
Pacific short stories on Traditional Agriculture to the Sustainable Development in the Pacific

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Abstract: The Pacific Islands face growing challenges related to food security, climate change, and modernization, threatening traditional agricultural knowledge and practices. While scientific and technological solutions are crucial, the role of literature - particularly short stories - in preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge remains largely unexplored. This research examines how Pacific short stories depict traditional food crops, farming techniques, and the cultural significance of agriculture, providing valuable insights into sustainability and resilience within island societies. Drawing on narratives from both Anglophone and Francophone Pacific authors such as Wendt, A. (1976), Hau'ofa, E. (1993), Kurtovitch, N. (2000), Gorodé, D. (2005), and Kurtovitch, N. (2011), Tavo, P. (2015), this study highlights how literature preserves oral traditions, documents indigenous farming practices, and reflects the evolving relationship between Pacific communities and their environment. These stories emphasize the importance of food sovereignty, seasonal cycles, and the spiritual and communal dimensions of agriculture. They also reveal tensions between modernization and the preservation of traditional agricultural systems, Nabobo-Baba, U. (2006) and Campbell, J.R. (2015). Through a literary and ethnographic analysis, this study argues that storytelling serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a potential tool for education and policymaking. Integrating literary narratives into discussions on sustainable agricultural development helps bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and technological innovations, ensuring a more holistic approach to food security in the Pacific. This study aligns with the PIURN 2025 theme by emphasizing how cultural narratives can complement and enrich technological advancements for sustainable development tailored to the realities of the Pacific Islands.

Keywords: Pacific literature, short stories, traditional agriculture, food security, indigenous knowledge, sustainability, cultural preservation.

Biography: Lina VUTIALA is a lecturer and researcher at the School of Education of the National University of Vanuatu in Port Vila, Vanuatu, specializing in literature and educational sciences. With 27 years of experience in teaching French as a Second Language, she trains future teachers in didactics and literatures. She holds two Master's degrees and is currently pursuing a PhD focused on Francophone short stories in the Pacific as a vehicle for indigenous knowledge and cultural resistance. Her research intersects orality, ecopoetic, and postcolonial pedagogy. She actively advocates for the integration of traditional narratives into sustainable educational and cultural policies across the Pacific Islands.

1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, STAKES, AND OBJECTIVES

The island Pacific, rich in cultural and ecological diversity, is currently facing increasing tensions between ancestral traditions and contemporary upheavals. Oceanian societies are undergoing the tangible effects of climate change - rising sea levels, soil erosion, and seasonal disruptions - that undermine their long-standing relationship with the natural environment. Compounding these environmental challenges is a growing dependence on imported goods, which threatens local agricultural practices and deeply alters dietary habits, village economies, and traditional ways of life. Simultaneously, the erosion of languages, narratives, and inherited knowledge systems

compromises the transmission of endogenous cultures—despite their capacity to offer context-specific responses to current challenges.

In this context, literature - and more specifically the short story - emerges as a space of mediation and resistance. Often overlooked in literary studies, the short story, through its concise and potent form, provides a privileged medium to address contemporary crises and to envision alternative futures. This article aims to examine how contemporary Francophone Oceanian short fiction engages with the issues of traditional agriculture and sustainable development.

Two main lines of inquiry structure this analysis: first, the valorization of ancestral agricultural practices through narratives rooted in natural rhythms and collective memory; second, the critical stance these texts adopt in relation to exogenous development models. By intersecting literary analysis with ecocritical perspectives, this study explores the role of fiction in current symbolic and political struggles, particularly in relation to local aspirations for food sovereignty, ecological justice, and the preservation of cultural identities.

1.1 Theoretical Framework: Agriculture, Culture, and Transformation

The analysis developed in this article is situated at the intersection of several complementary critical frameworks: environmental humanities, postcolonial criticism, and the *ecopoetic* of the Global South. Together, these approaches shed light on how contemporary Oceanian short fiction articulates a discourse on agriculture that extends far beyond productivity or purely utilitarian frameworks. Agriculture is thus examined not only as a means of subsistence, but also as a cultural, symbolic, and narrative system - deeply intertwined with the history, identity, and political struggles of Pacific Island societies.

1.2 Environmental Humanities: An Ecosystemic Reading of Narratives

Environmental humanities reposition literature within its interactions with ecosystems and global crises. The concept of *ecopoetic* refers to a mode of writing about nature that engages ethics, culture, and politics. In the Pacific context, this approach highlights narratives as mediators between orality, agriculture, and local cosmologies. Short stories thus become “ecologies of speech” (Abram, 1996), in which cultivated landscapes are traversed by memory, ritual, and transmission, forming a mode of resistance against dominant development logics.

1.2. Postcolonial Criticism and Agricultural Sovereignty

Postcolonial criticism sheds light on the legacy of land dispossession and the erasure of traditional agricultural practices imposed by colonial rule. Oceanian short stories revalorize agricultural gestures as acts of cultural and political sovereignty. They challenge productivism models in favor of sustainable, endogenous knowledge systems, positioning fiction within the broader struggles for food autonomy, land rights, and social justice. This narrative reversal constitutes both a literary and political response to dominant development discourses and to the marginalization of island societies.

1.3. Ecopoetic of the Global South: Narrating the Environment from the Periphery

The *ecopoetic* of the Global South analyzes ecological representations emerging from marginalized contexts shaped by extractivism and climate change. In contrast to mainstream ecological discourse, it values inhabited, cultivated, and vulnerable ecologies. In Oceanian short fiction, gardens and subsistence systems become spaces of resistance and hope. Writing performs a symbolic reterritorialization, linking ancestral knowledge to contemporary concerns with ecological justice and autonomy. These narratives form a counter-literary archive that redefines development according to the needs and values of Pacific peoples.

1.4. Synthesis: Culture at the Heart of Resilience

By intersecting these three approaches, agriculture emerges as a central pillar of cultural identity and social resilience in the Pacific. These short stories do more than depict rural life—they offer a critical rethinking of the

links between ecology, culture, and development. They demonstrate that the integration of cultural dimensions into sustainability policies is essential to the emergence of more autonomous, equitable island societies in tune with the rhythms of life.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE SHORT STORY AS A CRITICAL SPACE FOR THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ECOLOGY, CULTURE, AND DEVELOPMENT

Recent literary studies on Oceania highlight the capacity of the short story to articulate the entanglements of ecology, identity, and politics. As a concise narrative form, the short story enables a sharp expression of the social, environmental, and cultural tensions experienced by island societies, making it a privileged medium for rethinking development dynamics and valorizing indigenous knowledge systems.

In her cycle *Les Furtives* (2020), Émilie Notéris demonstrates how the short story captures moments of rupture between extractivist modernity and sustainable ways of life. She frames it as a tool of narrative resistance and ecological alliance, capable of forging connections among humans, non-humans, and living environments.

Déwé Gorodé, a foundational figure of Kanak literature, illustrates in *Sous les cendres des conquies* (1985) the spiritual and cultural embeddedness of agriculture. Her poetic short stories re-inscribe agrarian practices within a network of rituals, inherited knowledge, and sacred spaces, while denouncing their gradual erasure under the pressure of modernity, urbanization, and wage labor. She thereby asserts that the transmission of agricultural knowledge is inseparable from the struggle for cultural sovereignty.

Similarly, Marcel Melthérorong, in *Tôghàn* (2007), explores the role of agriculture in the identity quest of young ni-Vanuatu. Through narrative fragments resembling short stories, he portrays cultivation of the land as an act of cultural reappropriation in the face of globalization.

These works collectively demonstrate that the short story serves as a genuine literary and political laboratory. It offers a space to question the relationships between ecology and identity, and to articulate, through fiction, critical propositions for imagining sustainable ways of inhabiting Pacific Island territories.

3. LITERATURE AS ARCHIVE: ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITIONS

In a context marked by globalization and cultural erasure, the Oceanian short story plays a central role in the transmission and re-creation of endogenous knowledge systems. Through its brief and concentrated form, it reconfigures oral narratives into a vibrant, contemporary written mode. It functions as a dynamic archive in which agricultural practices, local cosmologies, and ancestral gestures are reactivated. This literary process embodies both cultural resistance and future projection, embedding the land and its associated knowledge within a shared symbolic, political, and spiritual horizon.

3.1. The Short Story as a Vehicle for the Transmission of endogenous Knowledge

The short story ensures the continuity of endangered agricultural knowledge by adapting it into an accessible, affective, and contextually grounded literary form. In *Quand le cannibale ricane* (2015), Paul Tavo illustrates this dynamic through the story of William, who rediscovers his customary garden. Fiction connects agricultural gestures to collective memory, transforming the garden into an embodied text. This return to the land represents a dual movement: the preservation of a fragile local heritage and the rehabilitation of ecological knowledge devalued by dominant systems. As a counter-discourse, the short story challenges the exclusion of peasant knowledge from educational and agricultural policies. It mobilizes the imagination and emotions, serving as an effective cultural mediator. Through narrative, it becomes a tool of resistance, popular education, and identity transformation.

3.2. The Short Story as Cultural and Political Advocacy for Sustainable Agricultural Practices

The short story also functions as a literary manifesto advocating for sustainable agriculture rooted in local traditions. In *L'Agenda* (1996) by Déwé Gorodé, a woman's return to taro cultivation symbolizes a rejection of food dependency and a reappropriation of identity. Taro farming becomes a metaphor for a self-sufficient, rooted model of living. The text implicitly critiques urbanization and externally imposed development policies, instead valorizing slowness, regeneration, and intergenerational transmission. Through poetic language, Gorodé elevates subsistence farming as an act of cultural and political resistance, redirecting the imagination toward ecological and communal sovereignty.

3.3. The Short Story as a Medium of Agricultural Memory

The short story enables the reactivation of agricultural memory, embodied in gestures, narratives, and myths connected to the land. In *Nouvelles calédoniennes* (2012), Waej Génin-Juni's short story *Hula* emphasizes the link between agrarian culture and clan memory, portraying land as an ancestral gift and sacred space. Similarly, in *Tôghân* (2007) by Marcel Melthérorong, a young man rediscovers agricultural knowledge through dialogue with elders. These stories highlight the resilience of ecological practices amid cultural ruptures. The short story isolates symbolic scenes—planting, transmission, ritual—that serve as markers of a memory both affective and political. This memory is not nostalgic but dynamic, revitalized through fiction as a living archive and a tool for cultural regeneration.

3.4. The Short Story as a Critical Tool against Development Models Detached from Local Realities

The short story serves as a vehicle for social critique, confronting development projects that are exogenous and disconnected from local realities. In *Les champs de la terre* (2015) by Pierre Gope, a village community faces the threat of a foreign agro-industrial project. Behind economic promises lie land dispossession and ecological collapse. The fiction reveals the incompatibility of such models with communal logic. The short story thus produces a counter-narrative that deconstructs technocratic discourses and reaffirms local knowledge as fundamental to any sustainable transformation. Rooted in local contexts, it becomes a space of discursive resistance and cultural affirmation.

3.5. The Short Story as a Reflective Medium on the Interrelations between Culture, Ecology, and Development

The short story provides a reflective space for exploring tensions between modernity and tradition, development and ecological integrity. In Oceanian tales and legends, a young female farmer hesitates between inherited techniques and intensive agriculture. The narrative gives voice to elders, dreams, and even personified plants to construct an ethic of reciprocity and care. Here, the short story becomes a laboratory of thought, interrogating the conditions of sustainable development. It offers narratives in which the land is a subject, traditions are living resources, and agricultural choices are existential stakes. The short story embodies a committed cultural ecology based on transmission, environmental justice, and the sovereignty of island peoples.

4. CASE STUDIES: IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THREE OCEANIAN SHORT STORIES

4.1. Paul Tavo, *Quand le cannibale ricane* (2015)

In one of the narratives included in this hybrid collection, Paul Tavo depicts the return of a young man, William, to Lamap, where he reconnects with the customary garden of his childhood. This garden, as a site of transmission for ancestral agricultural knowledge, becomes a space of memory and identity reappropriation. Tavo portrays agriculture as a symbolic and political system, in direct opposition to colonial narratives of progress that devalue

traditional practices. Through poetic prose, the short story transforms the land into a vector of cultural sovereignty and autonomy. It affirms literature's role as a vehicle for ecological knowledge transmission and community resilience within a postcolonial context.

4.2. Déwé Gorodé, *L'Agenda* (1996)

In one of the short stories from *L'Agenda*, a Kanak woman leaves the city to return to taro cultivation in her clan's valley. This return to ancestral practices embodies both an act of identity reclamation and a critique of colonizing development models. Gorodé draws a powerful parallel between agricultural fertility, feminine memory, and land sovereignty. Agriculture becomes an act of resistance grounded in a relational ethic of reciprocity and sustainability. The story mobilizes a postcolonial ecocriticism by interweaving social justice, customary memory, and the ecology of living systems—positioning literature as a space for political agency and spiritual regeneration.

4.3. Chantal Spitz, *L'Île des rêves écrasés* (1991)

Within this fragmentary novel, Chantal Spitz includes a striking episode: a former farmer sees his land expropriated to build a luxury hotel. This conflict crystallizes the opposition between an extractivist model of development and a cosmology deeply rooted in the land. The text denounces the marginalization of agricultural, linguistic, and cultural knowledge. Through poetic language interspersed with *reo mā'ohi*, Spitz constructs an aesthetics of loss and resistance. The short story becomes a multilingual space of ecological memory, interweaving oral transmission, political critique, and disillusionment with the excesses of neocolonial tourism.

Together, these three case studies demonstrate how short fiction can articulate ecological critique, agrarian memory, and cultural transmission, while also serving as a catalyst for endogenous sustainable development.

5. LITERATURE AND POLITICS: LINKING NARRATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Contemporary Oceanian short fiction extends beyond the aesthetic or symbolic register; it can be mobilized in educational and political contexts as a lever for transformation. When integrated into school curricula, it promotes ecological awareness, intergenerational transmission, and the valorization of local knowledge—as demonstrated by the textual studies of Déwé Gorodé and Paul Tavo implemented in schools in Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

Beyond the sphere of education, institutions such as the Pacific Community (SPC) and UNESCO Pacific have recognized the cultural value of literary narratives in their sustainable development initiatives. Educational brochures and awareness campaigns have incorporated literary excerpts to resonate more effectively with island imaginaries and to anchor ecological concerns within culturally meaningful frameworks. Literature thus becomes a channel for the appropriation of sustainable practices grounded in strong cultural and symbolic foundations.

Furthermore, fiction plays a key role in social and political mediation: it brings to light the tensions surrounding land, knowledge transmission, and cultural erosion. Its narrative power creates spaces for dialogue between local communities and policymakers. In this sense, fiction functions as a form of narrative diplomacy, capable of influencing agricultural and environmental policy agendas.

Ultimately, Oceanian authors, by connecting storytelling with action, reinvent the role of literature—not merely as a witness to social change, but as a strategic tool for development, bearing memory, commitment, and social transformation.

6. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study of Francophone Oceanian short fiction reveals the extent to which literature can serve as a strategic vector for sustainable development in Pacific Island contexts. By weaving together oral memory, ecological

awareness, and cultural rootedness, these literary narratives reaffirm the centrality of traditional agriculture not only as intangible heritage, but also as an identity- and politics-bearing matrix. They remind us that land is not merely a source of subsistence, but a site of memory, transmission, and social regeneration.

Through the narration of agroecological practices, endogenous knowledge systems, ancestral gestures, and resistance to exogenous development models, the short story fulfills a powerful mediating function—bridging past and future, orality and writing, culture and politics. Whether it is the revalorization of taro cultivation in Déwé Gorodé’s work, the garden as a space of reconciliation in Paul Tavo’s fiction, or the agricultural gesture as a bearer of memory in Marcel Melthérong’s narratives, each text offers a situated vision of development—one that respects local balances and cultural inheritances.

Thanks to its brief and accessible form, the short story emerges as a tool for ecological awareness, intercultural education, and social critique. It constitutes a space of resistance against cultural homogenization, as well as a laboratory for rooted narrative solutions. In this light, literature contributes to a mobilizing “narrative ecology,” in which stories become forces for action, tools for governance, and instruments for reshaping development imaginaries.

This research therefore advocates for increased institutional recognition of Oceanian literature in educational, cultural, and environmental policies. There is a pressing need to support regional literary creation, to encourage the circulation of works in local languages and in translation, and to harness digital tools to expand access to these narratives. By linking fiction and action, memory and innovation, these short stories offer an alternative vision of the future: a future that is grounded, solidaristic, and sustainable—conceived from within the realities of the Pacific.

In this perspective, it is essential that public policies integrate cultural and literary dimensions more thoroughly into sustainable development strategies, particularly within the educational sector. School curricula in Pacific countries and territories should include works from contemporary Oceanian literature—especially short stories centered on traditional agriculture—to promote local knowledge and strengthen young people’s sense of cultural belonging. Such integration would help build a more contextual, multilingual, and ecosystemic education—one that connects academic disciplines to the lived realities of island communities. It would also be valuable to support rural writing residencies, intergenerational storytelling workshops focused on agricultural heritage, and digital platforms for the dissemination of literary texts in both local languages and French. In this way, literature—far from being confined to the symbolic domain—can become a strategic lever for empowerment, transmission, and the co-construction of sustainable development rooted in Oceanian realities.

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