of the old civilization. Their failure." 80).

While the school system remains the principal form of "disciplinary apparatus" that the authors critique, it is necessary to insist upon the culture of institutionalization that infiltrated the French-colonized islands in an examination of the politics of Oceanic bodies. The prison system, the leper colonies, the reserves, and the military occupation of

the land all succeeded in confining bodies, all of which appear in the texts of Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz. In the context of New Caledonia, which was set up as a penal colony soon after Europeans arrived on the island, penal institutions and confinement indeed characterize the settlement of the island. France sent more than 200,000 criminals and political prisoners to the territory between the years of 1860 and 1897, which, along with the system of the *indigénat* that confined the indigenous population to reserves, effectively transformed the Grande Terre into the embodiment of institution during those years. As explored in Chapter One, the *bagne* heavily influenced the literatures emanating from the European population of the island. Furthermore, leprosy, thought to have been introduced by Chinese seamen in the 1860s when the settlers and former prisoners arrived, segregated the populations of New Caledonia and completely isolated or imprisoned many Caldoches and Kanaks alike. The smaller Belep islands to the north of New Caledonia's mainland became a site for a leper colony in 1892, where isolation was total, permanent, and the afflicted persons cared for themselves. In 1918, the former penitentiary buildings at Ducos, a small island situated to the south of the Grande Terre and northwest of Nouméa, were acquired for use by the leper colony. Like in the Belep islands, Ducos was originally isolated from the mainland, and the suffering were left to care for themselves except for occasional visits from a doctor and religious volunteers (Mcmenamin 75-76). While more than a century has passed since criminals and forced workers populated the island, and leprosy has been eradicated, the legacy of the institutionalized spaces in the islands has influenced the writings of Gorodé and Jacques, although to a lesser extent Spitz.[23] In particular, the authors' representations of illnesses and the destruction such illnesses wreak on confined bodies often serve to facilitate

political commentary and to emphasize the need to recognize the Other, especially when that 'Other' is a woman. [24]

In Claudine Jacques's short story "Condamné à perpetuité" ("Perpetually Condemned") in the collection *La Chasse et autres nouvelles*, leprosy takes hold of *broussard* René Lebel's body in the years preceding the discovery of the cure for Hansen's Disease. While in the beginning he attempts to resist confining himself by amputating his own fingers, thinking he may isolate the spread of the disease, he realizes that if he remains with his family he will risk contaminating them. He leaves, asking himself: "Où peut-on se cacher sur une île?" ("Where can one hide oneself on an island?" 172), reinforcing the internalized perception of the island as a small, isolated space. He departs for the "île des Lépreux" ("isle of the Lepers") on Ducos, later remarking that the island "connaissait l'isolement de la honte; gardée de jour comme de nuit par des surveillants austères et leurs chiens, la baie de Ducos n'était visité que par la baleinière de l'Administration apportant des vivres, des médicaments, des journaux, parfois des colis et des lettres pour ceux qui n'avaient pas été tout à fait oubliés" ("knew the isolation of shame; protected day and night by austere guards and their dogs, the bay of Ducos's only visitor was the Administration's boat bringing supplies, medicines, newspapers, sometimes packages and letters for those who hadn't been completely forgotten" 175). Jacques's narrative recounts not only the physical anguish felt by those suffering from the disease, but also the psychological ramifications inflicted by the extreme isolation. The "prisoners" recurrently engage in physical disputes, brought about frequently by the abuse of alcohol. René Lebel, in fact, attempts suicide, but is saved by a Kanak from the Loyalty Islands named Soliloque. Yet while the author demonstrates the frustration felt

by the sequestered patients, she also depicts an isolation that brings human beings together in their suffering: "De cet événement était née une amitié difficile, grave, essentielle, rare. René le broussard, Soli l'indigène, deux mondes se croisaient dans le malheur. À croire que la maladie est un pays où tous les hommes sont égaux!" ("This event gave birth to a difficult, serious, essential, rare friendship. René the man of the bush, Soli the indigenous man, two worlds crossed in misfortune. To think that illness is a country where all men are created equal!" 177). As the men realize that they are condemned by their physical deformities to live on the island forever, despite the arrival of the cure for Hansen's Disease in 1958 and the bridge built connecting the island of Ducos to Nouméa, they realize that they are also connected in a profound manner: "Notre soleil est le même, le tien, le mien, ici, là-bas" ("Our sun is the same, yours, mine, there, here" 179). Jacques's story reinforces the hybrid nature of much of her writing, seeking the humanity and a sense of solidarity that can come out of confinement and confrontation with the Other.

While Jacques's "Condamné à perpetuité" employs corporal confinement in order to support a political position of hope for the coming together of two communities, Déwé Gorodé places many of her more recent female characters, confronted by breast cancer or by cancer of the uterus, in hospitals.[25] This particular depiction of confinement draws attention specifically to the woman's body, as the types of cancers chosen occur almost exclusively in women. *Graines de pin colonnaire* (2009), Gorodé's second novel, is composed of journal excerpts, poems, short stories, and letters between friends, retracing and recounting history through the perspective of exclusively female characters, whom Gorodé aptly identifies as "les Amazones de la parole" ("Amazons of speech" 127). She

remarks in an interview with Jean-Pierre Palot that the choice of title is extremely symbolic. In the Kanak tradition, the pin colonnaire (the pine tree) represents men, since pine trees are tall and able to dominate from above, while women are symbolized in the figure of the cocotier (the coconut palm).[26] The author chooses to employ the symbol of the seeds of pine trees to represent women, who watch over the community and reproduce: "ce sont les femmes qui assurent la production, la reproduction de l'humanité…" ("it is women who assure production, the reproduction of humanity"). As she notes in the 2011 interview, it is important for her to demonstrate the dignity with which her women characters handle the prospect of death, and to ensure that her message of female solidarity is transmitted through the vehicle of storytelling and retelling between women, from generation to generation as well as between contemporary Oceanic women authors, whose literature is still characterized as an "emerging" literature.

In the novel, a young Kanak woman is handed the task of collecting and arranging the journal narratives, the letters, and the poems of her aunt Tany and her friends from adolescence. The first half of the novel consists of a transcription of the narrator's aunt Tany's collection of poems and journal entries, written throughout the course of her years in locations such as her *tribu* and the Beautemps-Beaupré pension. The narrator (also named Juanita, or Tany, after her aunt) remarks when introducing her aunt's writings that after sharing them with her for the purpose of publishing, Tany shares her journal with the women in the Beautemps-Beaupré pension, an act of confession and of female encouragement. This act is also figurative: the sharing of stories performs a symbolic rebirth of words, and through the transcription of her narrative, Tany creates a sort of literary reproduction mirroring the "woman's role," giving birth, or planting the seeds, of

literary creation. Furthermore, sharing stories accomplishes a doubly figurative emergence: it is representative both of an escape from the hospital's isolating and sobering walls, as the women are able to obtain a sense of freedom in their togetherness and reciprocity, and of an escape from the idea of a "confined" literature. It is an opening out into the world of Oceanic writing to create connections and rupture the boundaries imposed by the idea of orality versus writing and the "continental man's" perspective, as Epeli Hau'ofa would define it.

Throughout her personal narrative, Aunt Tany addresses "un lutin des pommes de pin colonnaire" ("a goblin of pine cones" 11), to whom she recites her poems and recounts her dreams. In an attempt to understand the dreams she experiences following her treatment at the pension, she reads C.G. Jung's *Essai d'exploration de l'inconscient*, but realizes: "il paraît que nous, Kanak, n'avons pas les mêmes symboles et repères oniriques que Freud, Jung, Lacan, et les autres" ("it seems that we, Kanak, don't have the same symbols and oneiric references as Freud, Jung, Lacan, and the others" 49). Gorodé reiterates the idea that the Kanak worldview is almost always incompatible with that of the West, even in dreams. However, Gorodé's women find support and comfort in each other, regardless of race or religious beliefs, evoking the sentiment that Claudine Jacques articulates in "Condamné à perpetuité": that sickness is a country in which everyone is equal. For the women of *Graines de pin colonnaire*, womanhood is a country in which every female character is united in her fight against masculine domination, class stereotypes, and especially breast cancer. Indeed, the author alludes to the feminist movement when Tany insists to Estella in Estella's narrative that women must read and educate themselves in order to liberate themselves "De l'homme, du père, du frère, de

l'époux et du fils" ("From the man, the father, the brother, the husband and the son" 104). Women are thus unified in the attempt to free themselves from the figurative walls of phallocentrism, but also in the reproductive task of writing and the diffusion of their writing. When the niece Tany introduces Estella's narrative, she affirms that the organization of these women's texts is necessary to ensure that they are not lost, "pour pouvoir les diffuser un jour, au vent des souvenirs et d'autres vies à venir, à la manière de tes grains de pomme de pin colonnaire, vouées à la dispersion naturelle et à la propension à renaître" ("to be able to diffuse them one day, on the wind of memories and others lives to come, like your pine cones, prone to natural dispersion and to the propensity of rebirth" 85). The stories of these "guerrières de la parole" ("warriors of speech" 111) function to guide and to encourage other women throughout even the most disheartening bodily suffering, reproducing writing when their bodies physically cannot reproduce.

In several of the poems that appear in Aunt Tany's journal, she laments the "torture" of the mammography, the loss of her hair, and the chemotherapy, but her most significant worry is that of being invisible in her sickness. She writes: "Plus que jamais/'La lutte continue/au tir à l'arc/après la cicatrice/du sein brûlé des Amazones" ("More than ever/the battle continues/in archery/after the scar/of the burned breast of the Amazons" 55). In another poem, she recounts a scene in which she cannot look at a woman who reminds her of an aunt: "Je baisse les yeux/en me courbant/par respect/et pour ne pas pleurer/devant son sein noir/sa poitrine millénaire/brulée aux rayons X" ("I lower my eyes/stooping/in respect/and to not cry/before her black breast/her ancient chest/burned by X-rays" 65). Throughout her journal, Tany's poems address the pain felt predominantly in an encounter with other women who suffer as she does. Transcribing

her pain, however, and sharing her story with others, enables a reconnection and an intimacy with other women in similar situations.

Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé! ou "No more baby," Déwé Gorodé's most recent novel, also treats the topic of the ill woman's body, albeit in a much more politically charged manner. Significantly, Gorodé begins the novel with the transcription of a phrase that traditionally announces the end of oral stories in the *paicî* language: "*cîgadoo, cîgadoo, cîgadoo*" (9), as translated by the author, means "to laze around in the sun for a long while" (352). Along with the conclusion of oral stories, the phrase affirms the death of the principal character's grandmother, Tâdo, after whom she is named. Moreover, the name Tâdo and the title of the novel signify, in *paicî*, the call of "the Crab" when he visits the Tâdo of the oral narrative, the title of which is "Tâdo est crabe" ("Tâdo is a crab" 354). The principal character Tâdo is thus indefinitely linked to the figure of the Crab, not coincidentally, the symbol for the astrological sign of Cancer. When she overhears her aunts discussing the miscarriage and inability to have more children of another one of her relatives, the young Tâdo repeats "plus de bébé, plus de bébé" ("no more baby, no more baby" 17), essentially anticipating her own inability to have children. The Crab is equated with Tâdo's condition of

> femme stérile considérée comme de la terre sèche et aride, inapte à produire de quoi nourrir les clans. Femme sans cordon ombilical, sans liane de vie en elle ni pour nouer les liens ni pour ouvrir la voie des alliances entre les clans, elle est vouée aux gémonies et à toutes les humiliations possibles exprimées directement ou par plaisanterie détournée. En effet, sa situation de tante est d'être considérée comme un rien ou, pire, une diablesse, pour traduire les termes de la langue qui la désigne ainsi à la moquerie et à la vindicte populaire. (45-46)
>
> sterile woman considered as dry and arid land, unable to produce in order to nourish the clans. Woman without an umbilical cord, without a life vine in her, neither to establish links nor to open the pathway to alliances

> between clans, she is subject to public scorn and to all the possible humiliations expressed directly or by underhanded teasing. In effect, her situation as aunt is to be considered as nothing, or worse, a she-devil, to translate the terms of language which designate her thus to mockery and public condemnation.

In effect, being associated with the Crab in name and in condition organizes Tâdo's life, and the lives of all women unable to reproduce and fulfill societally imposed roles, within the limitations of Kanak social structures that privilege and value fertility for the sake of the clan. As Gorodé's novel recounts the trajectory of history as seen through the Kanak perspective, it also includes a poignant reflection on the condition of Kanak women, who for the majority of their history have been confined to the roles (including that of object of exchange) laid out for them by the men of the clan. If they cannot perform their specific roles oriented towards the well-being of the group, they are ostracized or considered cursed for the inability that, like infirmities, renders them incapable of encapsulating the accepted notion of womanhood.

Tâdo employs the same metaphor of the Crab to characterize the cancer that overtakes her mother's uterus in the remaining third of the novel. While she is able to combat oppression despite her reproductive powerlessness, and finds love, employment, as well as fulfillment in her role as aunt, she also recognizes that she is one of the few women who resist categorization as a marketable good. She associates the Crab that has imposed limitations on her body with merchandizing, and further criticizes the economics of bodies that has been made of the medical industry: "Le Crabe, fétiche 'marchandise' multiforme en aspire des milliers par seconde, vitesse grand V. De mélanome en tumeur, de globule en leucémie, de cancer en SIDA, l'être passe du clan à la société et intègre les maux du monde d'aujourd'hui…" ("The Crab, multiform, 'merchandise' fetish inhales

thousands each second, at top speed. From melanoma to tumors, from blood cell to leukemia, from cancer to AIDS, one goes from the clan to society and integrates the evils of today's world…" 231). As the woman has traditionally been regarded at the level of object of exchange in Kanak histories, Gorodé's utilization of economic terminology to characterize the Crab also engenders a critique of the clash of Kanak culture with globalization as well as that of the woman's condition. When she recounts the traditional oral folktale of Tâdo and the Crab to her students at the secondary school, Tâdo asks her students what the Crab could represent in the contemporary era. One of her students says that his mother told him that the Crab represents cancer that occurs only in women "à cause de ce que les hommes leur font" ("because of what men do to them" 313); another girl responds that the Crab represents sexual harassment, or that it could equally represent acts of cannibalism. Tâdo herself tells her sister Alo as she battles breast cancer that "c'était, entre autres, le harcèlement sexuel au quotidien qui déclenchait les cancers du sein et de l'utérus chez les femmes" ("it was, among other things, daily sexual harassment that triggered breast and uterus cancer in women" 293).

The perpetual crusade against the poly-symbolic Crab characterizes the trajectory of the final third segment of the novel. While Tâdo's mother Âdi passes after a long battle against uterus cancer, her sister, Alo, survives, and at the time of the novel's apparition, has been in remission for a decade, perhaps a medical metaphor to denote the gradual movement towards a more "modern" conception of the Kanak woman, a more liberated woman. Similar to the depiction of the intimate journal in *Graines de pin colonnaire*, Gorodé allows Alo to speak through the transcription of her diary, written in a little notebook that she significantly entitles "Prélude."[27] The diary, which her children

encourage her to write, enables Alo to explore her feelings of suffering and fear, but more importantly, it encourages an overture, an effort to reach out to others through writing (thus the apropos title of "Prélude"). Indeed, as she recounts her journey through her illness, the chemotherapy and the loss of hair, she also emphasizes the importance of a sense of community. Describing the traditional dance to welcome the yam crops as "le cycle du sang et de la vie qui se renouvelle chaque année" ("the cycle of blood and of life which renews itself each year" 318) in which she participates, she notes: "Nos corps en mouvement bougeaient ensemble. Le temps de la danse de l'igname, j'en oubliais totalement la maladie" ("Our moving bodies moved together. The time of the yam dance, I totally forgot the sickness" 318).

Like the women of *Graines de pin colonnaire*, the women of *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé!* write in order to shatter the notions of isolation and confinement that formerly typified the discourse on New Caledonian and other Oceanic communities. The final section of the novel, in which Gorodé reveals that the narrator is in fact the Tâdo of the youngest generation, recounts the events of the Arab Spring.[28] Significantly, the Arab Spring began in 2010 with a series of uprisings and revolts enacted largely via sources of social media against many of the governments of the Arab world, including Tunisia, a former French protectorate. The usage of social media as a means by which to break out of the confinement of the countries' governmental institutions was unprecedented on such a large scale. Tâdo describes the insurgents as "tombeurs de gouvernements et pourfendeurs d'institutions" ("those who take down governments and attackers of institutions" 333), and the effect of the Arab Spring as "un gigantesque vent d'espoir et de liberté pour la jeunesse du monde entier" ("a gigantic breath of hope and liberty for

the youth of the entire world" 333). While she admits that "le commerce du corps humain et de ses longues maladies 'du siècle' a encore de beaux jours devant lui" ("the commerce of human bodies and long illnesses 'of the century' still has many days ahead" 336), it is significant that the novel culminates in such a manner, paralleling the success of social media as an outlet for the Arab Spring with the rupture of the confinement that formerly characterized the politics of Oceania, and specifically those of Kanaky/New Caledonia. In August of 2010, only four months before the Arab Spring, the government of Kanaky/New Caledonia officially adopted the flag of Kanaky as representative of the overseas sui generis collectivity, to fly alongside the French flag. Additionally, the island nation adopted a new motto: "Terre de parole, terre de partage" ("Land of speech, land of sharing"), and a new hymn to replace La Marseillaise: "Soyons unis, devenons frères" ("Let us unite, let us become brothers"). Tâdo recounts these events, citing the celebrated Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou whose discourse on Kanak identity discourages a return to the past, and rather encourages a positive turn toward the future: "Notre identité, elle est devant nous" ("Our identity is before us" 341). On the last page of prose writing, the young Tâdo reveals that she lives with her husband and their five children, all named after relatives. As the literature of Kanaky/New Caledonia proliferates and proves that it is more than simply a literature of "emergence," the fact that the young Tâdo has experienced such reproductive prosperity also mirrors this overture of forward-looking, tolerant politics, and more prolific writing from the Oceanic region.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the rupturing of the silence that until the last three and a half decades has characterized the literature and confined the bodies of

the French-speaking Oceanic islands. Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz employ literature as a vehicle through which they are able to break out of the silence imposed on their communities by the histories of colonialism as well as by the traditions of their own societies, which privilege the collective voice over that of the individual. The three Oceanic women authors indeed embody Tjibaou's conception of a forward-looking identity in transition, as they effectively demonstrate that not only their identities, but also their literatures are before them.

[1] *Tertre* is defined as the place of origin or mound from which the genealogical pathways of a clan are traced (Sinclair-Reynolds 123).

[2] Michel Serres remarks in *Malfeasance* that an act such as burying the dead is an act of appropriation and is the natural foundation of property right: "Necessary for survival, the act of appropriation seems to me to have an animal origin that is ethological, bodily, physiological, organic, vital…[…] Its foundation comes from the body, alive or dead" (12). Similarly, an act such as the burial of the umbilical cord or the placenta *marks* the land, or appropriates it, in Serres's terms.

[3] It is important to note that not all of the Kanak tribes faced such difficulties when confronted with the newcomers from Europe. Jean Guiart points out that while on the Grande Terre of New Caledonia 90% of the land was confiscated by the French government, colonists never veritably established themselves in the Loyalty Islands, considered part of New Caledonian territory (100). Thus, it is essential to emphasize that not every Kanak experience of history is identical.

[4] What I mean by New Caledonia being in a state of political and social transition is that the future political situation of the island community is still undetermined. While New Caledonia is no longer in a state of "violent" colonialism in the sense that it was in the earlier part of the twentieth century, defined by Aimé Césaire in *the Discourse on Colonialism* as "morally, spiritually indefensible" (32) and as "infinitely distanced"(34) from civilization, it is still economically and politically dependent on the French, as, in 2013, it continues as a sui generis collectivity. As outlined in the United Nations General Assembly in 1986, New Caledonia has been placed on the list of non-autonomous territories to be decolonized. The language of the Nouméa Accord indicates that New

Caledonian independence (which must be distinguished from Kanak independence) will be granted between the years 2013 and 2018. Currently, all citizens residing in the three provinces of New Caledonia are considered French and are able to participate in all local and French national elections.

[5] In "Rethinking Hybridity as a Frame for Understanding Identity Construction: The New Caledonian Case," Raylene Ramsay makes a case for the use of the term "hybrid" to describe the works of Claudine Jacques, Nicolas Kurtovitch, Déwé Gorodé, and Chantal T. Spitz, drawing on the theories of Homi Bhabha and his hybrid "third space" and Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*. Ramsay remarks: "[…] the open, heterogenous, dynamic aspects of this hybrid space provide a way of moving beyond the fixed binary divisions of Kanak-Caldoche (or Maori-Pakeha) bi-culturalism and beyond the periphery/centre divide that the French/francophone distinction continues to carry" (269).

[6] The title of the short story "Une terre de lumière," as Claudine Jacques indicates, is borrowed from a phrase by Jacqueline Sénès: "D'une terre de lumière, on a voulu faire un cachot…" (From a land of light, one has wanted to create a dungeon"). Jacqueline Sénès, a French-born author who lived in New Caledonia for the better part of her life, wrote, among her many novels, one entitled *Terre violente* (*Violent Land*), recounting the trials and tribulations of the different communities occupying the Pacific island.

[7] It is interesting to note that the French military assigned female code names such as "Brigitte" and "Hortensia" to the islands comprising Mururoa. Dina El Dessouky remarks that this suggests that France viewed the atoll "as a series of barren, female striking zones at the disposal of French nuclear violence" and that by utilizing European names, France

was perhaps attempting "to erase records of any indigenous language, history, or presence, and to induce the paralyzing colonial amnesia that Hau'ofa warns about" (261).

[8] In the novel, the nuclear experimentation plant is entitled "le Centre d'Expérimentation de Tirs de Missiles Nucléaires" ("The Experimental Center of Nuclear Missile Fire") rather than the "Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique." Spitz is careful to change the names of locations (rather than Tahiti, she uses "Rahiti," and instead of "Huahine" she names the island "Ruahine") in order to ensure that the reader understands that despite the autobiographical nature of the novel, the work is indeed one of fiction. However, the names of the *Mā'ohi* characters in the novel are borrowed from reality. Emily-Emere is in fact the name of the author's mother. In a lecture given to a class at the University of Hawai'i in April 2012, Spitz explained that in Tahiti it is tradition to re-use names in stories; using different names is bad luck and considered disrespectful. In an essay entitled "texte revisité" ("revisited text") found in *Pensées insolentes et inutiles*, Spitz critiques those who would call her first novel an autobiography: "Réduire ce texte à une autobiographie écrite où l'auteur raconte sa propre vie est évacuer la réflexion ou pour le dire autrement nier la subversion" ("To reduce this text to a written autobiography where the author recounts her life is to evacuate reflection, or to say it differently to negate subversion" 159).

[9] Bruno Saura remarks in *Tahiti Mā'ohi*: "L'identité est tout d'abord fondamentalement porteuse du rapport à l'Autre, à travers le ressenti d'une différence vis-à-vis de cet Autre, ressenti qui, *a contrario*, rapproche certaines personnes…" ("Identity, firstly, fundamentally relies on the relationship to the Other, through the feeling of a difference vis-à-vis the Other, a feeling which, on the contrary, brings together certain people…"

30). Perhaps including the perspective of the Other, especially the Other woman, enables the reader to distinguish the unique aspects of *Mā'ohi* identity that are fundamentally distinct from, yet in relation to, the Other (in this case, the Westerner).

[10] *Popwaalé* means French or Europeans in Gorodé's native language, *paicî*.

[11] It is noteworthy that this division is not only a binary division based on race or ethnicity: it is a multiple division, a separation of the populations of New Caledonia based on race, ethnicity, class, as well as gender. Jacques's texts articulate a desire for a common consciousness vis-à-vis the depictions of the various communities living on the island.

[12] "Caillou" is the affectionate term for New Caledonia, meaning "a pebble."

[13] Similarly, Michel Serres cautions the reader of a "final deluge" caused by globalized pollution in *Malfeasance*. He remarks that as culture disappeared beneath nature in the Biblical flood, in the final flood, nature will disappear under the burdens of pollution induced by culture. He warns: "There are already islands where the stench announces this ending" (70). Serres hopes for a "cosmocracy," a power of the world, in which rather than humans regarding the land as an object to appropriate, we regard the land as a temporary rental space where we will be able to contemplate peace among humans and with the world (72). Jacques's *L'Âge du perroquet-banane* warns of a similar tragic flood in which culture overwhelms nature, yet her hopes for the world seem to parallel those of Serres for a "cosmocracy," in which humans recognize that they are merely tenants of the earth rather than owners.

[14] In reality, it is the construction of a toll road that chases Ruddy from the squat towards the city.

[15] The Goro Nickel plant is one of the largest nickel mining projects in the world. The project is currently two years behind schedule, significantly due to delays from environmental opposition.

[16] See "Mangroves" on National Geographic's website.

[17] It is important to note that Foucault examines the phenomena of subjected and docile bodies in the very specific context of French institutions throughout a particular period of time. In the cases of New Caledonia and Tahiti, however, it seems pertinent to utilize Foucault's analyses as the authors in this study represent confined and tractable bodies throughout their texts in order to rupture this confinement. It is of course essential to keep in mind the different contexts and spaces that distinguish the Oceanic women authors' texts from the philosophies of Foucault.

[18] Significantly, between 1985 and 1988 (which is the date of the Matignon Accords, one of the first steps toward the independence of New Caledonia and an agreement that divided the territory into three provinces) Déwé Gorodé herself was an instructor of the paîci language in the EPK.

[19] Small concludes by noting that because of the dissent from within the FLNKS, the EPK lost much of its ideological basis and many supporters. The Matignon Accords heightened the conflict between the competing internal and external perspectives, and weakened the independence movement. Subsequently, the EPK as a national structure, originally conceived to prepare future generations of Kanak for a new society, failed in its attempt to achieve Kanak socialist independence. French colonial rule and domination of the school system proved much more robust than was thought.

[20] This is still largely the case for many Kanak, New Caledonian, and French Polynesian students. Even if they attend local universities, the official language of both major universities in the islands remains French.

[21] For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in *Le Mariage de Loti*, Loti characterizes a Kanak woman as having a "simian-like gaiety" (16), and a character in the Nervat's novel compares her hired Kanak woman to "lazy cats" (*Célina Landrot* 144).

[22] It is important to note that French is no longer enforced as the only permissible language in the school system. In fact, as Sylvie André informs us in her article "Littérature francophone et institutions en Polynésie française," the teaching of *reo mā'ohi* is required in maternal and primary schools, and an obligatory option in secondary schools, in accord with the law of September 6, 1984, which contains the subtitle "de l'identité culturelle de la Polynésie française" ("of cultural identity in French Polynesia" 67).

[23] Instead, the nuclear testing base as well as increased tourism remain the principal institutions, other than the school system, of Spitz's critiques.

[24] Remarkably, Caldoche writer Louis-José Barbançon employs a corporeal, illness-related metaphor when he reflects on the idea of a shared humanity and his fellow Caldoches' refusal to recognize Kanaks and vice-versa in *Le pays du non dit: regards sur la Nouvelle-Calédonie*: "J'ai souvent l'impression d'être une cellule saine dans un corps cancéreux. […] Les cellules atteintes par la maladie ne partagent-elles pas une origine commune avec les cellules en bonne santé?" ("I often have the impression of being a

healthy cell in a body with cancer. […] The cells afflicted with the disease, don't they share a common origin with the healthy cells? 7).

[25] Not coincidentally, the mother of Victoria/'Aiū in *Elles, terre d'enfance*, also dies of breast cancer. Spitz's narrator specifically links this tragedy to the nuclear institution: "comme de plus en plus de femmes et d'hommes de chez nous le corps rogné grignoté à son insu par un cancer du sein à une époque où s'étalaient sur les murs les posters colorés des champignons atomiques français rayonnant toutes nos morts" ("like more and more of our women and men the body trimmed snacked on without its knowledge by a breast cancer at a time when colored posters of French atomic fungi were displayed on the walls radiating all our deaths" 25). It is quite possible that Gorodé includes so many depictions of women afflicted with the same type of cancer in order to critique, like Spitz, the nuclear institutions that have inevitably affected all of the Oceanic islands.

[26] Gorodé's first collection of short stories evokes the feminine symbol of the coconut palm with the title *Utê Mûrûnû, Petite Fleur de cocotier*.

[27] It is interesting to note that the principal character, Tâdo, is not the narrator of the novel, but that it is Alo's young daughter Tâdo who says "I" in the final pages of the text. Only Alo, in the transcription of her narrative, and the Tâdo of the most recent generation, express themselves as individuals rather than as part of a group. This can perhaps be attributed to the younger generation's increased tendency to be separated from their clans. Indeed, the narrator explains that due to increased cellular phone usage and the facility of the Internet, Kanak clans are splitting up into more individualized, smaller communities, living separately and coming together less frequently in order to celebrate special occasions.

[28] In referring to the Arab Spring, Gorodé gives a "globalized" context to her narrative, recalling the efforts of the signatories of "Pour une littérature monde en français." Indeed, all three women's works take on a "global" perspective, which is particularly noticeable in the short stories of Gorodé and Jacques.

Chapter 4:

Writing the Silent Oceanic Body

In *Le Pays du non-dit: regards sur la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (*The Country of the Unsaid: Observations on New Caledonia*), Louis-José Barbançon reflects on the silence that for more than a century has characterized the relationship between the Kanak, the Caldoche, and the Zoreille (metropolitan French) communities of New Caledonia:

> …ici, le non-dit est une véritable institution, une constante…incontournable. Toute la Nouvelle-Calédonie a toujours fonctionné ainsi. Depuis toujours cette prédisposition de l'esprit à occulter les moments douloureux du passé a régné dans ce pays et sacrilège est celui qui ose soulever le voile sombre jeté sur les mémoires […] (9)
>
> …here, the unsaid is a veritable institution, an… inevitable constant. All of New Caledonia has always functioned in such a way. Since the beginning this predisposition of the spirit to hide the painful moments of the past has reigned in this country, and the person who dares to lift the somber veil thrown over the memories is considered sacrilegious […]

Barbançon observes that New Caledonian life has always functioned under a veil of silence. Young Caledonians know nothing of "real colonization": burned houses, confiscated lands, forced labor, displaced Kanaks. On the other hand, young Kanaks know nothing of the miserable life of the former prisoners and forced laborers during the *bagne*, forgetting that they, also, were displaced from their country of origin (10). To add to the complexity of the silence, the Caldoche community furtively views the Zoreilles or the "métros" as those who block their social and business opportunities for promotion (109). Barbançon cites both his mother and a Kanak interviewee as having stated, effectively, that one does not awaken the dead to revisit the past. Consequently, he acknowledges, his mother, a Caldoche, and the Kanak man both contribute to the silence

of the country and particularly to the misunderstandings of the younger generations in different ways: one does not want to know about the past, and the other does not want to bring up past clan quarrels. Thus, "Tous ont contribué au silence. Des générations plus tard, cela se traduit par une double méconnaissance" ("All have contributed to the silence. Generations later, this has been translated into a double misunderstanding" 9).

In this chapter, I will analyze the concept of silence and the *non-dit* as it appears throughout the works of Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz. Various manners of silence have been imposed on both indigenous and non-indigenous authors not only by the history of colonialism and the silencing of the indigenous voice, but also by the traditions and customs of indigenous Oceanic societies. As seen in Chapter One, the dominant European literary voice silenced those of the indigenous Tahitian and Kanak groups throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries by portraying the indigenous groups through Western perspectives. Indeed, for centuries, the European voice was the only voice that was heard arising from the Oceanic islands due to the "absence" of literature (in the form traditionally accepted in the West) from both indigenous Kanak and Tahitian cultures. As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* point out,

> The presence or absence of writing is possibly the most important element in the colonial situation. Writing does not merely introduce a communicative instrument, but also involves an entirely different and intrusive (invasive) orientation to knowledge and interpretation. (82)

In fact, writing, or the "seizing of the means of communication" (Ashcroft 82) of the colonizer, from both New Caledonia and the Society Islands, was undertaken by indigenous societies soon after the arrival of Europeans. Louise Peltzer reminds us of this fact in *Lettre à Poutaveri*, in which a young Tahitian girl, Rui, learns to write from

British missionaries and subsequently "writes back" to Bougainville, reconquering colonial history through her writing.[1]

Doubling the silence that has characterized the French speaking Oceanic region, in addition to the colonial mechanism that has, in Robert Nicole's terminology, "gagged" the Francophone Islanders, are the traditions of the indigenous Tahitian and Kanak communities that discourage speaking as individuals. While the reader might expect to see a series of dialogues and confrontations between the East and the West, between *la Métropole* and colony, and enunciations of identity that pit the excluded culture against the dominant, the silences permeating the literature and culture of the Oceanic French-speaking region are much more complex and problematic than this simplistic model. Instead, it is necessary to regard the silences that permeate the communities from the "inside out," to borrow a phrase from the collection of Vilsoni Hereniko.[2] Political leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou explained the difficulties that Melanesians face in adapting to the modern world in a conference held in France: "Nous ne sommes jamais…je ne suis jamais moi. Moi, c'est lié à l'individu. Je suis toujours quelqu'un *en référence à*…" ("We are never…I am never me. Me, that's linked to the individual. I am always someone *in reference to*…" Tjibaou 107). As Tjibaou continues, this conception of identity as always *in reference to* the community contributes to the misunderstandings between Kanaks and Europeans, because this conception mandates that the Kanak individual always speak to the community before, for example, making decisions, slowing down the decision-making process. The successful Kanak man, in contrast to the successful European, always consults his clan before making decisions, and always maintains alliances. Speaking as one is not only taboo – it is also a mark of failure, and a betrayal of the body.

As he notes: “Le corps n’est pas un principe d’individuation. Le corps est toujours la *relation*” (“The body is not a principal of individuation. The body is always *relational*” Tjibaou 106).

Similarly, Tahitian poet Flora Devatine remarks: “Tout cela, jusque-là insaisissable, parce que la pensée éclatée dispersée ne s’exprime que dans son groupe, dans sa famille, en vase clos, dans la solitude et la violence de son être et de ses corps” (“All this, until now imperceptible, because bursting, dispersed thought is not expressed but in one’s group, in one’s family, behind closed doors, in the solitude and the violence of one’s being and one’s body” Huffer 154). Devatine reveals that indigenous societies have themselves participated in the silences surrounding Oceanic literature in French, and that this silence is a corporeal experience. Chantal T. Spitz affirms in an interview with radio hostess Laurence Bacry on Radio Grenouille in Marseille that saying “I” was “unthinkable” as she was growing up in Tahiti: “…dans les petites communautés…on ne doit pas parler pour ne pas déséquilibrer la communauté. Donc, on ne parle pas de nous, on parle pas de ce qu’on ressent… donc dire ‘je’, c’était quelque chose d’impensable…” (“…in small communities…one shouldn’t speak so as not to unbalance the community. So, we don’t speak about ourselves, we don’t talk about what we feel…so saying ‘I’ was something unthinkable…”). Spitz also reminds her listeners that in the strictly hierarchized social structure of the Ancient Tahitians, only certain people were permitted free speech. Those of the higher classes and those in the Ariori society (a group of traveling dancers, singers, poets, and historians), were capable of speaking, while those in the lower or peasant classes were restricted by the traditions of their own communities. Silence has thus been a part of Oceanic island societies since well before the arrival of

Europeans, and, as we will see in this chapter, cannot always be regarded in a negative context. Indeed, all three writers in this study embrace some forms of silence, and Spitz in particular reminds us of the expressive powers of silence. In *Elles, terre d'enfance: Roman à deux encres*, the relationship between Victoria and Marie demonstrates the ability of silence to communicate, through physical touch, when words fail.

Certainly for women writers of Oceania, the subject of silence is additionally pertinent. As Tahitian novelist Titaua Peu's narrator states in *Mutismes*, "Chez nous, la première chose qu'une femme devait apprendre, après la cuisine, c'était la discrétion. Et une femme forte, digne, c'était celle qui savait commander en silence" ("The first thing that a woman from here had to learn, after cooking, was discretion. And a strong, dignified woman was one who knew how to command in silence" 86). For centuries, while silence has been accepted as the norm in *Mā'ohi* and Kanak communities, it has been particularly so for *Mā'ohi* and Kanak women. To be a woman in traditional Oceanic societies means knowing how and when to remain silent. Titaua Porcher remarks: "…l'un des traits les plus caractéristiques de la représentation des femmes telles qu'elles apparaissent dans les sociétés traditionnelles du Pacifique, c'est leur aptitude à garder le silence. Être femme, c'est savoir se taire" ("one of the most characteristic traits of the representation of women in traditional societies of the Pacific is their ability to keep silent. Being a woman is knowing to stay quiet" 143). Taking into consideration the notion that silence has been markedly ubiquitous in the lives of Oceanic women, in the final section of this chapter I will question whether the silences present in the novels of the three women writers can be considered feminist literature or *écriture féminine*, as rupturing silence is a fundamental characteristic of these genres of writing.

"When the Oral finally confronts the Written"

According to Paul Zumthor, "Le texte oralisé, dans la mesure où, par la voix qui le porte, il engage un corps, répugne plus que le texte écrit à toute perception qui le dissocierait de sa fonction sociale et de la place qu'elle lui confère dans la communauté réelle" ("The spoken text, insofar as, by the voice that carries it, it engages a body, more than the written text, repels all perceptions that would dissociate it from its social function and from the place the real community confers onto it" qtd. in *Le Roman autochtone* 27). Because oral literature has a highly specific social function in Kanak and *Mā'ohi* communities, and indeed, it does require corporeal engagement, it is often difficult for the Western or even the Caldoche reader to be able to discern its significance. As Sylvie André remarks, when legends and myths, integral elements of oral traditions, are transcribed, they often appear to belong more to the genre of children's literature, reduced to a marvelous content to which adults cannot adhere without difficulty (33). This tendency to regard transcribed oral literature as inferior to conventionally accepted "adult" literature has contributed to the silence haunting both indigenous Kanak and Tahitian literatures, as many myths and legends have been relegated to the domain of children's literature. However, indigenous authors have recently noted that the only way to preserve their oral traditions as their societies become increasingly modernized is through writing. Spitz's character Terii pronounces: "Le rêve transmis d'oralité se meure faute de mémoire et nous devons lui redonner vie par l'écriture" ("The dream passed on by oral tradition is dying because we can't remember, and we must bring it back to life through writing" *Île des rêves* 201; *Island* 156). The oral nature of the literature produced by indigenous authors in Oceania is a testament to the resilience of oral tradition that,

despite now needing transcription in order to ensure the living memory of *la parole*, gives life to the written text.[3]

The title of Gorodé's collection *Sous les cendres des conques* essentially announces the author's tragic vision of the decline of oral tradition. Taken from a line in the poem "Aubade" ("Dawn Serenade") the title reminds the Kanak reader of the traditional instrument, the conch shell, used to bring together the clan for gatherings, and of the ashes lingering from the fires that burned during the nighttime meetings, a symbol of togetherness and of the enduring nature of oral tradition. Peter Brown remarks, however, that the "ashes of the conch shells" themselves suggest that the "means of calling the clan together have been destroyed. The voice of the conch has been silenced, symbolizing the dispersion of the clans themselves and the loss of their culture" (xxiii). Throughout the collection, Gorodé continually evokes the silence imposed on her oral culture by the colonial mechanism. In the poem "Derrière les murs" ("Behind the Walls") she writes: "les paroles refoulées de/générations écrasées violentées humiliées/dans le glacial silence des caveaux coloniaux" ("the repressed words of/generations down-trodden humiliated beaten/in the icy silence of colonial tombs" 15; *Sharing* 8). In "Tant de fois" ("So Many Times") she laments the "imprisoned word" and "inert voice" (24) of her island. Speech is frequently characterized as "strangled," words "scattered" (20), vocal chords "suffocated" (39), yet through her poetry and the depictions of the violent French military, she is able to destabilize colonial narratives and oppose them with a counter narrative that effectively ruptures the silence that for more than a century prevented the Kanak community from being heard. In "Aubade" she constructs a poetic image of the continuous struggle to revive a Kanak voice, and insists that this voice has

not been rendered completely silent: “la réticence rétive du mot galvaudé/la lumière séditieuse du verbe interdit/le premier cri de l’inédit/l’amère rosée de la parole brisée” (“the restive reticence of the overused cliché/the seditious light of the forbidden verb/the first cry of the newborn word/the bitter dew of the word broken” 25; *Sharing* 16). Indeed, the qualities of orality that her works exude enable a Kanak voice to join what Édouard Glissant calls a “poetics of the universe”: “Quand l’oral confronte enfin l’écrit, les misères accumulées secrètes soudain parlent; l’individu sort du cercle étroit. Il rejoint, par-delà toute dérision vécue, un sens collectif, une poétique de l’univers, où chaque voix compte, où chaque vécu explique” (“When the oral finally confronts the written, the accumulated secret miseries suddenly speak; the individual exits the narrow circle. He rejoins, above any lived derision, a collective sense, a poetics of the universe, where every voice counts, where every lived experience explains” *Discours* 13).

Published in 1996, Gorodé’s collection of aphorisms, *Par les temps qui courent* (*Signs of the Times*), similarly addresses the notion of silence, the fragility of an oral culture, and the author’s concern with the ability and freedom to speak. The collection emphasizes poetic form as many of the words themselves display images, recalling Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, perhaps insisting on the freedom, creativity, and movement – the physical qualities – associated with *la parole*. In fact, on the title page of *Par les temps qui courent* is the aphorism “La parole est l’enfant de l’Homme” (“The word is the child of Man”). The first pages of the book of aphorisms indicate the conflicting and intricate roles that the fragile concept of silence has played throughout Kanak history. Gorodé reminds the reader that for fear of offending others, of giving a bad impression, or of clashing with custom, “Les moulins/à paroles/**ne tournent**

plus/devant/le concerné" ("the word mills/**are stilled into** silence/by/true concern" 9; *Sharing* 120). Yet the author acknowledges that from a nurturing silence, words can be born: "la parole est le fruit du silence" (The word is the fruit of silence" 6). She encourages the Kanak people to assert their voice and break out of obscurity, the last lines of the aphorism in bold font: "Le silence ne veut rien dire" ("Silence means nothing") and "On te coupe/la langue/tu as perdu/ta langue? **alors, parle!**" ("So they cut out/your tongue?/So you lost your/(native) tongue? **So then, speak!**" 7; *Sharing* 120). While she urges a rupturing of Kanak silence and a contribution of Kanak voices to the broadening Caledonian literary canon, she also warns of the dangers speaking freely may occasionally entail, most often in the political arena, as a form of eluding or of obscuring the truth: "On se **drogue** aussi/de mots/pour **oublier**/le monde" ("We also **get high**/on words/to **forget**/the world" 8; *Sharing* 120).[4] Gorodé thus reminds the reader of the precarious nature of the concept of free speech for a society whose *parole* and actions are regimented according to customary guidelines.

In *Hombo, transcription d'une biographie*, while Chantal Spitz gives a voice to the most marginal members of society, the crucial element contributing to the silent tone of the novel is, like Gorodé's *Sous les cendres des conques*, the loss of oral tradition. As Hombo's parents give him a European name in the beginning of the novel, the family is "face au silence de l'oubli" ("faced with the silence of forgetting" 15), essentially condemned to a life of silence as they choose the traditions of those who try to devalue *la parole*. The "European" tool, writing, is accused as the culprit of the silencing of Tahitian society: "… l'homme blanc leur avait appris l'immobilité des paroles figées dans les cahiers par l'écriture parce que disait-il la chose consignée reste alors que la chose parlée

s'envole […] ils avaient étouffé la créativité des paroles en les mutisant" ("the white man had taught them the immobility of words fixed in notebooks by writing, because, he said, the written word endures while the spoken word disappears […] they smothered the creativity of words by muting them" 30). Hombo's grandfather Mahine fears that his grandson will be encumbered by this silencing of Tahitian orality, and attempts to reinforce the power of tradition by reciting welcoming chants in *reo mā'ohi* when an elder member of society visits the village. Mahine also gives himself the task of handing down oral tradition: in evenings spent with his grandson, he recounts oral folklore and the legends of the origins of the Tahitian people and of the world. As Sylvie André observes in *Le Roman autochtone dans le Pacifique Sud: Penser la continuité*, the stories Mahine recounts to Hombo seem to be inexplicit citations from Teuira Henry's *Ancient Tahiti*, a history of Tahitian myths, legends, and folklore that Henry recorded from her grandfather's collected notes during his time as a reverend in Tahiti during the nineteenth century.[5] André remarks that Spitz reorganizes collected tradition in order to give it an appearance of continuity from the time of creation of the island (45). The author transcribes the myths and legends that often become trapped in children's literature in a novel intended for adult audiences and dedicated to providing a voice for the voiceless of Tahitian society: adolescents, those most far-removed from tradition. Spitz essentially gives life to the oral folklore that has, for many contemporary Tahitians, been silenced with the passage of time and the primacy of written literature, refusing to allow the Tahitian oral tradition to remain under a veil of silence.

With a similar goal in mind, Spitz juxtaposes the Tahitian oral creation story, written in *reo mā'ohi*, with the Christian creation story written in French in *L'Île des*

rêves écrasés. Furthermore, the Tahitian author's first novel chronicles the amorous relationships of three couples, and not coincidentally, the only successful couple of the novel embraces oral communication. Tematua, after returning from fighting in the First World War on behalf of France, helps Emere, the daughter of the British Charles Williams and the Tahitian Toofa, to recover the words lost in the "silence qui a entouré l'histoire de sa naissance" ("silence that has surrounded the history of her birth" 56):

> …paroles venues de l'aube du temps de leurs pères, et qu'il lui offre à elle, venue d'ailleurs. Paroles qu'elle fait siennes, avec son esprit formé à l'école étrangère, musique qu'elle laisse pénétrer son cœur et courir dans ses veines, la rendant malgré elle à son origine, demie que ses parents ont voulu plus *papa'ā* que *mā'ohi*. (57)
>
> …the words handed down from the beginning of the time of their Fathers, words he offers as a gift to her, to this woman come from afar. Words she makes her own, with her intellect formed in the foreigners' school, a music she lets into her heart, flowing through her veins, taking her back in spite of herself to her origins, a half-blood her parents tried to make more *Pap'aā* (French) than *Mā'ohi*. (*Island* 43)

La parole nourishes and protects the relationship, enveloping the couple in a type of protective cocoon that links their bodies to their land and their traditions. In contrast, the relationship of Emere and Tematua's son, Terii, with French engineer Laura Lebrun dissolves in an encumbering silence. Terii does not answer Laura's questions about his family's history or the history of his community, and is unable to articulate his love for Laura, which conflicts with his hatred of the nuclear testing with which she is manifestly associated. He views his silence as a defensive shield from the harmful words that will destroy the relationship: "Le silence s'étire et s'enroule autour de chacun pour mieux l'isoler des autres, lourd de mots que l'on ne peut dire, ces mots que l'on doit taire pour ne pas blesser" ("The silence lengthens and entwines itself around each of them, the better to isolate them from one another, a silence heavy with words that cannot be

spoken, words that must be held back so as not to wound" 153; *Island* 117). Although Terii embraces the silence that he views as protective, Laura, the incarnation of the Western world of rationalization, feels that it is essential to speak in order to exorcise her pain. The couple's inability to reconcile Terii's self-imposed silence with Laura's desire for speech foreshadows the destruction of the relationship that results from the first nuclear test.

Each love story symbolizes a moment in the history of the *Mā'ohi parole* and the transition from the colonial period, to the relatively peaceful period in the twentieth century before the nuclear testing, to modernity. Emere's Tahitian mother and British father emblematize the stereotypical ephemeral relationship of the European colonizer with the exotic Tahitian *vahine*, Emere and Tematua discover their passion through the spoken word, a metaphor for the power of Tahitian orality, while Terii's love disintegrates in silence, symbolizing the neocolonial stifling of the *Mā'ohi* voice. Yet Terii's younger sister, Tetiare, will emblematize the revitalization of the *Mā'ohi* voice through the usurpation of the colonial tool: the written text. She will write to express her discomfort with the attitudes of outsiders towards her culture, to express her personal suffering as well as that of her people, and to retrace the misunderstood history of the community. Writing, or "les mots écrits, ceux qui restent" ("written words, the ones that last" 164), provides an outlet through which Tetiare, undoubtedly the porte-parole for the author, may rupture the silences threatening the oral traditions of the community. Spitz demonstrates that orality has endured despite the dangers of erasure encountered throughout the colonial era.

In fact, the most recent novels of the indigenous authors, as well as the novels of Claudine Jacques, include the most modern elements of orality. Frequent character dialogue and poems interspersed throughout the texts lend an oral quality to the works of the Oceanic writers in this study. Specifically, Gorodé's *L'Épave* includes rap, *Kanéka* (a kind of music, similar to reggae, popular among youth in New Caledonia), and lauds the feminine orality of Lila "la conteuse" ("the storyteller"). Sylvie André likens Gorodé's *conteuse* to the celebrated figure of the *conteur antillais* in the works of Patrick Chamoiseau. For Chamoiseau (as well as for Édouard Glissant), the storyteller is the figure that most accurately emblematizes Antillean self-recognition and embodies Antillean identity – he is the porte-parole for the community. Similarly, Gorodé's Lila recounts the legends and stories anchoring the Kanak community to its past, yet her orality does not only maintain the qualities of a veritable traditional word, she also incorporates her own personal, tragic history. André remarks that Lila's discourse, as transcribed by Gorodé, possesses the very characteristics of oral storytelling: vehement exclamatory phrases, oratory amplifications, word and sound play, all of which encapsulate the creative nature of oral tradition (59). Likewise, the characters of *Graines de pin colonnaire* are considered "Amazones de la parole" ("Amazons of speech"), and frequently engage in word play or recite poems. Chantal Spitz's most recent novel, *Elles, terre d'enfance*, is written in a stream of consciousness style with very little punctuation, recalling the fluid quality of speech. Today, in the face of globalization and modernization, the passage from the strictly oral to the written has enabled those precious elements of tradition to remain present in the collective memories and in the literature of

indigenous Oceanic communities, and to serve as a basis for a textual enunciation of identity.[6]

Rupturing a Colonial-Imposed Silence

While fear of an effaced tradition of orality frequently surfaces throughout Gorodé and Spitz's texts, the two indigenous writers' militant response to the silence imposed by the French presence in Oceania also characterizes their literature. Indeed, the silence of a colonized people before they speak out is a distinctive aspect of many post-colonial literatures, including those in French-speaking regions like the Antilles or in Africa. The denunciation of the mechanism that threatened this silence is, of course, also a prevalent theme in the literatures of Oceania. In the epilogue to *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Spitz laments: "La folie de l'homme blanc frappe une nouvelle fois cette île tranquille, rendant déments ses habitants qui n'ont pas su se protéger du torrent dévastateur de la modernité occidentale" ("The white man's craziness has once again struck this quiet island, maddening its inhabitants who haven't been able to protect themselves against the devastating torrent of western modernity" 189; *Island* 147). The French military presence (as well as the brief presence of American troops during World War II), the instrument of colonial silence, frequently comes under attack in Gorodé's work. In a haunting long short story entitled "Affaire classée" ("Case Closed") in *L'Agenda* (1996), the author critiques three different stages of the European and American occupations of the island, reminding the reader that Kanak history must not remain overshadowed and silenced by the history of the various military presences. In all three episodes that comprise the short story, young officers set to depart for their overseas military commitments meet a young

woman by a banyan tree, in whose trunk appears to be carved "un couple enraciné dans la douleur" ("a couple rooted in pain" 30): the figures of a young woman and an old eel-fisherman, the young woman seated and crying, the man with his arm outstretched towards her.

In the first episode, a young officer lies dying on the field of honor at Verdun during World War I. The officer, a Caldoche set to inherit his family's estate, reflects on his encounter with the white Marguerite by the banyan tree before his departure for war, her hands covered by elegant white gloves. After two meetings, the young officer had determined that Marguerite would eventually be his wife, and signed the paperwork indicating her as his heir should anything happen to him during the war. He remembers that as his ship departed the island, he noticed Marguerite waving to him from the port, but the image conflates to that of a Kanak woman removing her gloves to reveal her hands bursting into flames, and then seating herself in the same position as the carved figure in the banyan tree. The officer brushes this off as a figment of his imagination. Years later, a journalist writing an article about the Caledonian heroes who perished in the Great War discovers that the girl to whom the young officer had left his fortune had the exact same identity as a girl who was burned alive in a fire set to her family's house during the 1878 Kanak revolt, nearly 35 years before the beginning of the war.[7]

In the second episode, an American naval captain and ethnographer meets Margaret, a military doctor from San Francisco wearing surgeon's gloves, under the banyan tree. Margaret tells him the fascinating story of being stationed at Pearl Harbor, where she lost her fiancé in the Japanese attack. Following the trajectory of the first story, the American captain ends his engagement with his American fiancée and makes

Margaret his heir before his deployment to Guadalcanal, and like the first episode, he imagines seeing Margaret as he lies burning to death on the beach. Later, his American fiancée, a journalist, discovers that the Margaret to whom the captain had left his fortune had died the previous year at Pearl Harbor.

In the final episode, the officer is a Kanak man who has returned to his island with the French army. Under the banyan tree he encounters Maguy, her hands covered in cloths, who chastises him for participating in the French military: "Si j'étais à votre place, cet uniforme me brûlerait la peau" ("If I were in your place, that uniform would burn my skin" 38). After their encounter, the parachutist signs away all of his money to Maguy, designating her as his heir before he returns that night to meet her again. Maguy agrees to marry him, and recounts a story. This *mise-en-abyme* explains the ghostly appearance of the three "Marguerites" of Gorodé's short narrative. During the early years of French occupation, a young Kanak priestess (a priestess of fire, whose body was designated as taboo to all men and all sexual activity) was seduced by a white officer, one night while the elders were not paying attention as they "nouaient l'herbe de guerre" ("were knotting the grass of war" 42), plotting the insurrection of 1878. The following day, the young priestess discovered the officer with Marguerite, a girl "from his own country" (42) under the very banyan tree where she had given herself to him. The grandfather of the priestess, an eel-fisherman, "ne trouvait plus de paroles assez réconfortantes pour effacer la honte, apaiser la colère de sa petite-fille, vaincre la haine qui l'avait ravagée jusqu'au mutisme absolu" ("could no longer find enough comforting words to erase the shame, to ease the anger of his granddaughter, to overcome the hate that had ravaged her into an absolute muteness" 43). Thus, the night of the engagement celebration between Marguerite and

the French officer, the priestess set fire to the sleeping house, burning it and everyone in it, as well as her own hands. Maguy then remarks, "Depuis cette nuit-là, l'on m'appelle Maguy Doigts-Calcinés" ("Since that night, everyone calls me Maguy Burnt-Fingers" 43). As she finishes the story Maguy touches the forehead and neck of the Kanak officer. The next morning, at the time his regiment is scheduled to depart, he is discovered dead, his forehead and neck completely burnt.

The narrative in its totality is based on the theme of violent retaliation for an offense against a Kanak woman's body. Repeatedly, the Kanak woman, rendered "absolutely mute" by her devastation, seeks revenge by murdering both her former lover and future incarnations of her lover during significant events of world history. Raylene Ramsey views the tri-episodic narrative as an "echo of Franz Fanon's theme of violent reaction against the colonial order," and remarks that the succession of mysterious deaths by burning embodies "a curious principle of an originary act of vengeance" (Ramsay 178). As Fanon declares in the section entitled "On Violence" of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. […] Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime" (3). According to Fanon, the colonized can only retaliate against the colonizer through the vehicle of violence, which becomes a "cleansing force" (51): "Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence" (44). However, at the conclusion of Gorodé's short narrative, the reader discovers that this attempt at revenge through violence, the attempt to make the colonizer hear the voice of the colonized, has been unsuccessful. The

French officer in charge of the investigation of the death of his Kanak soldier, in a hurry to return home to *la Métropole,* dismisses any inquiries into the Kanak man's death. While others insist, suggesting that it may be necessary in regards to the politics of the island to investigate the death, the officer replies: "Enfin, messieurs, c'est insensé, voyons! Vous n'allez pas vous y mettre, vous non plus […] Non, non et non. Affaire classée, j'ai dit. Je suis désolé, messieurs, ce sont les ordres. Affaire classée" ("Really, gentlemen, this is absurd! You are not going to get involved, either […] No, no, and no. Case closed, I said. I'm sorry, gentlemen, these are orders. Case closed" 44). Gorodé's text is not simply a story of violent ethnic reaction to the history of colonialism and military occupation (as Ramsay remarks, the American presence symbolizes the lures of materialism and of the European male). The story is also a reminder that the specific histories of Kanak resistance to colonialism have been obscured by the larger narratives of world wars and military heroism: the great insurrection of 1878, which ultimately lead to a devastating decline in the Kanak population, is overshadowed.[8] Tragically, the retaliatory violence is ignored. The Kanak woman's voice, trying so desperately to be heard through the methodical killing of French or American military officers, is stifled when the French military again refuses to investigate the case of the Kanak officer's murder.

Silence in the "Pays du non-dit"

While both Chantal Spitz and Déwé Gorodé's early works denounce European and American military presences and exhibit both nationalist and Marxist tendencies, the two indigenous women authors also view writing as a way to give dignity and expression

back to their communities, writing toward the Other to facilitate comprehension and encourage dialogue. Disseminating the truth, being forthright about the effects of colonialism, the delicate relationship between the Kanak and Caldoche communities after a close call with civil war, and the concerns she has with the idea of a nostalgic return to custom, are certainly preoccupations of Gorodé's oeuvre, including her collaborative work with Nicolas Kurtovitch. Hence, *Dire le vrai*, or *Speaking Truth*, attempts to navigate the perilous boundaries preventing the Caldoche and Kanak communities from facing one another and participating in a genuine dialogue. Writing, although it does not take the place of speech nor supersede the traditions of orality, proves an effective tool by which to rupture the silence and face her own fears, as well as those of the community, of being misunderstood and misrepresented, especially during the period immediately preceding and following *les Evénéments*. As she writes in "la peur" ("fear") Kanaks have felt "La peur de souffrir/la peur de dire/la peur d'écrire/la peur d'oser" ("fear of suffering/fear of saying/fear of writing/fear of daring" 46; *Sharing* 84), yet she encourages writing despite a fear that permeates the body: "la peur qui ne veut pas dire son nom/la peur au ventre/la peur au cœur/la peur au corps" ("fear that will not say its name/fear in the belly/fear in the heart/fear in the body" 47; *Sharing* 85). While she fears the potential reaction of the Kanak community to this collaborative approach she takes with the Caldoche Kurtovitch, she nevertheless writes in order to make known what others have been afraid to reveal. In "écrire" ("writing") she writes: "écrire/une île/un pays/où les êtres étaient/où les êtres étaient sans être/où les êtres sont sans être/sans dire/sans vie/sans voie/sans voix/sous la chape de/silence/et en coupe réglée de/la pensée

unique" ("writing/an island/a land/where beings once were/where beings were without being/where beings are without being/speechless/lifeless /visionless/voiceless/beneath the heavy cloak/of silence/clear felled/by oneness of thought/by thought of oneness" 10; *Sharing* 48). Gorodé gives herself the mission of breaking this fear-instilled silence by writing and transcribing the land, whose voice speaks in the place of man: "écrire/une île/un pays/où/la terre/et/la pierre/parlent/à la place de l'être/à la place de l'homme/à la place de la femme/pour dire/la place de l'enfant/à/naître" ("writing/an island/a land/where/earth and/stone speak/in the place of beings/in the place of man/in the place of woman/so that they may speak/the place of the child/who is/to be/born" 11; *Sharing* 49). Significantly, the author acknowledges that she must write to give existence to the Kanak people, their oral traditions not having proven a powerful enough means by which to assert their voice and identity in a world where writing has been privileged over the spoken word. Yet, she equates writing with speech when she questions in another poem in the same collection entitled "l'autre" ("the other"): "mais que serait l'autre/que serait l'humain/sans signe/sans langue/parlée ou écrite?/que serait l'homme/sans parole?" ("but what would the other be/what would a human be/without signs/without language/spoken or written?/what would man be/without words?" 19; *Sharing* 58). In effect, through writing, she extends an olive branch, and accepts that extended to her by Kurtovitch, who apologizes on behalf of the Caledonian community: "En tout premier lieu/accorde-nous/ton pardon/d'avoir été/inhumain/d'avoir été/en ne songeant qu'à avoir/votre terre" ("Firstly/give us/your pardon/for having been/inhuman/for having been/thinking of nothing but to have/ your land" 32).

The poem after which the collection takes its name, "dire le vrai," addresses the silence of the Kanak people, as not only an effect of colonialism, but also as something which has ensued from the misunderstandings between the Kanak, the Caldoche, and the Zoreille communities. The author insists upon voicing the truth and disallowing others from speaking for her either as an individual or on the part of the Kanak community. She speaks the truth to those who have been unwilling to listen: "au béton d'un regard/au clos des yeux fermés/au sort du mauvais œil/au masque des œillères" ("to the armoured gaze/to the blank stare of closed lids/to the fatality of the evil-eye/to the blinkered masque" (66; *Sharing* 108). Gorodé's ultimate goal, with this poem, is to lift the veils, both imposed by others and self-imposed, to liberate a Kanak voice so that people can speak for themselves, rather than be spoken for: "casser la voix des/on parle pour toi" (to break the voices of the/we're speaking for you, mates" (66; *Sharing* 108). Her intention is to reinsert a Kanak voice and presence in a New Caledonia where she fears remaining silent would "pour/mine de rien/nous/réduire à rien" ("to/ casually/reduce us/to nothing" (67; *Sharing* 109).

As Gorodé attempts to rupture the silences between the Kanak and Caldoche communities, Claudine Jacques's first collection of short stories, published in 1996, just two years before the signing of the Nouméa Accords, is aptly named *Nos Silences sont si fragiles*. Composed of seven short narratives, the collection reveals the author's capacity to perceive the world from its secret, hidden spaces, and that indeed, in New Caledonia, silence is fragile and when broken can easily lead to either catharsis – or, more often, catastrophe. The titles of several of the stories are themselves indications that the collection is an attempt to reveal the muted stories that permeate the histories of New

Caledonia, especially when these silences surround the woman's body. "L'alibi," "La faute," and "Secrets amers," as discussed in Chapter Two, all uncover the secrets of rapes or violent relationships, and reveal the extent to which the community becomes complicit in the silence surrounding violence and the woman's body. In "L'alibi," Joseph unknowingly covers up his friend Marco's rape of a young girl, and is thus forced to recognize, along with the reader, that he has contributed to the unspeakable crime, while in "Secrets amers," the silence surrounding Tomass's brutal murder of his wife is broken, providing a catalyst for the murder of his own son.

In "La faute," the entire community of Caledonians is shrouded in silence, unwilling or perhaps simply unable to articulate the dangers that lay hidden for women living alone in the bush. Indeed, at the opening of the narrative, upon seeing the sixteen-year-old Nana grocery shopping with her mother, an elderly man wants to warn her to be careful, but cannot find the words: "Mais lui-même ne comprend pas les pensées qui se bousculent dans sa tête, il ne saurait formuler clairement l'impression terrible qui lui serre le cœur à chaque fois qu'il l'aperçoit" ("But he himself does not understand the thoughts that rush into his head, he wouldn't know how to clearly formulate the terrible impression that grips his heart every time he sees her" 38). When Ron sees Nana's mother, Léa, he is determined to pursue her, while his cousin Camille realizes that bringing Ron and his brother to help prevent the killing of their herds may prove disastrous: "La venue de Ronald et de Nelson ne va-t-elle pas ranimer la souffrance, bouleverser l'ordre établi et rompre le silence installé autour de leur passé?" ("Won't the arrival of Ronald and Nelson revive the suffering, overturn the established order and break the silence installed around the past?" 41). As Camille predicts, the brothers' presence does rupture the

silence that has kept their family intact and has rendered Léa "sauvage et exigeante" ("asocial and austere" 58). This rupture, in fact, forces Léa to move Nana and herself to Nouméa. In this manner, she is able to preserve a protective silence enabling the two women to move on, while the ruptured silence in Ronald and Nelson's family destroys any possibility of reconciliation with the woman who was raped by their father.

Family secrets are indeed given a starring role in Claudine Jacques's short stories and novels. In "Mensonges" ("Lies"), a story in *La Chasse et autres nouvelles*, eleven-year-old Alicia lies in order to disentangle the secrets of her past from the silences of her family, only to discover that her family has been lying to her, even to the point of changing her name. As she convinces her grandmother to reveal the truth, she reflects on the lies surrounding her:

> Toutes ces femmes qui l'entourent de leur ombre menteuse lui ouvrent autant de voies mystérieuses, de profondeurs insondables où sa force neuve s'épuise et se perd dans un océan de doutes et de malheur. Ne pas savoir pour être préservé, disait sa grand-mère tout à l'heure. Mais alors ce serait ne vivre qu'à moitié, avec le sentiment d'avoir oublié une partie de soi ailleurs. (165)
>
> All these women who surround her with their lying shadow open up so many mysterious paths, inscrutable depths where her new strength empties and loses itself in an ocean of doubt and misfortune. To not know to be preserved, said her grandmother earlier. But then that would be like half living, with the sense of having forgotten a part of oneself elsewhere.

Recognizing that Alicia is at the precipice of discovering the truth regardless of her participation in this discovery, her grandmother reveals to her that her mother was a Kanak woman, a woman "not from their world" (162). As Béniéla Houmbouay notes in the introduction to Jacques's third collection of short narratives, *C'est pas la faute de la lune* (*It's Not the Moon's Fault*) the author provokes a reflection for her New Caledonian readers, and in writing stories of lies, of rumors, she helps to "rendre possible le dialogue

dont les communautés humaines du Territoire ont tant besoin, pour s'ouvrir les unes aux autres et pour s'accueillir les unes et les autres" ("make possible the dialogue of which the human communities of the territory have such need, to open up to each other and to accept one another" 8).[9]

Déwé Gorodé recounts a similar story of secret ancestry in *Graines de pin colonnaire*. An orphaned Estella ("Tella") gets "adopted" by a Kanak family, but never understands why many of the adults refer to her as "sans famille car" ("without family because" 88). At the end of her narrative, when she meets with Eddy, a former lover with whom marriage would have been impossible, he reveals to her that she is the daughter of an American soldier and a *popwaalé* (white woman) who died in childbirth. Because Kanaks did not yet have French citizenship under the *régime de l'indigénat* at the time the couple was trying to adopt her, they were not legally able to do so, especially since Tella was half *popwaalé*, and thus made an arrangement with the Catholic head of the orphanage to illegitimately adopt her. Eddy states: "En fait, tous ces vieux étaient de mèche, et nous, on n'en savait rien" ("In fact, all the elders were in on it, and us, we didn't know anything" 120). Gorodé's fictional narrative uncovers many of the silenced narratives of the colonial period, and reveals to what extent both populations on the island were complicit in this silence. For Jacques and Gorodé, recovering hidden stories enables their characters to reconstruct their past, and rupture the silence prohibiting the Caledonian communities, be they of European or of Melanesian (or both) descent, from achieving a true, constructive dialogue.

In *Les Cœurs barbelés*, Jacques further explores and exposes the intricate balance between a destructive silence and a silence that protects alluded to in the stories of *Nos*

silences sont si fragiles. The novel attempts to retrieve what has been lost from the historical silence and obscurity that prevents the different classes and ethnicities in New Caledonia from working together to form a common destiny during the years leading up to the Matignon Accords. Jacques demonstrates that the inability to articulate historical silences very nearly entails a civil war, a possibility that many Caledonians, both Kanak and Caldoche, justifiably feared during the climax of *les Evénéments*, the traumatic Ouvéa Affair.[10] The free verse that opens the novel reveals the puzzle that torments the characters: "Le paradoxe est là, infernal et subtil. Faut-il s'ouvrir ou se fermer? Se taire ou parler? Se livrer ou s'armer? Espérer seulement?" ("The paradox is there, infernal and subtle. Should one open up or shut down? Stay quiet or speak? Confide or arm oneself? Only hope?" 9). Throughout the narrative, the author includes pertinent authentic speeches and poems in italicized text, all which reveal the extent to which the country is indeed a "pays du non-dit" – these excerpts attempt a discussion, yet as revealed through the failed relationship between the two main characters, a dialogue in which each voice is heard and understood is ever elusive. The excerpt from Jean-Marie Tjibaou's opening speech for the festival *Mélanesia 2000* appears as Sery agrees to begin his lifelong engagement in the Kanak independence debate: "La non-reconnaissance qui crée l'insignifiance et l'absence de dialogue culturel ne peut amener qu'au suicide ou à la révolte" ("The non-recognition that creates insignificance and the absence of cultural dialogue cannot but bring us to suicide or to revolt" 43). Tjibaou warns against the debilitating silence that has transformed into an absence, yet Sery remains unable to hear the Caldoche voice. The author provides a textual space for this voice, nevertheless, as the (fictional) letters of former prisoners and forced workers accompany the Kanak

voices interspersed throughout the novel in italicized excerpts, uncovering the sequestered voices in the history of the former penal colony.

The Caldoche community in the narrative of *Les Cœurs barbelés* balances on a tightrope of protective and destructive silence. When Malou arrives in the bush to visit her parents (she lives with her grandmother in Nouméa while completing her schooling and training to become a teacher), she remembers that with the change in climate from Nouméa to the bush, there is also a change in conventions, and one must nourish and respect the silence in order to penetrate it:

> Ici, en brousse, on se tait, on attend.
> Il faut saisir l'instant des confidences et des aveux. Rare. Sentir le problème, renifler le non-dit, voir l'inexprimable, deviner l'inexplicable. Ne pas se tromper de silence. Être à l'écoute de mots qui ne seront jamais prononcés. Entendre l'inaudible. Respecter le temps du secret et celui de la parole. (69)
>
> Here, in the bush, you stay quiet, you wait.
> You have to seize the instant of confidences and confessions. Rare. Feel the problem, sniff out the unsaid, see the inexpressible, guess the inexplicable. Don't mistake the silence. Be ready to hear words that will never be pronounced. Hear the inaudible. Respect the time for secrets and the time for speech.

Malou's family is in fact shrouded in silence, isolated in a home full of secrets and misreadings. Malou recognizes that she must not expect to be enveloped in speech and explanations, as she is with her grandmother in Nouméa, and accepts silence as a part of life in the bush.[11] The reader realizes that the silence permeates even deeper into the history of Malou's family, as her father swears to her mother that he will never let his children know that their ancestor was a violent prisoner, and her brother fears confiding that his girlfriend is part Kanak. Although she never uncovers the violent history of her ancestry, Malou soon becomes overwhelmed by the silence she earlier accepted: "Il n'y a

pas de paix dans ce mutisme obscure où rodent les secrets, où flâne l'inquiétude, où tournoient les pourquoi, les comment" ("There is no peace in this obscure muteness, where secrets roam, where worries wander, where the whys and hows swirl around" 87), and, in a temporary escape from the oppressive silence when ambling alone through the bush, she willingly loses her virginity to a stranger.

Although Malou's open-mindedness and naiveté about the racial tensions permeating the island are revealed when she insinuates to her brother that the heart does not have a color (104) when encouraging him to disclose the truth of his relationship to his parents, she eventually realizes that maintaining a mixed relationship during the 1980s in New Caledonia demands living with a silence that appears impermeable. She recognizes that although she and Sery speak French to one another, they do not speak the same language, the same words have different meanings; the implications of Sery's speech are inaccessible to her: "Et pire encore lorsque l'autre possède une langue interdite derrière celle de l'échange. Toute cette ombre complexe au revers des mots parlés, ce relief derrière l'écriture, cette pensée taboue, impénétrable, héritée des profondeurs du temps" ("And even worse when the other possesses a prohibited language behind that of exchange. All this complex shadow behind spoken words, this context behind writing, this taboo thought, impenetrable, inherited from the depths of time" 212). While he tries to inform her about his Kanak customs, Sery cannot help but hide all of the weaknesses and the deviations of his culture from Malou: "Il n'avait voulu lui montrer que les bons côtés, ceux qui honorent un peuple et s'était enfoncé dans le mensonge par omission. Il en avait un peu honte, mais moins que s'il eût dû avouer cette vérité-là" ("He wanted to show her only the good sides, those that honored a people, and sank into a lie

by omission. He was a little ashamed of it, but less than if he had had to confess that truth" 173). In fact, Sery never fully opens himself to Malou, and after ending their relationship, even with a child between them, maintains the thought that "Un couple mixte…il y a un fossé entre nous…" ("A mixed couple…there is a gulf between us…" 278). Yet the mutual Kanak friend of Sery and Malou brings him to his senses, when after the signing of the Matignon Accords Sery still insists that the silence ensuing from the cultural gap cannot be bridged. Nylane lectures him:

> - Je ne veux pas t'écouter ni te suivre sur ce chemin. A l'heure de la paix, quand les hommes de bonne volonté se serrent la main et inventent, malgré les différences, un avenir multiracial, toi Sery, tu restes prisonnier de tes *a priori* et de tes complexes…tu nous rabâches l'histoire du colonialisme…tu es…tu es…
> Elle martelait les syllabes en haussant la voix :
> - Ré-tro-gra-de. (278)
>
> - I don't want to hear you nor follow you down this path. At the time of peace, when men of goodwill shake hands and invent, despite the differences, a multiracial future, you Sery, you remain a prisoner of your *a prioris* and your complexes…you're repeating the history of colonialism for us…you are…you are…
> She hammered out the syllables while raising her voice:
> - Re-tro-gra-de.

Malou leaves Lifou, where she was living and working in order to be close to Sery and their son Timothy, sadly leaving her son to be raised by Sery and his clan. The now repentant Sery arrives at her home, only to find a letter informing him that one day, a "day of indifference" (282), they might be able to forgive one another. Dominique Jouve remarks that this sad conclusion to a novel written retrospectively (between 1997 and 1998, just before the Nouméa Accords) reveals a pessimistic Claudine Jacques, as the characters remain moulded by their histories and fractured by their individual experiences, unable to cross the metaphorical barbed wire that separates Kanak and

Caldoches, just as barbed wire sets the boundaries between the conquered "stations" and the Kanak land ("Conférence").

Écriture féminine? Women Rupturing Silence

While all of the women writers of this project attack the silences that repress identity, and attempt to engage in an open dialogue permitting the voices of the various ethnic groups in Oceania to be heard, it is pertinent to this study to question whether their attempts at dialogue also emphasize a space for the woman's voice in particular. One of the characteristics of women's literature, be it feminist literature or *écriture féminine*, is the insistence on the rupturing of a silence imposed by the phallocentric parameters around language.[12]As Hélène Cixous maintains in *Le Rire de la Méduse*, because women have always been conceptualized through the eyes of men, they must write in order to liberate a unique, feminine voice. Although Cixous acknowledges that women cannot be categorically defined, similar to Luce Irigaray's assertions in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, she urges women to write in a collective context in order to rupture the boundaries erected by a masculine discourse. Both Cixous and Irigaray insist that women cannot be written about without the insertion of the woman's voice itself, and any discourse that excludes the woman's voice is in fact a discourse of silence, a censuring of the woman's voice as well as her body. Cixous parallels the woman's voice and her body: "À censurer le corps on censure du meme coup le souffle, la parole" ("In censuring the body once censures at the same time breath, the voice" 43). For Cixous, writing is a corporeal exertion, and helps women to realize their voices: "En vérité, elle matérialise charnellement ce qu'elle pense, elle le signifie avec son corps" ("In truth, she physically

materializes that which she thinks, she signifies it with her body" 44). For Béatrice Didier, *l'écriture féminine* is also a literature of the body, "une écriture du Dedans: l'intérieur du corps, l'intérieur de la maison" ("a writing of the Inside: the interior of the body, the interior of the home" 37). The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to the question of whether the writings of Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz can be viewed as an Oceanic *écriture féminine*, a type of writing that ruptures the silence to which women have been subjected with regard to their bodies and minds.

For Déwé Gorodé, the endeavor to rupture the silence of Kanak women in particular is one of her most important objectives throughout her works and in her life as a Kanak woman. In 1982, Gorodé participated in the creation of the "Groupe de femmes kanakes exploitées en lutte" ("Group of exploited Kanak women in struggle"), an autonomous, feminist independence group composed of approximately 60 Kanak women. The objective of the GFKEL was to expose and denounce the practice of collective rapes, but the group was quickly sidelined by the FLNKS and ended its activities in 1986. Despite the failure of the GFKEL, a foundation was created for a strong Kanak woman's voice to emerge during the 1980s and to continually resonate throughout the following three decades. Although she has stated that she does not identify with the feminist movement, as the movement in the 1970s was a principally Western endeavor, Gorodé's novels specifically address the Kanak woman's condition.[13]

As seen in the second chapter of this project, Gorodé consistently denounces the sexual crimes against Kanak women that have contributed to their fear of speaking out. In *L'Épave*, for instance, the outspoken Lila, who fearlessly denounces the sexual predation that otherwise remains an unspeakable crime, is violently raped and murdered for having

dared to rupture the silence surrounding rape and domestic violence. In the third chapter of the novel, entitled "Lila," Tom and Léna visit Lila's body in the morgue the night before the funeral. Tom remembers Lila's lengthy tirade, in which she lauds Kanaky, the écoles populaires kanaks, and the Kanak struggle for independence, but in which she also critiques those who essentially silence Kanak women, thinking they cannot speak for themselves. She notes in the beginning of her diatribe that she reads the newspaper "pour m'informer, mais aussi pour fermer leur gueule à tous les connards qui pensent qu'on ne pense pas parce qu'on est une femme kanak malfamée!" ("to be informed, but also to shut the mouths of the assholes who think that I don't think because I'm a seedy Kanak woman" 63). She insists: "les hommes, ils ont toujours tout eu. À commencer par la parole" ("men, they've always had everything. Beginning with the word" 70), yet she comments that her penchant for storytelling comes from her experience during the 1980s, when she spent time in her *tribu* learning from older women storytellers, and that now she has become a storyteller "parce que c'est ma manière à moi d'être debout" ("because it's my way of standing tall" 68).

Because she exposes the violence prevalent within the Kanak community and speaks what thus far no one has been willing to enunciate, Lila is raped and murdered, left strangled in the ocean. The farewell poem that accompanies her burial, a collaborative work between all of Lila's friends, is in fact a eulogy to her reputation as a symbol of a specifically feminine orality, although it does question why the other communities on the island tend not to see or hear the excluded Kanak voices: "pourquoi ici/les exclus/sont tous/bruns ou noirs" ("why here/are the excluded/always/ brown or black" 83). The section entitled "Lila's epitaph" expresses the laments of her solitary,

impoverished life and brutal death: “oralité/feminine/de femme/mal famée/affamée” (“feminine/orality/of a disreputable/hungry/woman” 83). Her friends laud her outspokenness: “Lila/fleur/d’oralité” (“Lila/flower/of orality” 83) and wish that through the recantation of stories, justice will be done: “et d’une histoire/à l’autre/que justice/soit faite/à la fin” (“and from one story/to another/that justice/be done/in the end” 83). Despite her friends’ wishes to discover the culprits and avenge Lila’s life, the female storyteller’s voice is rendered eternally silent, as well as are the voices of the other principal female characters of the novel. The conclusion of Gorodé’s *L’Épave* demonstrates the extent to which the female characters are submerged in silence, completely submitted to men and unable to speak beyond the constraints of both Kanak and Christian traditions. Gorodé also reveals the dissatisfaction of many Kanak women concerning the system of retribution in the clans, as until the 1990s cases of rape and incest were not heard in the Caledonian court system, but rather addressed internally. This further marginalized Kanak women’s voices, because the culprits of rape and domestic violence in Kanak clans faced, rather than time in prison, a series of beatings from which they could easily recover.[14] Gorodé thus states through the silencing of the woman’s voice in *L’Épave*, that as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously asserts, “the subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak 104). Indeed, the ironic citation taken from Sophocles’s *Ajax* on the dedication page of the novel announces the theme of the novel: “La parure des femmes, c’est le silence” (“Silence is an ornament for women” 5).[15]

While effectively silenced in her first novel, Gorodé’s female characters do break out of their positions as subalterns and are able to speak in her more recent two novels, *Graines de pin colonnaire* and *Tâdo, Tâdo, wée! ou “No more baby.”* As the main

characters of *Graines de pin colonnaire* are in fact all women, and considered "les Amazones de la parole" ("Amazons of Speech"), Gorodé's novel is evidence of a continued optimism and a determination to insert a resilient Kanak woman's voice into the growing literature of New Caledonia. Like in the novella "Ûte Mûrûnû, petite fleur de cocotier," in *Graines de pin colonnaire* men make ephemeral appearances in the lives of the female characters, while the women maintain lasting, lifelong friendships and inscribe the stories of their lives through letters and journal writing. Her female characters are committed to rupturing the silences of the community. Tany insists that Tella must not be afraid to live her "vraie vie" ("real life" 114), and that in order to face her fears she must confront them with speech: "il faut parler avant, il faut combler le silence complice et chanter dans le noir pour évacuer la peur et la confrontation qui, on le sait, peuvent mener à la catastrophe" ("you have to speak beforehand, you have to fill in the complicit silence and sing in the night to evacuate the fear and the confrontation, that, as we know, can lead to catastrophe" 116).

Likewise, in *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé! ou "No more baby,"* Tâdo and many of the women of her family are unafraid of speaking out and of participating in politics. As she reflects on her speech at the political rally discussed in the third chapter of this project, where she encourages other women to speak out, "même en tremblant" ("even if trembling" 87) against the violence of men, Tâdo realizes that liberating her words feels something like giving birth: "Elle compare les sentiments de libération, de renaissance et de renouvellement de soi qui coulent en elle depuis cette prise de parole, à ce que doit être la délivrance de l'accouchement pour les mères" ("She compares the feelings of liberation, of birth and of self-renewal that run in her veins since this seizure of speech, to those

which new mothers must feel after having given birth" 90-91). It is in this moment that Tâdo recognizes her fervor for speaking publicly: "Ce feu, c'est celui de la parole trop longtemps confisquée et qui lui brulait les entrailles depuis plus longtemps encore" ("This fire, it's that of a too-long confiscated speech that has burned her insides for an even longer time" 91). Her desire to speak is, significantly, a corporeal sensation, similar to that described by Cixous and Didier. Gorodé's novel, through the revolutionary figure of Tâdo, recounts the period during *les Evénéments* that effectively proved a period of political enlightenment for women, in which they began bridging the gender gap preventing them from participating in discussions: "Elles pénètrent ensemble, pour la première fois, la sphère politique dévolue aux hommes porteurs de la parole du clan, de la case et du pays" ("Together, for the first time, they penetrated the political sphere meant only for the male speakers of the clan, of the household, and of the country" 186). In fact, the 2012 novel traces both the evolution of Kanak resistance and more particularly, the advancement of Kanak women's participation in customary as well as political activities. The novel essentially recapitulates the process of the rupturing of Kanak women's silence as seen through the Kanak woman's perspective, and concludes in an era, as shown through the laudatory explanations of the Arab Spring, in which the woman's voice and the voices of the formerly marginalized, are free. Gorodé's second and third novels embrace a much more positive outlook towards the woman's condition in Kanak societies than her first novel, and provide an outlet for a more assertive Kanak woman's voice.

Similarly, while Jacques's *Les Cœurs barbelés* gives voices to both the Caldoche and Kanak communities, men as well as women, it is important to note that although the discourse and political actions of the men of the novel lead to the signing of the Matignon

Accords, it is the women whose actions speak loudly to end the silence separating the ethnic communities. Indeed, Sery's mother insists that Malou live with them when she finds out she is pregnant with Sery's son. Although she rejected the white woman at first, she remarks: "Maintenant l'enfant a effacé la honte" ("Now the child has erased the shame" 237). As a "femme encanaquée" ("en-Kanaked woman" 239), Malou is accepted by the women of the clan, the figures of the novel who truly embrace the Other community. Claudine Jacques often lays the burden of rupturing the silences fracturing the communities on the shoulders of women. In *L'Âge du perroquet-banane*, for example, the character through whose perspective the history is told is a woman, it is she who recounts the stories anchoring the sages and the children to their memories, and it is she who is willing to sacrifice her life at the end of the novel, insisting that she will colonize the "mana" of the cannibal man in order to ensure an informed future for the territory.[16] In *Nouméa mangrove*, Emma's voice will live on in her manuscript, sent to help other battered women at the conclusion of the novel. Jacques's novels, like those of Gorodé, employ the woman's voice to bear witness to both the silencing of an ethnic voice and the oppression of the woman's voice, and reconstruct the fractured histories of the Kanak and Caledonian communities through a female perspective. As her narratives of rape indicate, however, despite the progress made during the past several decades of political negotiations and peace agreements, rupturing the silence regarding women's bodies still remains a challenge.

Jacques's second novel, *L'Homme-lézard* (*The Lizard Man*) published in 2002, navigates the silence surrounding the woman's body, and like Spitz's *Hombo*, employs adolescents as the representatives of a repressed history. Set a little more than a decade

after the conclusion of her first novel, the drama surrounds the investigation into a murder, and adopts the characteristics of a detective novel, as the narration following the various characters determines the information to which the reader is privy. The third-person omniscient narrator follows the crossing paths of an array of tragic characters. "Nassirah la silencieuse" ("Nassirah the Silent") was repeatedly raped and beaten by her father, and lives with the in-and-out-of-jail Erwann and his adoptive grandmother. Enok, a drug-addicted artist, lives in a squat and creates the terrifying sculpture after which the novel is named.[17] Mandela, Enok's younger sister, must postpone her education to help her indigent brother by working in a snack-bar, and the three-faced metis Siwel-Lewis-Tash, drug-dealer, proprietor, and seducer of Mandela, commits suicide by the conclusion of the novel. Truly, the characters evoke the pity and compassion of the reader, since they are, as Dominique Jouve remarks, the epitome of Victor Hugo's "misérables" ("Conférence").

When following Nassirah, the narration consistently emphasizes the impossibility of enunciation that the victim of rape and incest elicits. She is elusive, both to herself and especially around the male characters. Enok must tell himself that he will never be Nassirah's lover because "il y a dans la façon d'être de Nassirah quelque chose qui s'holocauste et se sacrifie" ("there is something about Nassirah's way of being that holocausts itself, sacrifices itself" 161). Upon discovering that her father has been murdered, she visits the location at which he was found, and realizes while contemplating which plastic flowers to place there, "elle n'avait pas su choisir la couleur de son deuil" ("she didn't know how to choose the color of her mourning" 70). Unable to choose the color of her mourning, she is only able to verbalize what happened to her to the young,

innocent Mandela. The narrator follows Nassirah's thoughts after she surprises herself with her unprompted revelation:

> - Il me violait.
> Le mot glissa de sa bouche comme un serpent qu'elle aurait recraché, il prit toute sa réalité puis s'enfuit dans l'herbe. Elle le prononçait enfin ce mot maudit, ce mot tabou qu'elle gardait au fond de son ventre. Elle osait en parler à Mandela qui lui saisit les mains.
> - Je suis souillée, tu comprends, tachée. (99)
>
> - He was raping me.
> The word slithered out of her mouth like a snake that she would have spit out, it materialized and then escaped into the grass. She finally pronounced this cursed word, this taboo word that she had been keeping at the pit of her stomach. She ventured to speak about it to Mandela, who grasped her hands.
> - I'm soiled, you understand, stained.

While she has difficulty expressing her tragic past and negotiating her feelings of love and hate for her incestuous father, Nassirah is finally able to connect, only physically, with Enok. In Chapter XXVI, she enters his house in the shantytown while he lays, unconscious, detoxifying from a night of heavy drinking and drugs. Nassirah undresses and lies with Enok, becoming aroused by the lack of threat in his limp, sleeping member: "Il n'y avait aucune agressivité dans cette virilité-là. Ni horreur" ("There was no aggressiveness in this virility. Nor horror" 185).[18] The silent Nassirah is attracted by Enok's similar inability to speak, and remains with him (until she believes him to be the murderer of her father) after he has been shot and paralyzed from the waist down in an attempt to escape escalating ethnic tensions during the Saint-Louis and Ave Maria confrontations, in which his sister Mandela is accidentally murdered.[19] In fact, this accident temporarily impairs Enok's speech, and as Lusia, the woman who eventually marries Enok, remarks, Nassirah seems only to desire Enok when he is silent, handicapped, as opposed to healthy: "On dirait que c'est mieux ainsi. Qu'elle préfère…"

("It seems like it's better this way. That she prefers it…" 212). As Lewis-Siwel-Tash, the character who is revealed to be the murderer of Nassirah's father at the conclusion of the novel, remarks, for the characters of *L'Homme-lézard*, "C'est facile de se réfugier dans le silence" ("It's easy to seek refuge in silence" 213).[20]

While Nassirah seeks shelter in silence, the efforts of Mandela to combat the silence surrounding masculine violence remain ineffective in Jacques's tragic representation of the lives of the forgotten, those marginal members of Caledonian society inhabiting the squats of Nouméa. Mandela, who joins a group of Kanak women attempting to reduce male alcoholism, drug addiction, and violence, and desires to make her voice heard, becomes the sacrificial lamb of the novel, a promising figure of female empowerment silenced. Indeed, all of the characters are miserable, tragic figures silenced by their marginal positions in society. Dominique Jouve remarks: "la romancière […] pointe du doigt le refoulé, les misères que chacun profère oublier ou passer sous silence" ("the novelist […] points out the repressed, the miseries that everyone professes to forget or to pass under silence," "Conférence" n.p.). However, bringing characters representative of the marginalized youth of New Caledonia to the forefront of the novel gives voice to those very characters, and ruptures the silence of the often forgotten members of the diverse, dynamic community. Although the majority of Jacques's novel may represent a tragic present, Enok and Lusia are able to conceive a child before he spends the remainder of his life paralyzed and in prison. Significantly, the couple names their girl Nassidéla. A combination of the names of the silent Nassirah and the suppressed Mandela, this child represents a hope for the future of the woman's voice in New Caledonia.

In contrast to Déwé Gorodé and similar to Claudine Jacques, Chantal T. Spitz employs characters of both sexes as the principal characters of her novels. In *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Emere, Tematua, Terii, and Laura are heroes of the novel, in *Hombo*, the principal characters and figures of orality are male, and in *Elles, terres d'enfance*, the central characters are all women, which is, as Spitz comments in her interview with Laurence Bacry, an important added complication to her most recent novel. However, the only characters who take up the pen in Spitz's works are female characters: Laura Lebrun and Tetiare in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, and Victoria and her nanny in *Elles, terres d'enfance*. Several critics have questioned whether feminism is a pertinent element to her first novel, as it principally focuses on the question of identity and the need for a Tahitian voice in the Francophone canon. Lise Briec observes that while Toofa and Charles Williams do engage in the stereotypical relationship fetishized by writers such as Loti and Gauguin, the Tahitian woman utilizes her position as the mother of a half white child in order to ascend the social ranks. Spitz employs this relationship as a tool by which to subvert the stereotypical colonial narrative. In contrast to the Rarahu of Loti's narrative, Toofa does not appear as a naïve, unbalanced girl, but rather a determined, independent, and ambitious young woman (Briec 96). Emere follows in her mother's footsteps of opposing social conventions by refusing to marry in order to ascend the social ranks and instead marries a native Tahitian. Laura Lebrun is a divorced French woman, working alongside and commanding men in a field that rarely saw women engineers in the 1970s. Significantly, the novel concludes with the decision of Tetiare to inscribe the traditions and oral narratives in writing, a powerful female figure determined to rupture the silence preventing the world from truly seeing the Tahitian community. Indeed, Laura and

Tetiare are the only representatives of writers in the novel, both independent women determined to make a difference in their respective societies. Thus, *L'Île des rêves écrasés* can be considered to support many of the elements of a feminist agenda, all within the context of the primary objective of the novel, asserting a specifically Tahitian identity.

Elles, terre d'enfance: Roman à deux encres, however, is an intimate portrayal of a young woman's relationship to the women in her life, all of whom contribute to her sense of identity, of self-knowledge, and of self-worth. Spitz's most recent, more psychological and more spirally written novel, adopts the perspectives of two female narrators who dare to say "je" ("I"): a young "mixed" girl, Victoria, whose parents raise her in a "Western" manner and who speaks only French, and Victoria's nanny, Marie, who speaks only Tahitian and gives Victoria, whom she calls "'Aiū," a glimpse into the indigenous Tahitian world. Indeed, it is literally a novel in "two inks." Marie's short chapters, always entitled 'Aiū, are typographically juxtaposed to the longer chapters of Victoria in a brown ink and a distinct font. Her sentences are staccato, yet they follow a linear trajectory and make use of traditional French punctuation, while Victoria's numbered and titled chapters are written in black ink, her syntax characterized by long, stream-of-consciousness sentences and a subversive absence of punctuation. The different styles and "inks" with which each woman writes emblematize the silence enveloping their relationship: "nous restions à la lisière des mots" ("we stayed on the edge of words" 95). Yet they find communication possible in corporeal contact: "Marie me touchait dans une maison où les corps cohabitaient se croisaient s'éludaient" ("Marie touched me in a house where bodies cohabitated, crossed each other, eluded each other"

96). As Victoria's relationship with Marie is characterized by a nurturing, communicative, albeit involuntary silence, the silence characterizing her relationship with the "elles," her mother and her grandmother, is an imposed one, as they insist that women in their family do not cry, they remain *debout* (upright), they do not complain: "J'ai vite appris à ne pas pleurer pas me plaindre. J'ai vite appris le silence" ("I quickly learned not to cry not to complain. I quickly learned silence" 49).

Victoria's struggle with the silences of her family lend to a focus on her struggle with language, as she is unable to understand the most painful prohibition of speech: the interdiction imposed on her from within her own immediate family. Far worse than the colonial school system's imposition of the French language and prohibition of *reo mā'ohi* is the family's perpetuation of the colonial endeavor to silence the Tahitian voice by refusing to hand down the native language to the younger generation. She declares: "cette interdiction de parole m'ancrait dans une transparence flamboyante qui aggravait le chaos de mes incompréhensions cette condamnation au mutisme me nouait dans une obscurité sinistre qui augmentait le non-sens de mon alentour" ("this interdiction of speech anchored me in a flamboyant transparence that aggravated the chaos of my incomprehension. This condemnation to muteness drowned me in a sinister obscurity that intensified the nonsense of my surroundings…" 47). Similar to her accusation of the *Mā'ohi* people as "trained monkeys" in her first novel, Spitz accuses Tahitian families of the crime of withholding tradition from the younger generations. While Victoria's family is capable of speaking *reo mā'ohi*, she is prohibited from responding in the same language. *Reo mā'ohi*, to her, is an elusive language spoken with all of the body:

> que j'aurais voulu dire qui restait imparlée mutisée
> d'interdictions définitive

que j'ondulais insonore clandestine dans mon corps
allongée la nuit dans le noir
une langue charnelle charnue que je caressais dans tous
mes silences qui ourlait mes noirceurs
une langue familière farouche…(61)

how I would have wanted to say what remained unspoken
muted by definitive interdictions
that I undulated silent clandestine in my body
stretched out in the dark of night
a carnal fleshy language that I caressed in all
my silences that hemmed my darknesses
a familiar, wild language…

The disjointedness she feels in language translates to a corporeal misunderstanding, and until she can speak Tahitian later in life, she feels almost physically divided. The prohibited words of *reo mā'ohi* are "des mots qui nous lient aux absences nous relient à nous-mêmes nous allient l'un à l'autre des mots auxquels nous confions notre humanité flageolante" ("words that link us to absences link us to ourselves ally us to one another, words to which we entrust our quivering humanity" 272). Without access to these words, she is unable to articulate her being. Writing her individual story, however, and learning the "langue de liberation" ("language of liberation" *Pensées* 154) from Marie, grants her access to the words of her people, the words of the "elles" that link her to her land. Ultimately, the novel itself is the articulation of a heretofore-muted subjectivity, one that is personal, fragile, unique, and accessible only through the Tahitian language.

In this novel, Spitz not only fights for an expressly *Mā'ohi* voice; she also encourages a specifically female breaking of silence. It is the women who speak in the narrative, the many "elles," while men in the novel are spoken *of*. Robert Nicole remarks in *The Word, The Pen, and The Pistol*, that the absence of the male *Mā'ohi* voice in women's narratives "is a means of denying them their customary patriarchal power"

(197). While male characters seldom speak, many of the "elles" of the narrative, especially Marie and Victoria herself, successfully say "je" in an attempt to rupture the silences that envelop Victoria's upbringing. This rupturing of silence by exclusively female narrators lends to a possible reading of Spitz's most recent novel as *écriture féminine*.

Chantal Spitz's works reveal that language, writing, and the production of a literature that expresses a *Mā'ohi* consciousness will enable the *Mā'ohi* people to reconnect to themselves and to articulate the silences of 150 years of *Mā'ohi* history, but it also reveals the extent to which it is the woman's voice that enables these articulations of identity. Significantly, it is women writers, such as Chantal Spitz, Déwé Gorodé and Claudine Jacques, who are shattering the silence, undermining the traditional ideas of what can and cannot be written in a novel, what women can and cannot say, and creating an Oceanic literary canon in French. Currently, women writers in French Polynesia outnumber male writers by more than 60%, which could possibly be linked to education statistics: in 2003, women outnumbered men by 66% at the university undergraduate level, although men outnumbered women in total population (André, *Le Roman autochtone* 245-6). By rupturing the silence and writing the stories of their people, Oceanic women redefine their reality, they de-mythologize their existence; they refuse their own marginalization, on their own terms. Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz write to speak, write in place of *la parole*, to give speech back to Oceanic people, men as well as women. As Spitz insists in "Écrits clandestins" (Clandestine writings": the desire is "publier pour revendiquer une originalité mutisée" ("to publish… to claim a muted originality" *Pensées* 93).

[1] It is interesting to note that in New Caledonia, also, indigenous populations took great interest in reading and writing, which they learned from the London Missionary Society. Printed texts were considered magical instruments containing ideas, and schools on the Loyalty Islands had the highest level of attendance in New Caledonia. The schools separated the genders, however, contributing to the already stringent gender roles in the Kanak clan tradition, and, as Hélène Nicolas notes, "inscribed bodies and minds with sexual identities and conditioned the education these pupils would give to their own children" (188).

[2] The 1999 collection *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, edited by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, is one of the first collections comparing the literatures of Oceania across language divides, and raises a complex set of questions concerning the creation and circulation of contemporary Pacific literature.

[3] The term "la parole" does not easily translate into English. Therefore, I will be employing the French term throughout the chapter. "La parole" can connote both "speech" and "the word," but is often used to signify "the spoken word" or in an even broader context, "orality."

[4] Gorodé's letters in bold emphasize the physical quality of the urgency of the text. Similarly, Chantal T. Spitz uses bold letters, rather than italics, in *Elles, Terre d'enfance: Roman à deux encres* to emphasize words written in *reo mā'ohi*. This tactic lends itself to a more corporeal engagement with the reader.

[5] Alain Babadzan remarks in the preface to Teuira Henry's *Mythes tahitiens* that the Reverend John Muggridge Orsmond is said to have been one of the best-versed protestant missionaries in the Tahitian language during the 19th century. His manuscripts are some

of the most precious of those in existence, and his work represents the first large ethnographic study of Tahitian culture. Teuira Henry's work is thus "la source majeure, la référence obligée d'une quête des racines parfois militante, toujours nostalgique" ("the primordial source, the obligatory reference for a quest for roots sometimes militant, always nostalgic" 7). Originally written in English with the myths alongside in *reo mā'ohi*, Henry's *Ancient Tahiti* has been translated into French and has proven an invaluable source for those searching to reconstruct Tahitian oral traditions.

[6] It is also significant to note the appearance of Radio Djiido in 1985, a radio station dedicated to Kanak music and news, a "modernized" version of Kanak orality.

[7] The 1878 Kanak rebellion, sometimes called "la grande insurrection" ("the great insurrection"), is one of the most significant of the many rebellions that occurred during the period of colonization in the late nineteenth century. After a large drought, Kanak rebels, led by the renowned Chief Ataï and many other clan chiefs, set fire to half of the west coast of the island, between Bouloupari and Poya, where many of the more prominent stockbreeders and former prisoners were located. Between June and December of 1878, 200 Europeans were killed, but in return, approximately 1,000 Kanaks were killed. Ethnologist Alain Saussol remarks: "Pour les Mélanésiens la grande insurrection marque aussi une rupture. Confiscations de terres et déportations vont sanctionner la révolte. L'invincibilité du 'Blanc' semble sonner le glas de l'homme noir. Chez eux se développera ce découragement suicidaire et ce refus de procréer qui va provoquer un déclin démographique…" ("For Melanesians the great insurrection also marked a rupture. Land confiscations and deportations would sanction the revolt. The invincibility of the "White man" seemed to announce the end of the black man. The suicidary

discouragement and the refusal to procreate would provoke a demographic decline…" 41). Despite the demographic decline, contemporary Kanaks often regard the 1878 rebellion as a source of pride, as their people fought to maintain their lands from the invading Europeans. In fact, in 1974, along with several other Kanak militants, Déwé Gorodé created the "Groupe 1878" in order to reclaim the ancestral lands pillaged by colonialism.

[8] In fact, during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the insurrection of 1878 was often used as an instrument to further the fears of Kanaks in the minds of the white settler population, increasing the divide and misunderstandings between the two communities.

[9] It is necessary to stress the significance of the subtitle of Jacques's collection *C'est pas la faute de la lune: Petites histoires calédoniennes. Anecdotes, rumeurs, ragots et mensonges*. Jacques attempts to make known the rumors, the lies, and the indiscretions that for so long prevented the communities of New Caledonia from coming together.

[10] The Ouvéa Affair was the most dramatic event during the turbulent decade of the 1980s in New Caledonia, and can be considered the climax of *les Evénéments*. On the 24th of April, 1988, Alphonse Dianou, along with several members of his clan at Gossanah, invaded a police station, killing four police officers and taking others hostage in the jungle. Although negotiations were attempted, true dialogue between the political leaders of France, New Caledonia, and the Kanak communities remained elusive, and ultimately culminated in the French government's invasion of the grotto in which the Kanak militants were hiding 23 hostages. 19 Kanak independence militants were killed, including Alphonse Dianou (Angleviel 198). It is worth noting that in 2011, Matthieu

Kassovitz produced and directed a fascinating film entitled *L'Ordre et la Morale*, depicting the Ouvéa Affair through the perspective of the French lieutenant who attempted negotiations, Philippe Legorgus. Unfortunately, the film met little success in either the territory or in France.

[11] Like Laura Lebrun in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Malou's grandmother is the emblem of rational, "Western" thought. She rarely leaves the city of Nouméa and takes it upon herself to ensure Malou's educational formation, surrounding her with books and "high society."

[12] It is important to distinguish the difference between feminist literature and *écriture féminine*. Feminist literature is a literature related to the (Western) feminist sociopolitical movement, in which women and men both declare the necessity of women's emancipation and the extension of women's political, economic, social, and ideological rights. By contrast, *écriture féminine*, or women's writing, is usually classified as such by thematic content including a focus on love and relationships, on the body, on family life, and most importantly, on writing to repudiate the stereotypes and societal conventions that limit women. I hesitate to employ either term, because, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes, "Western feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group that is placed in kinship, legal, and other structures, defines Third World women as subjects *outside* social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted *through* these very structures" (272). However, I do find it necessary and particularly relevant, in a study of the writing of bodies, to discuss the similarities of the works of the authors in question with the basic values of feminism and *l'écriture*

féminine, a writing specifically linked to the body and to rejecting the conventions limiting women.

[13] Jacques, too, has refused such categorization, stating: "lorsque j'écris, je ne me sens pas femme, mais simplement écrivain" ("when I write, I don't feel like a woman, but simply like a writer" qtd. in André 251). It is worth noting that in many cases, denoting women's literature as *écriture feminine* risks placing literature written by women in a position of marginalization, as the very category separates those texts from the "dominant" category known simply as "literature" – not specified by gender, meaning "male" literature. Béatrice Didier remarks in the preamble to *L'Écriture féminine* that the fact that a book about *écriture féminine* is thinkable, whereas a book about masculine writing seems ridiculous, indeed characterizes the marginality of *écriture féminine*, and its various ambiguities (5).

[14] See Salomon, "Quand les filles ne se taisent plus."

[15] Gorodé dedicates *L'Épave* to the memory of a real victim, Marie-Paule, a woman from the Garnison shantytown who is the model for the storyteller character of Lila.

[16] It is interesting to note that of Jacques's four novels, *L'Âge du perroquet-banane* is the only novel that employs a first-person narrator, who is in fact a woman.

[17] The title of the novel is a mixture of borrowed references. Louis-José Barbançon's historical account and declaration of love for Caledonian land, *La terre du lézard,* may have been influential in the writing of the novel. Additionally, in the *paicî* language of Déwé Gorodé's clan, "l'homme-lézard" ("man-lizard") is one of the first forms of man. In *Téâ Kanaké: l'homme aux cinq vies*, Denis Pourawa informs us that the lizard, half-

animal and half-spirit, is a symbol of both death and life, the guardian of peace and justice among men.

[18] The scene in which Nassirah makes love to Enok is a revelatory look at the internal thought processes of both characters. While Enok appears to be asleep, he is actually cognizant of Nassirah's actions, and because he is in love with her, he is elated that she physically demonstrates mutual emotions. Yet since he is temporarily paralyzed and appears to be asleep, this episode could technically be considered a rape scene, in which the typically gendered roles of victim and rapist are reversed, as seen in *L'Âge du perroquet-banane*.

[19] The community of immigrants from Wallis and Futuna is the third largest ethnic group in New Caledonia, a large portion of which resides in an area of Nouméa called Ave Maria. The Wallisian community of Ave Maria and the Kanak tribe of Saint-Louis have a history of racial tensions, about which the reader learns as the characters of the novel hear the news of the series of confrontations occurring at the time of the narrative. The references to the confrontations between the two communities as well as those to the Bunchy top virus, discovered in New Caledonia in 1999, historically situate the novel in the very last years of the twentieth century.

[20] Interestingly, earlier in the novel, Nassirah remembers her mother, hospitalized in a psychiatric institution. She thinks: "La folie pouvait être un refuge. Pour elle aussi" ("Madness could be a refuge. For her too" 129). Nassirah's life is characterized by seeking refuge, hiding from her pain and fears.

Conclusion

In Claudine Jacques's short narrative entitled "Colloque," the principal character and novelist Mila Guerra, attending a conference on Oceanic literatures, acknowledges the need for literary criticism of Oceanic literature: "Chaque livre dénudait son auteur, soit, devenait immédiatement la propriété du premier lecteur mais que serait un écrivain dont l'œuvre ne serait ni lue, ni analysé, ni critiquée?" ("Every book undressed its author, immediately became the property of its first reader but what would a writer be whose work was not read, nor analyzed, nor critiqued?" 112-113). As Jacques's character indicates, Oceanic literature, like all literature, depends on readers. The works of writers of French expression in Oceania are just as deserving of literary study as the more commonly studied texts of African, Antillean, and Canadian writers of French expression. Additionally, as an American writing a dissertation on Oceanic writing in French, I believe that our connections as Americans with the Oceanic region are exceptionally relevant. Indeed, American Oceanic writing, such as Hawaiian, American Samoan, and Chamorro literature (not to mention indigenous or Native American literature) find resemblances with Oceanic writing in French, with very similar themes, particularly that of maintaining a sense of identity faced with globalization and "militourism," as defined by Teresia Teaiwa. The inclusion of Oceanic literature of French expression in American and French university programs alike is essential to the awareness of the rather uncommonly studied Oceanic literary canon. Yet it is perhaps even more crucial to acknowledge the need of an increased readership in Oceania proper.[1] Without analysis and critique, without inclusion in dissertations such as this, in

programs of French and Francophone literature across the globe, and most importantly, without a readership base in Oceania itself, the works of the writers included in this study might find no outlet in which to unveil and circulate the unique and original conceptions of an Oceanic body and the plurality of the voices within the region.

Certainly with respect to the body, the women authors studied in this project have paved a literary pathway for writers of younger generations to explore Oceanic corporeality in a manner unencumbered by Western exoticism. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, there are two views of the body: that which one has of her own body, and that which others have of it. These two perceptions coexist in the same world, and endow the body with different meanings. Like Merleau-Ponty suggests, "the body is our general medium for having a world" (146). The body plays an essential role in negotiating identity. It is the location of one's engagement with the world, and as this project suggests, the body as represented in Oceanic literature is a means through which the authors express a unique, multiform and multi-vocal Oceanic identity, free of the constraints of an often prescriptive European and male-dominated perspective. Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz, each from a distinct background rich with both individual histories specific to their islands and their communities, and common histories uniting them as Oceanic writers, "writes" Oceanic bodies in a manner that reformulates the myth of the exotic Tahitian *vahine*, of the dehumanized Kanak woman or of the insensitive and racist Caldoche. In so doing, they have created a space for a dialogue that essentially, until recently, did not exist for Oceanic peoples of French expression, a dialogue that is liberated from the outsider discourses that have prevented

Oceanic bodies from being configured in a manner celebrating their cultural as well as gendered specificity.

As the discussions in the second, third, and fourth chapters of this project reveal, the representation of the Oceanic body, and particularly of the woman's body, is not always optimistic. Maryse Condé remarks in her discussion of Antillean women's writing:

> Le roman, s'il est le monde intime qu'un écrivain entrouvre, est aussi un témoignage social. […] Ce discours n'apparaît ni optimiste ni triomphaliste. Il est chargé d'angoisses, de frustrations et de refus. Mais cela n'est pas particulier aux Antilles. A travers le monde, la parole des femmes est rarement triomphante. La condition féminine se vit partout comme une condition d'exploitées et de dépendantes. (113)
>
> The novel, if it is the intimate world that a writer half opens, is also a social witness. […] This discourse appears neither optimist nor triumphal. It is heavy with anguish, frustrations and refusals. But this is not particular to the Antilles. Across the world, women's speech is rarely triumphant. The feminine condition is seen everywhere as a condition of exploited and dependent women.

Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz present an image of an Oceanic body damaged, or pillaged by the outcome of colonization and from within their own communities, an image that is irrefutably the antithesis of triumphant. As the metaphorical, metonymical, and literal rape narratives of the three authors suggest, power is inextricably tied to a corporeal discourse in the Oceanic region, and while it may no longer be the same type of relationship between the political order and the sexual order as discussed in Chapter One, the ramifications of colonial history are nonetheless present in the various manifestations of rape seen throughout their works. The depiction of the body in such a manner is an undeniably political maneuver. Consistently portrayed as in isomorphism with the violated land, and indisputably affected by the heavy weight of colonial institutions,

ecological, institutionalized, and ill bodies serve as instruments of political critique. Michelle Keown observes of several Anglophone Oceanic writers' works: "explorations of the indigenous body are therefore informed by an underlying 'wounding' and 'healing' structure which explores the pathology of the damaged colonized body while simultaneously seeking to cure the social ills which have reduced it to this debilitated condition" (12). Similarly, the works of Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz employ an image of a dilapidated body that resists continued repression. In so doing, they employ a pessimistic or tragic representation of the body in a manner that encourages hope and resolve for a changed future.

Despite the decidedly pessimistic representations of the Oceanic body seen in the texts of the three women authors, their works seem to affirm that their outlook on the future of Oceania and Oceanic writing is not as bleak as one might have previously presumed. As the last chapter of this project has suggested, Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz have been successful in rupturing the silence surrounding Oceanic bodies. Not only has their transgressive and daring work opened up a figurative space for dialogue in French-speaking Oceania, but they have also all contributed to the creation of literal spaces that rupture the silence due to the former lack of publishing and distribution bases for Oceanic voices in French. In 1997 Claudine Jacques created, along with other writers in New Caledonia, the *Association des Écrivains de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, of which Gorodé is also a member. In 2001, Chantal T. Spitz, with six other colleagues including Flora Devatine and Jimmy Ly, created the review *Littéramā'ohi*, a space in which writers of French Polynesia, but also of French-speaking Oceania in general, may publish. Since 2007, Spitz has served as the director of *Littéramā'ohi*. More recently, and in fact during

the process of writing this conclusion in March 2013, the Tahiti-based publishing company Au Vent des Îles announced its decision to fix a maximum price limit for its collection "Littératures du Pacifique." Editor Christian Robert remarks that this operation will permit a repositioning of the works and authors of the Pacific, and will help circulate the knowledge of Oceanic writers by making the Pacific literatures collection more affordable to readers in Oceania, Canada, Africa, and France alike. He argues: "Nous pensons que ces auteurs ont des choses à dire et qu'il y a donc des choses à lire dans leurs œuvres" ("We think that these authors have things to say and thus that there are things to read in their works" Loubet).

Indeed, "there are things to read in their works," especially if we are to continue the conversation of the representation of the Oceanic body. Many more recent Oceanic novelists, men as well as women, have engaged in the discussion of the Oceanic body in their novels, short stories, theatre, and poetry. Kanak playwright Pierre Gope's 1997 play *Où est le droit*? explores the debate between the customary Kanak justice system and that of the "white world" in a drama surrounding the rape of a clan elder's daughter, Corilen. When the Kanak tribunal of elders decides to pardon her rapist, Corilen seeks justice in the French legal system, refusing to be seen as *dekö*, "une rien" ("a nothing" 26) in a community where the collective voice reigns, and asserts her individuality as a Kanak woman. Despite her courageous speaking out, Corilen cannot convince her father of the value of her actions – he believes that her turn toward the French legal system questions his authority and brings him public shame. Devastated, Corilen ultimately commits suicide atop her mother's grave.

Similarly, Kanak writer Weniko Ihage exposes the reality of incest and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as the delicate balance between speaking out and remaining silent in both of his collections of short stories, *Îles sur un horizon de paroles* (2000) and *Le Tissage de nos silences* (2007). In the first collection, the short story "Force, Silence et Sagesse" ("Strength, Silence and Wisdom") reveals the immense psychological tragedy that results from the rape of a Kanak woman, who gives birth to her own father's child, and, like Corilen of Gope's play, also commits suicide. The victim expresses the message that both Gorodé and Gope transmit in their texts as she ruptures the silence protecting her father in a confession to the narrator: "J'ai une autre idée du silence, maintenant. Si tu as décidé un jour de mettre quelque chose au-dessous de tout, viole le silence de ta conscience" ("I have another opinion of silence, now. If one day you have decided to put something below everything else, violate the silence of your conscience" 48). Gope and Ihage explore the taboo questions of sexuality, the delicate balance between the preservation of custom and the transition into "modernity," the sanctity of *la parole*, and most importantly, the psychological and physical destruction that sexual violence can enact on the bodies of Kanak women.

In Tahiti in 2011, lawyer Philippe Temauiarii Neuffer published *Les gens 2 la folie*, a collection of short stories that recount the everyday struggles of French Polynesians today, the stories of those uncomfortable in their own skin, afflicted by violence, deaths, and misery, both physical and psychological. First-time Tahitian novelist Nathalie Heirani Salmon-Hudry published in 2012 the autobiographical novel *Je suis née morte*, in which she recounts her existence after a medical error at birth left her severely handicapped. Forced to navigate life with a cerebral and corporeal disability, the

author invites yet another consideration of the Oceanic body in an account that insists on the recognition of the rights of handicapped persons.

Tahitian novelist Stéphanie Ari'riau Richard, who publishes under her Polynesian name Ari'irau, addresses a particularly transgressive and forward-looking reimagining of an Oceanic body. In *Je reviendrai à Tahiti* (2005), she acknowledges the influence of the writers of previous generations, reinforcing the continuity of Oceanic literature. The emphasis throughout the text on the burial of the placenta (she refers to her island as the "land of placentas") fortifies the corporeal attachment the narrator feels to her island, similar to that seen in the novels of Chantal Spitz, Déwé Gorodé, and Claudine Jacques. *Je reviendrai à Tahiti* as well as Ari'irau's second novel, *Matamimi, ou la vie nous attend* (2006) both take up the subject of the woman's body, specifically in her recurrent, traditionally considered *tapu* (taboo) discussions of abortion and sexuality. In fact, in *Matamimi, ou la vie nous attend*, the narrator teaches lessons to and recounts the life of her imaginary daughter, Matamimi, who we discover at the end of the novel was aborted in Kansas. Similar to the analogy of the land with the violated body of a woman by all three writers of this project, the narrator repeats the corporeal analogy briefly addressed in *Je reviendrai à Tahiti*: "Mon corps, c'est mon pays. Mon pays, c'est mon corps" ("My body, it's my country. My country, it's my body" *Je reviendrai* 113). The narrator insists to her daughter in the chapter entitled "Ton corps, c'est ton pays" ("Your body is your country"):

> Sache tout d'abord, que ton corps est ton pays. Qu'il ne faut pas le soumettre au protectorat ou sous la tutelle de quiconque. Qu'il n'appartient à personne d'autre que toi […] Par exemple, ton pays ne s'en sort pas indemne de tous ces tirs nucléaires, à force de fricoter pour de l'argent avec la métropole. Nos gens sont cancéreux […] Si tu n'y prends

> pas garde, ma fille, ton corps ne sortira pas indemne de ces contacts physiques… (61)
>
> Know, firstly, that your body is your country. That you must not submit it to the protection or under the supervision of anyone. That it belongs to no one but you […] For example, your country does not leave unscathed by these nuclear trials, by dint of knocking about for money from the Metropole. Our people have cancer […] If you are not careful, my daughter, your body will not leave unscathed from these physical contacts…

Resembling Spitz, Ari'irau accuses the Tahitian people of having been complicit with the nuclear testing in the Pacific, of having allowed *la Métropole* to rape and pillage the land and, metaphorically as well as literally, wreak havoc on the indigenous Tahitian body. Comparable to Jacques and Gorodé, she explicitly links sexuality to power, and parallels the political submission of Tahiti to France with that of women to men in the past: "La sexualité, ma fille, c'est ce qui a fait écrire Diderot […] C'est ce qui fait que nos hommes veulent tous entrer dans la politique et devenir présidents. Le pouvoir, c'est la sexualité. La sexualité, c'est le pouvoir" ("Sexuality, my daughter, is what made Diderot write […] It is what makes our men all want to enter politics and become presidents. Power is sexuality. Sexuality is power" 59). She encourages her daughter to embrace her sexuality, to not allow religion or sentimentality to encumber or confuse her adolescent sexual desires, and to believe that sex is one of the pleasures of life, rather than a matter of shame. In fact, she urges her daughter to masturbate, insisting that women do not need men in order to experience pleasure and thus can find liberty in their sexuality:

> Cette indépendance physique de l'être féminin est, je pense, l'essence même de son asservissement à l'homme, du moins d'un point de vue socio-historique. Notre capacité à jouir, sans besoin de pénétration, à plusieurs reprises, explique dans certains pays, la tradition douloureuse de l'excision, l'enfermement de la femme, l'obligation de se couvrir des pieds à la tête, aujourd'hui les salaires inégaux qui subsistent… (62)

> This physical independence of the feminine being is, I think, the very essence of her servitude to man, at least from a socio-historic point of view. Our capacity to orgasm, without need of penetration, multiple times, explains, in certain countries, the painful tradition of excision, confinement of women, the obligation to cover oneself from head to toe, unequal salaries that persist today…

Ari'irau's work, at the avant-garde of Oceanic literature, is reminiscent of that of the authors examined in this project. She similarly expresses the idea that the body is "neither brute nor passive, but is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation" (Grosz 18). While women writers in French-speaking Oceania are seeking to reconfigure the body in a language that is both specific to female writing and in one that is specific to Oceania, male writers, as we can see in the works of Gope and Ihage, no longer hesitate to broach these taboo subjects. The Oceanic body is not a fixed concept, represented as either a fascinating *vahine* or a monstrous, terrifying cannibal, nor is it a body shrouded in silence. As Mark Johnson writes, "My body is never merely a thing; it is a lived body […] the situation from which our world and experience flows" (275). Bodies are paradoxical, they escape fixity, and in Oceanic literature, narratives of the body have facilitated a confrontational, cathartic, and emancipatory discourse. As both Tahiti and New Caledonia are expected to enter into further discussions of independence in the impending years, the Oceanic body will surely find new systems of meaning, signification, and representation in Oceanic texts. In the words of Tahitian poetess Flora Devatine, "La réalité, c'est que c'est complexe, mais c'est toujours dynamique, en effervescence, à redéfinir constamment" ("The reality is that it is complex, but it's always dynamic, in effervescence, to be constantly redefined" "Langues, oralité" 150).

Déwé Gorodé, Claudine Jacques, and Chantal T. Spitz have indeed paved the pathway for a complex, effervescent Oceanic literature in which the Oceanic body is in constant redefinition. These women's works have transgressed boundaries and have faced social and political taboos, particularly with respect to the body. They have welcomed critique and have been unafraid to criticize, destabilize, and challenge. Gorodé, Jacques, and Spitz have born witness to history, provided a narrative space for the omissions of literary as well as cultural history in Oceania, and have made accessible a literature in which Oceanic women can now unreservedly say "je."

[1] To encourage an enlarged readership in Oceania, Oceanic writers have been utilizing various sorts of media, so that they are speaking not only to those who can afford the (often expensive) books they publish. They speak to the people among whom they live through Facebook, through blogs, they speak at conferences at universities, at bookstores, and they do interviews with local newspapers. As Sylvie André remarks in *Le Roman autochtone*, they do this because they want to be heard as people, as writers, in some ways as scapegoats or victims, as porte-paroles. Yet, André questions, "Sont-ils entendus par leur communauté, par les autres? Ils refusent souvent, là aussi, d'être pris en otage par une élite. Ils préfèrent les marges même si cela est inconfortable" ("Are they heard by their communities, by others? They often refuse, there too, to be taken hostage by an elite. They prefer the margins even if that is uncomfortable" 282).

Glossary

âdi: *paicî* word designating what one would call Kanak "money" or change made from seashells; symbol for a person.

bagne: French term for "penal colony."

brousse: French term for "bush."

broussard: French term designating someone who lives in the bush.

le Caillou: affectionate term for the island of New Caledonia; literally means "the pebble."

Caldoche: not a universally accepted term designating those of European descent, born and raised in New Caledonia.

cantonnement: French term for the reservation system put in place in 1868, which lasted until 1903. Similar to the reservation system for Native Americans in the United States, it displaced the indigenous Melanesian groups of New Caledonia from their original lands to reservations designated by the French government.

chaîne (*faire la chaîne*): French term for collective rape, often translated as "the line-up."

la coutume: French term for Custom (frequently capitalized in English). Used generally, it indicates all elements of Kanak traditions. One will often hear the phrase "faire la coutume," which designates the act of giving a speech or telling stories in groups. "Faire la coutume" is generally a male act.

Demi(e): French term for Tahitian métissage. A Tahitian of mixed European and Tahitian heritage. Indicates both "racial" mixing and/or social class.

les Evénéments: period of instability and violence in New Caledonia during the 1980s, which nearly resulted in a civil war between the Kanak and Caldoche communities. Came to a climax in the Ouvéa Affair of 1988, when a radical pro-independence group invaded a police station and took 19 hostages.

gèè: *paicî* word for grandmother.

Kaatâdaa: *paicî* word for Venus, the morning star; one of the main planets of the solar system.

Kanak: Melanesian from New Caledonia. Derived from Polynesian word *kanaka*, meaning man.

Kanaky: Kanak name for the island of New Caledonia.

Kanéka: Kanak music, a style of music created in the 1980s.

māfera: *reo mā'ohi* word for rape. The *Académie Tahitienne* defines it as "to rape a woman while she is sleeping."

Mā'ohi: autochthonous group from Polynesia.

Matignon Accords: the 1988 agreement between France and the Kanaks that brought the period of *les Evénéments* to a close. Set up a 10-year period of development in which institutional and economic provisions were made for the Kanak community, and divided the territory into three provinces. Followed in 1998 with the Nouméa Accords.

mōtoro: *reo mā'ohi* term meaning "to enter secretly into the house of a woman to visit a her with gallant intentions." A Tahitian "tradition" for adolescents.

motu: *reo mā'ohi* for small island or atoll.

Ni-Vanuatu: a person from Vanuatu, formerly known as the New Hebrides, colonized by both the French and the British.

Nouméa Accords: 1998 follow-up to the Matignon Accords; promises significant political autonomy to the government of New Caledonia and to Kanaks, with the possibility of complete sovereignty from France in another referendum to be held between 2013 and 2018. Acknowledges the fault of the French in having displaced Kanaks from their lands and identities, and envisions a "common destiny" for the diverse groups now inhabiting the islands. Under the Nouméa Accords, Kanaks and Caledonians of European descent are recognized as French citizens.

paicî: one of the 28 Kanak languages of New Caledonia; mother tongue of Déwé Gorodé.

pilou: a fast-paced Kanak dance; formerly a ceremony that lasted for several days commemorating a great event. The dances at *pilous* held great importance, as they welcomed guests, presented clans, and announced customary exchanges and speeches.

popinée: term used by French settlers and Kanaks alike; designates a Melanesian woman.

popwaalé: *paicî* term for a French or European person.

püfenua: *reo mā'ohi* for placenta.

reo mā'ohi: language of the *Mā'ohi* people. Designates all Polynesian languages and used generally; *reo tahiti* specifically indicates the Tahitian language.

taure'are'a: *reo mā'ohi* word for the awkward, unstable period of adolescence.

vahine: *reo mā'ohi* for woman, frequently used in French to designate Tahitian women.

Zoreille: name given to French people originated from mainland France. Also "z'ores" or "zozos."

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