The Uses of Modernity and Counter-Modernity in the Re-negotiation of Contemporary Identity in the work of Kanak writers

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One of the most evident stakes of contemporary Kanak writing and publication of literary texts is the renegotiation of Kanak identities and the affirming of their distinctive value. This renegotiation occurs within the context of the binary polarities and hierarchies of Metropolitan Centre or French State and island 'country' and peripheral communities. The opposition between local traditions and 'universal' or global economies appears to be part of these binaries. This paper considers the primary hypothesis that this literary enunciation constitutes a 'performance', incorporating elements of tradition, but ultimately challenging the notion of any single and agreed canon or authority. The global and the local, it then argues, as in Baudrillard’s metaphor of the game of ‘paper, stone, or scissors,’ are less in competition, less mutually exclusive, than they are simply dynamic layers of a single and hybrid cultural phenomenon, constantly jostling for the pre-eminent position. The published texts of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Dewe Gorode, Pierre Gope and the young ‘rap’ poet, Paul Wamo, in particular, will be examined.

Our paper will examine both the local and the universal aspects of these texts, their colonial/postcolonial or French/ Francophone character, to determine the position they allow current and future processes of modernity and globalization.