The Politics of Popular Music and Youth Culture in 21st-Century Mauritius and Réunion

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

September, 2014

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help, support, and encouragement of many people strewn across two hemispheres. In Leeds and the UK, I would firstly like to thank Andy Stafford for being such a wonderful supervisor. I'd also like to thank Karen Priestley, Jenni Rauch, and all other members of staff in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies who have assisted in various important ways throughout the course of my studies. Thanks are also due to Matthew Philpotts, Barbara Lebrun, and Joe McGonagle at the University of Manchester for nurturing my love of research and for recognising some kind of potential in my former undergraduate self. Thanks too to Héloïse Finch-Boyer for the encouragement and for representing Indian Ocean research in the UK. I apologise that I can't name everybody, but many thanks to all those who have stimulated my thoughts at conferences, reading groups, and over cups of tea/coffee. Thanks too to my friends who have kept me sane when my thoughts have been over-stimulated.

In Mauritius, there are too many people to thank. Thank you to all those who filled my seven months in Mauritius with music: Alain, Marou, and everybody at Abaim; Yann and Yannick and everybody who was in some way involved in events and concerts at Le Sapin. Thank you to everybody at ELI Africa in Pamplemousses, and special thanks to those who took part in my somewhat experimental theatre group. Thanks to all those who helped shaped the ideas which are expressed in this thesis, including but not limited to Daniella Bastien, Ashish Bissoondial at the Mauritius Institute of Education, Fahrad Khoyratty and Bruno Cunniah at the University of Mauritius, Catherine Boudet and Jeff Lingaya, Ram Seegobin, Lindsey Collen and other members of Lalit. Mersi sirtou a tou dimounn ki'nn ed mwa aprann kreol.

In Réunion, many thanks to Jonathan, Pierre, and Daniela and Julien for not leaving me homeless and for being there. Un grand merci à Donadieu et Titan Maloyèr, au Centre du Cœur saignant, et à Lekol Moring Le Port de m'avoir accueillie si chaleureusement. Thanks to Jacqueline Andoche and Yu-Sion Live at the Université de La Réunion for productive discussions about music and tradition.

In another part of France, many thanks are due to Catherine Servan-Schreiber and Julie Peghini for, amongst many other things, managing to discuss Mauritian cultural politics without finding my Mauritian-inflected French too strange.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and especially my parents for making all this possible. Philip and Krystyna Bremner, I dedicate this thesis to you.

Abstract

This thesis examines the politics of popular music and youth culture in two geographically close but socioculturally distinct Indian Ocean islands: Réunion (a French overseas département) and Mauritius (independent from Britain since 1968). Neither island has an indigenous, pre-colonial population: the respective societies have thus formed through successive waves of immigration, including the importation of slaves and indentured workers from Madagascar, Africa, and Asia, resulting in extremely ethnically diverse populations, on both a communal and individual level.

The island societies both began the twentieth century as sugar-producing plantation colonies, but by the beginning of the twenty-first century, their socioeconomic landscapes had been dramatically transformed: independent Mauritius was proclaimed as an 'African tiger' thanks to astute state management of limited resources, and Réunion became a French *département d'outre-mer*, with living standards now similar to those of metropolitan France. Although both island societies experienced dramatic and rapid transformation, however, modern-day Réunion and Mauritius have come to represent opposing postcolonial experiences. This has resulted in the adoption of opposing approaches to the question of ethnic and racial difference: whereas the Mauritian Constitution officially acknowledges the existence of ethnoreligious 'communities', ethnic difference is not officially recognised in Réunion due to colour-blind French Republican policy.

The following analysis seeks to show that the study of contemporary popular culture can provide particular insights into the workings of these two creolised, postcolonial societies. Considered here principally through the lens of popular music and youth culture, it will be argued that contemporary Réunionese and Mauritian popular music and youth cultures engage with political and social issues specific to each context. This is discussed in Part II in relation to Kreol language politics, which shows that popular music can be said to work towards changing mentalities still influenced by colonial language prejudices; and in Part III as concerns popular culture's engagement with discourses of inclusion and exclusion within the national community.

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Introduction: Pop Music, Youth Culture and Politics in the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean: Isolation and Obscurity

> Ne pas pouvoir, pendant longtemps, nommer l'océan indien dans l'imaginaire occidental, signale une difficulté de représentation qui est de situation, une difficulté à penser cet océan comme espace. On pense l'Afrique, l'Inde ou les îles, mais on ne pense pas ce qui les relie. Même aujourd'hui, l'Océan Indien ne constitue pas vraiment un espace dans la pensée et dans la représentation, alors que l'on parle sans problème de monde atlantique, de monde caribéen, de monde pacifique.'[1]

> the Indian Ocean […] has been known and ignored, dismissed and described. European scholars often found it as a passive region, part of the unchanging East, on which impacted exogenous Roman, Islamic and Western European influences. The Indian Ocean was brought into history when some external force came to it. [...] the Indian Ocean is by far the oldest of the seas in history, in terms of it being used and traversed by humans.[2]

Like the wider Indian Ocean region in which they are situated, Mauritius and Réunion are often overlooked, relegated to the periphery of our contemporary global world. The islands' isolated geographical position means that they are often wiped from the global map, in both a metaphorical and literal sense: Françoise Vergès and Carpanin Marimoutou point to the fact that Réunion is effectively 'une île souvent oubliée sur les cartes du monde, souvent confondue avec d'autres territoires français'.[3] Viewed from the world's metropolitan centres, the two islands feature in the global imaginary, if at all, perhaps only as tropical islands of imprecise geographic location, with amiable locals of uncertain ethnic origins.[4] What figures perhaps more centrally in these touristic imaginaries are dramatic landscapes and geographical features, namely, Mauritius' white sand beaches and turquoise lagoons, and Réunion's 'intense' mountainous scenery and breathtaking volcanic landscape.[5] And this focus on dramatic but generally uninhabited landscapes is perhaps not without justification, given that both islands had no permanent human population prior to colonization.

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[1] Carpanin Marimoutou, 'Littératures indiaocéaniques', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 318: 2 (2006), 131-40, p. 133.

[2] Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3.

[3] This observation serves as the starting point to their formulation of Indian Ocean creolisation. See *Amarres: Créolisations india-océanes* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2005), p. 7.

[4] Tourists arriving at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport in Mauritius are greeted with a mural showing homogenous brown-skinned workers in sugar cane fields: the only hint of ethnic or cultural specificity is perhaps a woman with a long 'Indian' plait in her hair.

[5] 'L'île intense' is one of the official slogans used by Île de La Reunion Tourisme, the official tourist board. See, for example, 'La Réunion: l'île intense', <http://www.france.fr/entreprendre-et-reussir-en-france/la-reunion-lile-intense.html> [Accessed 19th August 2014].

Yet the islands' human populations can also be successfully harnessed for their touristic appeal. As societies formed exclusively through immigration, with correspondingly high levels of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, there is a significant symbolic investment in the conceptualisation of Mauritius and Réunion as multicultural microcosms, where peoples of diverse origins have learned to successfully live together in peace. Both island societies are presented in tourist literature as harmonious, diverse, multiethnic, and colourful, with all the attendant exoticising connotations. The islands might even be seen as global tourism's equivalent of the infamous images of human diversity in advertisements driven by 'corporate multiculturalism',[6] in that they permit and encourage predominantly Western tourists to engage in a form of voyeurism concerning the beauty of biological and cultural *métissage*, whilst the historical context of colonialism and racial violence in which *métissage* took place remains under erasure.

Nevertheless, it is increasingly recognised that despite their obscurity, the social dynamics and cultural practices and production of Réunion and Mauritius, and that of the wider Indian Ocean region, demand a more sustained and critical approach. Their cultures and societies can be said to constitute a burgeoning but under-investigated area in terms of academic research. As Anjali Prabhu has observed, 'La Réunion and Mauritius have not been central in an academic discussion of postcoloniality, yet they are situated, geographically and theoretically, at the crossroads of the most consequential ruminations in recent postcolonial theory', given their collective experience of two major European empires (French and British) and of both slavery and indentured labour; their contrasting political statuses as French overseas department and independent nation; and their positions in relation to colonial trade routes and more recent military projects, from the Cold War to the wars in Afghanistan, in which the US military base on Diego Garcia which was used.[7] Peter Hawkins, author of the only English anthology of Francophone and Creolophone Indian Ocean literatures and cultures, has suggested that the perceived marginality of the Indian Ocean region continues to play an important role in evaluations of the region's cultural production:

> The geographical distance of the islands from both the mainland of the African
> continent as well as from the colonial decision-making centres of the West is one of

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[6] Paul Gilroy offers a critique of 'corporate multiculturalism', the co-opting of cultural and racial difference for corporate purposes, in *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004); and *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

[7] *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 17. This study does not concern itself with the issue of whether or not the cultural output of Réunion and/or Mauritius can be qualified as 'postcolonial', a term which is more readily associated with literature rather than popular cultural expression. For this discussion, see Peter Hawkins, 'How Appropriate is the Term "Post-Colonial" to the Cultural Production of Réunion?' in *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures*, ed. by Kamal Salhi (Lanham: Lexington, 2003), pp. 311-20.

the factors that affect the status of the island's cultures. In spite of the speedier communications of modern air travel and the internet, which have transformed the islands' access to the mainstream cultures of Europe and North America, their relative isolation remains a determining factor in their own self-image and their role in postcolonial development.[8]

The ramifications, however, are not limited to appraisals of cultural output: Françoise Lionnet, has suggested that perceived or real geographical isolation contributes to 'the level of disaffection among the peoples of Réunion', which, she argues, 'is deeper than that of the Antilleans whose cultural identity has always been somewhat better defined, in part also because of their geographic location in the Caribbean basin, which is larger and better known than the Mascarene islands of the Indian Ocean.'[9]

The present study therefore aims to build on the work of researchers who have sought to establish that these remote places are worthy of greater attention, and to undo some of the common assumptions regarding the Indian Ocean region in general, and Mauritius and Réunion in particular. The particularly acute need to resituate Réunion in the Indian Ocean has been succinctly captured by Vergès and Marimoutou in their attempt to theorise Indian Ocean processes of creolisation. Using the Réunionese term 'amarrer' (*attacher*), they justify the need to deconstruct Eurocentric and Francocentric analytical frameworks:

> Quand l'Europe se pensait le centre du monde, organisait le monde autour de ce centre, nous étions quelque part, là-bas, au bout du monde. Nous étions alors amarrés à la France, c'était une amarre imposée, le lien nous étranglait parfois. Aujourd'hui, alors que l'Europe est devenue l'une des provinces du monde, nous repensons nos amarres. Décentrer le regard, retracer une cartographie du monde, de l'océan indien, où la France, l'Afrique, l'Europe, l'Asie, le monde musulman se croisent, voilà notre projet. Inscrire notre île dans ces réseaux d'échanges et des rencontres, à la croisée des mondes africains, européens, asiatiques et insulaires. À la périphérie sans doute mais une périphérie pensée, travaillée, transformée en atout, en avantage.

In a sense, this study itself can be said to constitute an attempt to rethink these 'amarres', in that one of the motivations behind researching both Réunionese and Mauritian culture was to resituate Réunion in its geographical, rather than political, context. The two islands' societies and cultures are in fact rarely looked at comparatively or simultaneously within scholarly analysis; indeed, Mauritius is more likely to be compared to Trinidad and Tobago in the

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[8] *The Other Hybrid Archipelago: Introduction to the Literatures and Cultures of the Francophone Indian Ocean* (Lanham: Lexington, 2007), pp. 165-66.

[9] 'Créolité in the Indian Ocean: Two Models of Cultural Diversity', *Yale French Studies*, 82: 1 (1993), 101-12, p. 102.

Caribbean or Fiji in the Pacific due to their shared feature of having a large population of Indian origin.[10]

Moreover, the study applies the concept of transforming marginality into an advantage to its subjects of analysis, popular music and youth culture, both marginalised elements within the already marginal cultural production of Réunion and Mauritius. Their marginalisation is arguably further exacerbated by the tendency to confuse culture with tradition on the one hand, or with religion on the other, as is revealed by the Mauritian concept of ancestral cultures and of plural state-funded cultural centres.[11] Furthermore, the concern with marginalisation reflects the political position of this research project, which attempts to privilege those whose voices are not normally heard within discourses on culture in Réunionese and Mauritian society. This position is informed by feminist standpoint theory, which posits that the oppressed have a greater understanding of pertinent social issues, given that 'one's social situation enables and sets limits on what one can know: some social situations – critically unexamined dominant ones – are more limiting than others in this respect, and what makes these situations more limiting is their inability to generate the most critical questions about received belief.'[12]

This study aims to generate some critical questions regarding received belief about culture in Réunion and Mauritius, or to at least provide the basis for further reflection. More precisely, the following analysis seeks to show that the study of contemporary popular culture can provide particular insights into the workings of these two creolised, postcolonial societies. It aspires to take popular culture seriously, and to privilege the experiences and cultural practices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Considered here principally through the lens of popular music and youth culture, popular culture is understood as a site in

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[10] Important exceptions include Prabhu, and Lionnet, *Le Su et l'incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien*, coll. *Essais et critiques littéraires* (La Pelouse, Trou d'Eau Douce, Île Maurice: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012). For Mauritius comparisons, see, for example, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Us and Them in Modern Societies: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius, Trinidad and Beyond* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992).

[11] For more detail, see Chapter 2 of this study. In the Réunionese context, see also Christian Ghasarian's work on the *renouveau tamoul*, which might be characterised as the gentrification of Indo-Réunionese cultural specificity, in, for example, 'Patrimoine culturel et ethnicité à La Réunion (dynamiques et dialogismes)', *Ethnologie française*, 99: 3 (1999), 365-74; and 'We Have the Best Gods! The Encounter Between Hinduism and Christianity in La Réunion', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 32 (1997), 286-95.

[12] Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"?' in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. by Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 49-82, pp. 54-5. She argues here that purposefully including oppressed groups within our research agendas serves to undermine the implicit masculine, bourgeois and white Eurocentric bias of social research, resulting in 'strong objectivity'. See, amongst others, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York; London: Routledge, 1991).

which political issues are engaged with and contested.[13] It will be argued that contemporary Réunionese and Mauritian popular music and youth cultures engage with political and social issues specific to each context. Some of the subsequent analysis may be seen to reveal parallels between the politics of culture within the two societies, as will become apparent in the analysis of engagement with language politics in Part II of this study; and some will be seen to reflect sharp contrasts, as in Part III on popular culture and the politics of belonging. In this regard, this thesis is not a comparative study in the strictest sense, and, with the exception of the brief consideration of Mauritian dancehall music in Chapter 3, the following chapters generally discuss the Réunionese and Mauritian contexts separately in order to give an adequate account of the specificities of each context. Nevertheless, the thesis aims to demonstrate that in both locations, popular cultural practices and output respond to the postcolonial politics and contemporary social issues of the two island societies, which in spite of significant political differences both remain fundamentally marked by asymmetrical power relations, deep-founded old inequalities and dynamic and elusive new ones. The following analysis also seeks to explore how the cultural politics of popular music and youth culture drawn on, perpetuate, modify, counter, and/or subvert existing discourses on race, ethnicity, and the nation, including a critical consideration of the globalised images of blackness which circulate in globalised popular culture and the meanings which young people in Réunion and Mauritius attribute to these images.

Popular Music, Youth Culture, and Academics

On first appearances, however, neither pop music nor youth cultures would seem to lend themselves easily to political analysis, in the most commonly understood sense of the term. Contemporary commercially produced musical forms in particular would appear to have been irredeemably corrupted by their implication in their own commodification and global dissemination. This is seen to have rendered such forms incapable of engagement with political and social issues, and indeed many such forms appear outwardly apolitical, expressing a decided lack of interest in political issues in favour of individualism and corporate consumerism characterised by 'bling bling' aesthetics. As Halifu Osumare points out, however,

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[13] This understanding of the politics of popular culture is influenced by the work of Stuart Hall: 'Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture – already fully formed – might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters.' 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"' in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. by John Storey, 2nd ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 442-53, p. 453.

even this process of commodification, itself inherently complicit in the spread of global neoliberal capitalism, can arguably be seen to have a democratizing potential: speaking of the now global hip hop movement, she suggests that '[h]ip hop's involvement in commodification, ironically enough, is simultaneously implicated in its potential as a globally democratizing pop subculture.'[14] Thus, though it may be tempting to characterise all forms of engagement with commercialised cultural expression simply as passive consumerism, we would do well to follow Hall's maxim which insists that this engagement is neither inherently passive nor active, but first and foremost a site of contestation.[15]

Academic engagement with popular and youth culture, though often admirable in its intentions, has however proved problematic. The research of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s and 70s is generally considered as pioneering in this field, notably for its attempt to situate popular cultural expression in relation to both political and social developments and critical theory.[16] Dick Hebdige's work on youth subcultures is still cited today as a foundational text in the sociological analysis of youth cultures.[17] Yet the Cultural Studies project has also been mired in criticism. In particular, the tendency towards an uncritical celebration of the politically subversive nature of youth subcultures was denounced by scholars such as Jim McGuigan, who accused some CCCS researchers of adopting 'a disingenuous selectivity in populist cultural research' which failed to address the darker side of many elements of popular culture, including expressions of racism and misogyny.[18] The cultural studies project has nonetheless since outgrown its initial context of post-war British youth cultures, and as an academic discipline it has been exported internationally. Yet many supporters as well as critics of the project have suggested that it has lost its critical edge. Even Hall, one of the founding members of the CCCS, recently suggested in an interview with Sut Jhally that some elements of cultural studies research have become akin to an uncritical and depoliticised form of media studies: in

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[14] 'Global Hip-Hop and The African Diaspora' in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. by Harry J. Elam, Jr., and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 266-88, p. 286.

[15] See his 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"'.

[16] See, amongst others, Stuart Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978; and Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Hutchinson, The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1976).

[17] *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979). For a critical reconsideration of the CCCS work on subcultures and application of the concept to contemporary popular cultures, see Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[18] Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 171-2.

his words, 'we cannot just go on producing another analysis of The Sopranos' when 'something more is happening which requires our attention'.[19]

These criticisms notwithstanding, this study has in many respects modelled itself on the (British) cultural studies project. It aims to offer a political analysis of popular music and youth culture, using critical theory where it helps to elucidate certain social phenomena (as with Judith Butler's concept of performativity discussed in Chapter 5), and is based on long-term ethnographic research undertaken in Mauritius and Réunion from October 2011 to August 2013. So at this point it might be asked, why apply an approach developed in relation to youth culture in post-war Britain to that of the Indian Ocean in the 21st century? It is the author's belief that the cultural studies approach has helped to highlight and uncover numerous ways in which popular music and youth culture engages with political issues, even through cultural output which is widely considered as indicative of global consumerism and thus often characterised as apolitical. It is hoped that this thesis may serve as a springboard for further research and reflection on the applicability of the cultural studies approach to Mauritian and Réunionese popular culture.

It might also be asked, why study the cultural politics of youth culture and popular music in two isolated island contexts, whose painful histories appear to have been successfully overcome, albeit in very different ways, resulting in generally peaceful, multicultural societies which, from the dominant Western perspective, would appear to have much to teach other multiethnic and postcolonial nations about peaceful co-existence and successful development? We could even ask what is the point of studying the political implications of popular culture at all, when more important things are occurring on the ground level. Stuart Hall has posed this question in relation to the AIDS epidemic:

> At that point, I think anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we've been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don't feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook.

He further explains that '[u]nless we operate in this tension, we don't know what cultural studies can do, can't, can never do; but also, what it has to do', which, according to Hall, is 'to analyze certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death.'[20]

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[19] See 'Stuart Hall Interviewed by Sut Jhally', (2012) <http://vimeo.com/53879491>, [Accessed 23rd September 2014]. For an overview of these developments, see Hall's 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies' in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 277-94.

[20] Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', p. 285.

Whilst remaining sensitive to both historical experiences of violence and human suffering and the more elusive yet no less real forms of suffering experienced by subordinated populations today, this is what I aim to work towards in this thesis. In keeping with the ethos evoked by Hall above, and with the tension that he argues is an evitable and necessary part of successful political engagement within analyses of popular culture, this study aims to keep in mind questions of power within cultural representation, or cultural politics, within its analysis of popular music and related aspects of youth culture. Thus I aim to foreground issues of social inequality and cultural difference whilst considering the political nature of representations of Mauritianness and Réunionness within popular culture. These are understood here not as ready-defined constructs, but rather as contested terms which actors try to counter, define, and redefine within their engagement with popular culture.

Finally, it must also be acknowledged that the fact that this study chooses to explore the politics of popular culture in Réunion and Mauritius through an analysis of popular music and youth culture might appear to presuppose a 'special relationship', based on 'a nearly always unstated assumption that popular music is a phenomenon associated with "youth"'.[21] For many scholars, the tendency to associate the two fields of study highlights the need to unpack this common assumption.[22] For David Hesmondhalgh, 'these ideas rely on particular notions of what popular music is, which are derived from an era, that of the 1960s and 1970s, when popular music became tied commercially and discursively to youth'; and as a result, in contemporary research 'popular music should not be conceived as the privileged domain of young people'.[23] However, it must also be recognised that this study's interest in these fields results from the specificities of the two contexts, which have both been marked by rapid development at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. The current generation of young Réunionese and Mauritians aged under 30 years old can thus be considered as a product of this period of accelerated development, the consequences of which will be considered in the historical overview below. Furthermore, the study has also been fundamentally shaped by two lengthy periods of fieldwork research with youth associations and youth music groups, in which music played a central role and served as a bridge between my own experience of adolescence in a relatively privileged, First World context and that of my research participants. Additionally, we should also remember that in much academic engagement with popular musical forms in Mauritius and Réunion, especially those recognised

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[21] David Hesmondhalgh, 'Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8: 1 (2005), 21-40, p. 36.
[22] Dan Laughey, *Music and Youth Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[23] Hesmondhalgh, p. 22.

as folk forms, it is the older generations rather than the young who are generally considered as privileged informers.[24]

Historical Context: The Colonisation of Île Bourbon (Réunion) and Île de France (Mauritius)

The two small islands of Réunion and Mauritius, with respective land areas of 2,511 km^2 and 2,040 km^2, are situated approximately 170km apart, 800km east of Madagascar in the south-western Indian Ocean. Along with the smaller island of Rodrigues, now a dependency of Mauritius, the islands form the Mascarene archipelago.[25] Both islands were known to Arab navigators,[26] and were 'probably visited by Arab or Swahili sailors before 1500', but it was through Portuguese voyages in early sixteenth century that they first became known to the wider world.[27] The Mascarene archipelago was given its current name during this period in honour of the Portuguese navigator Pedro Mascarenhas, who is thought to be the first European to land on one of the islands.[28] Permanent settlement, however, is generally considered to have begun much later with European colonisation in the seventeenth century.[29]

According to the Réunionese historian Sonia Chane-Kune, although the three Mascarene islands came to be inhabited at different times, the colonisation of Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues followed to same pattern. Each island served first as a stopping point

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[24] See, for example, the unpublished PhD theses of Benjamin Lagarde, 'Réunion maloya: La créolisation réunionnaise telle qu'entendue depuis sa musique traditionnelle' (University of Aix-Marseille, 2012); and Guillaume Samson, 'Musique et identité à La Réunion: Généalogie des constructions d'une singularité insulaire' (University of Montréal and Aix-Marseille, 2006).

[25] Space does not permit me to discuss Rodriguan culture and society in this thesis. Formerly a colony, Rodrigues still remains to some extent in relation of domination within the modern-day Mauritian state, and a binary opposition between 'developed' Mauritius and 'poor, undeveloped' Rodrigues is often evoked in public discourse. For more information see Christian Barat, Michel Carayol, and Robert Chaudenson, *Rodrigues, la cendrillon des Mascareignes* (Sainte-Clotilde, Réunion: Université de la Réunion, Institut de Linguistique et d'Anthropologie, 1985); and Jean-Michel Jauze, *Rodrigues: La troisième île des Mascareignes* (Paris; Saint-Denis, Réunion: L'Harmattan, 1998).

[26] Historian Auguste Toussaint claims that the islands 'figurai[ent] sous des noms arabes sur des cartes trouvées aux mains des Nakhoudas de la côte d'Afrique par les premier marins portugais que pénétrèrent l'océan Indien'. *Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1972), p. 21. Cited in Chane-Kune, *Aux origines de l'identité réunionnaise* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), p. 15.

[27] Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.

[28] Sonia Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, p. 16.

[29] A lack of information regarding the islands' earlier histories has however led some historians to question the thesis that the islands were unpopulated prior to European colonisation. A conference organised by UNSECO reported that those present 'did not accept as proven the hypothesis that these islands [Réunion, Mauritius, Rodrigues and the Seychelles] were not peopled at all until the Europeans settled there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.' See 'Report on the Discussions' in *Historical Relations across the Indian Ocean. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organized by UNESCO at Port Louis, Mauritius, from 15 to 19 July 1974* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1980), pp. 165-84, p. 174.

on the route to India, then as a temporary settlement, finally leading to permanent inhabitation.[30] Dutch colonisation of Mauritius, which was named in honour of the *stadthouder* of Holland Maurice of Nassau, began in 1638. However, the island was twice abandoned due to cost inefficiency, with the Dutch population leaving definitively in 1706.[31] The French later claimed the island under the control of *Compagnie des Indes* in 1715, which was henceforth renamed as Île de France. Permanent settlement of the island began in 1721.[32]

Meanwhile, Réunion was also claimed by France as one of the 'îles adjacentes' to Madagascar, their principal colonial project, in 1642, and named Île Bourbon after the ruling French dynasty.[33] Mutineers from Fort-Dauphin, a French outpost in Madagascar, were exiled on the island in 1646; yet after their release the former famously characterised the Bourbon as an earthly 'paradise' and as 'l'île la plus saine qui soit au monde', despite being uninhabited.[34] The island was to be used as penal colony again in 1654 before the first attempt at permanent settlement in 1663: the first inhabitants were two French men, and ten Malagasy male and female *serviteurs*.[35] Biological miscegenation was a necessity given the absence of white women amongst early settlers, so the first children born on the island were of mixed parentage. Chane-Kune maintains that during this initial period, '[d]es unions sont célébrées entre des Français et des femmes de Madagascar', and 'les métissages étaient fréquents et fort bien acceptés'.[36] Yet the institution of slavery soon established a racially hierarchical social structure, even though initially Bourbon did not actively participate in the slave trade, and colonisers were more numerous than slaves.[37] Françoise Dumas-Champion thus suggests that

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[30] *Aux origines*, p. 16

[31] Gijs Kruijtzer, 'European Migration in the Dutch Sphere' in *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Gert Oostindie (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008), pp. 97-154, p. 105. For an account of the two periods of Dutch colonisation in Mauritius, see Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 4-27. It would seem that some escaped slaves may have stayed on the island after this point: Vaughan notes that during the both attempts to colonise the island, slaves 'escaped with apparent ease', but that ultimately we cannot know whether slaves remained on the island, p. 12. Philip Baker and Chris Corne dispute this in their account of the peopling of the Mascarene islands in *Isle de France Creole: Affinities and Origins* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1982).

[32] Vaughan, p. 27.

[33] Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, p. 18. The island was renamed several times during the course of the nineteenth century, first as 'Île de la Réunion' during the French Revolution, then as 'Île Bonaparte' between 1803 and 1814, then once again as 'Bourbon' until 1848, when it was renamed as Réunion for the second time.

[34] Étienne de Flacourt, *Histoire de la grande isle Madagascar* (Paris: Karthala, 1995) [1658], p. 306, cited in Françoise Dumas-Champion, *Le Mariage des cultures à l'île de la Réunion* (Paris: Karthala 2008), p. 23, and Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, pp. 18-9.

[35] *Aux origines*, p. 20.

[36] Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, p. 27, p. 41.

[37] See Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, p. 41. There is some debate as to whether, as Michel Robert asserts, 'dès le départ, la société réunionnaise était organisée en société esclavagiste', *La Réunion, combats pour l'autonomie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1976), p. 10. Toussaint notes that the term 'slave' was not used prior to 1690, and thus was not initially used to refer to population of Malagasy origin, p. 30.

even before the practice of slavery became widespread, as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, Réunionese society witnessed the development of 'une classification à caractère racial qui persiste nos jours, même si le sens de ces catégories a considérablement évolué'.[38] Following the start of coffee cultivation in 1715, in 1723 Bourbon applied the *Code Noir* (1685) decree, which served to regulate the practice of slavery in France and its territories.[39]

It was in fact the value attached to the emerging coffee industry on Île Bourbon which appears to have been the initial trigger behind the settlement of neighbouring Île de France. According to the historian Megan Vaughan, 'the very value of the crop was thought to pose a security problem, encouraging the attention of foreign enemies', and Bourbon now 'seemed dangerously exposed by the "emptiness" of the neighbouring island' within the context of 'the great power games of the Indian Ocean'.[40] As she explains,

> [t]he initial purpose of colonizing Île de France, then, was to protect Île Bourbon from attack. The new colony would be productive *and* strategic: populating the island itself acted as a deterrent to foreign powers, or so it was thought.[41]

Unlike Île Bourbon, then, Île de France was not initially conceived as a plantation colony; yet slaves were still considered indispensable to its functioning. The implementation of slavery, here as on Bourbon, was however by no means accepted without resistance. Slave owners on both islands were faced with the growing phenomenon of *marronnage*, the act of running away, often to mountainous regions, to escape the authority of the white colonisers.[42] These runaway slaves, or *marrons*, were to become important symbolic figures of resistance to the colonial regime;[43] however, as the historian Richard B. Allen observes, *marronnage* in

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[38] p. 26, in reference to the writings of Antoine Boucher who spent seven years on the island, from 1702 to 1709.

[39] Chane-Kune, *Aux origines*, p. 61.

[40] Vaughan, p. 21.

[41] Vaughan, p. 22.

[42] In Île de France/Mauritius, '[a]n average of four to five per cent of the island's slave population marooned each year during the last third of the eighteenth century; during the early 1820s this rate climbed to 11-13 per cent'. Richard B. Allen, 'A Serious and Alarming Daily Evil: *Marronage* and Its Legacy in Mauritius and the Colonial Plantation World', *Slavery & Abolition*, 25:2 (2004), 1-17, p. 1. Jean-Marie Desport suggests that 'On peut dire que le marronnage a commencé en même temps que le peuplement de Bourbon'. *De la servitude à la liberté: Bourbon des origines à 1848* (Saint-Denis: Océan Editions, 1989), p. 67. Toni Arno and Claude Orian also claim that the initial period of French settlement prior to 1735 witnessed high levels of *marronnage*. *Ile Maurice, une société multiraciale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), p. 24.

[43] For a discussion of *marronnage* as a comtemporary cultural politics in the Réunionese context, see Edward A. Alpers, 'The Idea of Marronage: Reflections on Literature and Politics in Réunion' in *Slavery and Resistance in Africa and Asia*, ed. by Edward A. Alpers, Gwyn Campbell and Michael Salman (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 37-49.

Mauritius was not always motivated by the desire for freedom and also appears to have served as a form of temporary reprieve from harsh living and working conditions.[44]

The early period of French colonisation was thus marred by many of the same problems as the previous Dutch attempts to settle the island. However, the appointment of Mahé de la Bourdonnais as governor general in 1735 is generally seen to have inaugurated a period a greater productivity, including the construction of a port at the island's natural harbour in the north-west of the island, the site of the present-day capital Port Louis.[45] It was the port and the surrounding town, rather than the plantation, which came to form the basis of the island's economic activity. Toni Arno and Claude Orian argue that it is for this reason that the development of colonial Île de France must be differentiated from that of Île Bourbon and other French plantation colonies in the Caribbean:

> Aux Antilles, la plantation était une unité de production de denrées coloniales et l'esclave était le moteur de production ; à l'Isle de France (île-port), l'activité économique consistait en l'entreposage des produits d'origine orientale et occidentale ; la plantation n'était qu'un cadre de vie et l'esclave qu'un signe de richesse, un complice de la vie idyllique que le colon recherchait au soleil tropical. [46]

They further explain that this set of circumstances 'facilita l'apparition rapide d'un groupe d'autochtones, les « métis », qui dans son mouvement ascensionnel se créa un idéal et s'érigea des barrières pour le protéger', resulting in the formation of social divisions and a rigidly stratified social structure like that of its sister island Île Bourbon.[47] For Arno and Orian, moreover, the fact that slaves served principally as signs of prosperity rather than as generators of wealth has been fundamental to the development of a specifically Mauritian form of social differentiation which they refer to as the *'société de regard'*, whereby individuals attempt to negotiate their upward mobility in relation to the position of others in what nonetheless remains a rigid and essentially racist social structure.[48]

The respective statuses of the two colonies were to change over the course of the eighteenth century: coffee production on Bourbon did not prove as profitable as was first expected, whereas Île de France's port 'proved its value especially in times of war or colonial

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[44] p. 7.
[45] See Arno and Orian, p. 25.
[46] p. 7.
[47] p. 7.
[48] They characterise the process as involving a form of indirect affirmation, 'une dépendance par rapport à l'assignation. Assigner et être assigné, suivre sa vie durant les agissements de l'autre que l'on exclut. Et même, lorsque sa propre place n'est pas en jeu, on interviendra pour faire observer la fixité de la place de quiconque voudrait en changer.' Skin colour and 'la toute-puissance du modèle blanc' are considered crucial elements here. See Arno and Orian, p. 117.

conquest'.[49] The latter thus came to be perceived as the more valuable asset: as 'the maritime advantages of Île de France's harbors (and particularly those of the northwest port) were slowly recognised', 'the respective status of the two islands would be reversed, with Île Bourbon becoming somewhat of a backwater, and Île de France the crucial link in French colonial and commercial policy in the Indian Ocean.'[50] The lack of prosperity in colonial Bourbon is also evident in the process of 'prolétarisation' of a part of its population of European origin, beginning in the 1800s.[51] These small-scale planters who came to be known as the *Ti Blan* or *petits blancs* were pushed to the isolated south east and the mountainous interior of the island as the land-owning families, the *Gro Blan*, bought up their land around the more fertile coastal region.[52] It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that when the British took control of the Mascarenes and the Seychelles during the Napoleonic wars, they chose to retain Île de France as a strategic military post and link to trade routes, which in 1810 was once again named Mauritius.[53] The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade had already been passed in Britain on March 25th, 1807, and was applied in Mauritius in 1813.[54] However, with the advent of sugar production on both islands in the first decades of the eighteenth century, these political developments resulted only in increases in illegal slave trading.[55] Indeed, overall activity in the region may have intensified during this period: historians maintain that 'the decline of slave trading in the Atlantic was accompanied by a rise in both slave trading and slavery in the western Indian Ocean during the nineteenth century.'[56] Ending the slave trade in the Indian Ocean proved more problematic than in the Atlantic due to its multidirectional

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[49] Vaughan, p. 45. See also Daniel Vaxelaire, *Le grand livre de l'histoire de la Réunion*, vol. 1 (Réunion: Orphie, 1999).

[50] Vaughan, p. 26.

[51] Alexandre Bourquin, *Histoire des Petits-Blancs de la Réunion: XIXe - début XXe siècles* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), p. 30.

[52] Land in Réunion was inherited in vertical strips, beginning at the coast and ending at the 'ligne du gouvernement' at 800-1000m altitude, so that each inheritor received land of equal quality. Thus some families were left with increasingly narrow strips of land. Laurent Médéa notes that in 1785, *Gro Blan* landowner Joseph Hubert offered poor white lands in the south (in St-Joseph and St-Phillippe) in exchange for their small strips. The *Gro Blan* population were in favour of this scheme, which separated them from the poorer whites who often had the same surnames. 'C'est ainsi, à cette époque, que les mutations socio-économiques apparaissent à l'intérieur de la communauté blanche qui n'existaient pas au début du peuplement.' See Laurent Médéa, *La Délinquance juvénile à La Réunion* (Sainte-Clotilde, La Réunion: Zarlor Editions, 2011), pp. 98-100.

[53] This was ratified by the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. See Jean Claude Lau Thi Keng, *Inter-ethnicité et politique à l'île Maurice* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), p. 13. Réunion was occupied by the British between 1810 and 1815 before being returned to France.

[54] Robert Harms, 'Introduction: Indian Ocean slavery in the age of abolition' in *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, ed. by Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon and David W. Blight (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 1-22, p. 9.

[55] See, amongst others, Richard B. Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles during the Early Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), 91-116; Hubert Gerbeau, 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique. La traite illégale à Bourbon au XIXe siècle', *Outre-mers*, 89 (2002), 79-108.

[56] Harms, p. 1.

nature, with slaves being transported from Africa to the Middle East and India, and from Africa, Indonesia and India to Réunion, Mauritius, and South Africa.[57] In an attempt to gain the support of the established Franco-Mauritian community, even R.T. Farquhar, the first British governor of Mauritius, 'colluded in illegal slaving, though supply never met demand.'[58]

The impending abolition of slavery therefore compelled plantation owners to look elsewhere for sources of labour, heralding the beginning of indentureship, a system of technically free labour which was however shaped by the previous institution of slavery in many respects.[59] Richard B. Allen traces the beginnings of the indentured labour system back to unsuccessful attempts to use Chinese and Indian free workers in Mauritius and Réunion in the late 1820s, although '[t]he arrival in Mauritius on November 2, 1834, of 75 privately recruited Indian workers is commonly regarded as the advent of the modern system of migrant contract labour.'[60] Slavery was officially abolished there on February 1st, 1835, but freed slaves were required to work for their former masters as apprentices for up to six years after this date.[61] Given the reluctance of freed slaves to work beyond this stipulated period, a total of over 450,000 indentured workers were subsequently brought to Mauritius from the Indian subcontinent before the official end of recruitment in 1910, more than 294,000 of whom decided to stay in Mauritius:[62]

> Ces travailleurs indiens sous contrat (*indentured labour*) s'engageront à travailler pendant cinq ans pour un propriétaire mauricien – dans des conditions misérables, il faut le dire – et très peu pourront rentrer en Inde car les frais de rapatriement sont à la charge des travailleurs eux-mêmes.[63]

Given that the vast majority of indentured labourers remained on the island, then, the abolition of slavery and subsequent inauguration of indentureship was to have a lasting effect on the make-up of Mauritian society:

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[57] Martin A. Klein, 'The Emancipation of Slaves in the Indian Ocean', in *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, edited by Gwyn Campbell (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 198-218, p. 198.

[58] Clare Anderson, 'The Bel Ombre Rebellion: Indian Convicts in Mauritius, 1815-53' in *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, edited by Gwyn Campbell (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 50-65, p. 51.

[59] Hugh Tinker famously characterised indentured labour as 'a new system of slavery', however this view has since been critiqued. See Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). For a discussion of Tinker's appraisal see various chapters in *Across the Kalapani: The Bihari Presence in Mauritius*, edited by Marina Carter (Port Louis, Mauritius: Centre for Research on Indian Ocean Societies, 2000).

[60] 'Slave Trading, Abolitionism, and "New Systems of Slavery" in the Nineteenth-Century Indian Ocean World' in *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, ed. by Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon and David W. Blight (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 183-99, p. 184.

[61] Allen, 'Slaves, Freedmen', p. 15.

[62] Allen, 'Slaves, Freedmen', p. 16.

[63] Jean Claude Lau Thi Keng, *Inter-ethnicité et politique à l'île Maurice* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), p. 13.

> By 1846, only 1.3 percent of the workforce on the sugar plantations was made up of freed persons. […] Within ten years, there was a complete transformation of the labour force from slave to indentured labour and from majority African to a solidly Indian workforce.[64]

It would therefore seem that we cannot underestimate the significance of Indian immigration to Mauritius, insofar as it 'profoundly alter[ed] the traditional ethnic balance' of the colony.[65]

The abolition of slavery in Réunion, which took place on 20th December 1848, would also result in the widespread use of indentured labour; however, the number of labourers brought from India was significantly lower than in Mauritius because the French colonial administration did not have the same preferential access to the areas which the British used for recruitment:

> Réunion also went looking for indentured labour, but the British would not let the French recruit in India so the latter focused more on maintaining the existing labour force, for example, with laws making work obligatory and prohibiting vagabondage or begging. They also continued to bring labour in from Mozambique, indenture contracts masking what was essentially a continuation of the slave trade.[66]

Daniel Vaxelaire estimates the number of indentured labourers brought from the Indian subcontinent at 120,000, with the majority embarking from ports on the East coast, compared to 15,000 from both Madagascar and East Africa, and 1,000 from China.[67] As in Mauritius, these predominantly male workers were subject to a contract determining minimum duration of employment, and lived and worked under extremely difficult conditions. Despite their smaller numbers, however, the immigration of Indian labour in Réunion appears to have resulted in a comparable transformation of the labour force involved in the production of sugar, from mainly *Kaf* to almost exclusively *Malbar*, the informal terms used in Réunionese Kreol to refer respectively to slaves descendants and those of Indian indentured labourers. As the Réunionese sociologist Laurent Médéa explains,

> Avant l'engagisme et l'arrivée des Indiens [...] on est en présence de ce que l'on pourrait appeler un « schéma antillais » à La Réunion : il y a 85% des Noirs et 15% des Blancs. [...] avec l'arrivée massive des Indiens, le schéma va totalement s'inverser : les

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[64] Klein, p. 201.

[65] Kenneth McPherson, 'Mauritius: Mirror and Model of History' in *Multiple Identities in Action: Mauritius and Some Antillean Parallelisms*, ed. by Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, Ralph Ludwig and Burkhard Schnepel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 31-44, p. 35.

[66] Klein, p. 201.

[67] He also notes the import of small numbers of labourers from Yemen, Vietnam, and even Australian aboriginal communities. See diagram entitled 'D'où venaient les engages?' in *Le Grand Livre de l'histoire de la Réunion*, vol. 2 (Sainte-Clotilde, Réunion: Orphie, 1999), p. 387.

> *Malbar* sont apprentis, les *Kaf* leur montrent les techniques pour faire du sucre. Ces *Kaf* vont partir au fur et à mesure, face à ce que l'on pourrait appeler à une « Malbarisation » des emplois stratégiques dans l'usine, du fait du grand nombre de *Malbar*.[68]

Médéa maintains that it is due to this development that the Indian indentured labourers and their offspring were gradually able to take up management positions in the factories, whilst simultaneously benefitting from a stronger sense of group identity and belonging than that experienced by the slave descendent population, who in contrast had no shared language, religion, or culture. In parallel, the predominance of Indian workers in the sugar production workforce in Mauritius also created opportunities for social mobility. Following a steep decline in the price of sugar on the international market in the 1860s, the land reform known as the *grand morcellement* made it possible for Indian workers to rent or buy strips of land from plantation owners who were in deficit, thereby generating 'l'émergence de toute une classe de petits propriétaires d'origine indienne qui vont jouer un role extrêmement important dans l'évolution politique ultérieure de l'île'.[69] Many of those who benefitted from these developments would form the Indo-Mauritian middle classes who voted for independence in 1968.[70]

It should therefore be recognised that the colonial histories of Réunion and Mauritius are also histories of successive waves of immigration from diverse locations. In addition to the heterogeneous ex-slave population (given that slaves were brought from East and West Africa, Madagascar, and India), those brought as indentured labourers and the white land-owning classes, traders from China and Muslims from Gujarat also immigrated to both islands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is this diverse immigration which has resulted in the ethnic, cultural and racial diversity which is celebrated in discourses of harmonious multiculturalism; however, it has not been uncontested. Throughout the islands' histories of immigration, the newly arrived have struggled to negotiate their place in the host society. Jacqueline Andoche *et al.* maintain that throughout Réunionese history, immigration has triggered 'le processus d'activation du rapport historique à l'étranger nouveau venu qui

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[68] Laurent Médéa, *La Délinquance juvénile,* p. 116. The term *Kaf* comes from 'kaffir', the Arabic term for infidel, and *Malbar* refers to the India's south western Malabar Coast, the origin of the first Indian indentured labourers, although the majority were recruited in the present-day state of Tamil Nadu, notably from the areas surrounding Pondichéry, Madras and Karikal. See Yann Yvergniaux, 'Les processus syncrétiques à l'île de La Réunion: Les assimilations réciproques des pratiques religieuses créoles et de l'hindouisme populaire', Unpublished undergraduate dissertation, (Free University of Brussels, 2007), <http://www.indereunion.net/IREV/yvergniaux/I1.htm>, [Accessed 5th September, 2014].

[69] Lau Thi Keng, p. 14.

[70] It should also be noted that all Mauritian Prime Ministers since Independence have been Hindu and of the Vaish caste, with one exception: Paul Bérenger, a Franco-Mauritian.

inquiète par ses mœurs différentes, sa non intégration, et de surcroît par la couleur de sa peau',[71] as sectors of the population attempt to assert their anteriority and superiority by emphasising the racial and cultural difference of the newly arrived. In Mauritius, Catherine Boudet observes that changes in the terminology used to classify ethnic groups in the census can be said to reflect shifting perceptions of the extent to which the population of more recent Indian and Chinese immigration could be recognised as Mauritian:

> À partir du recensement de 1952, une terminologie en termes ethno-religieux remplace la catégorisation en termes de race et d'origine géographique héritée des classifications de la société esclavagiste. Le groupe des « Chinois » est désormais désigné sous le vocable de « Sino-Mauriciens », et le groupe des « Indiens » sous celui d'« Indo-Mauriciens », pour mieux marquer leur appartenance à la communauté politique nationale.[72]

This brief and necessarily incomplete overview of the colonial histories of Réunion and Mauritius has thus revealed a number of significant parallels. Both societies began as colonies marked by acutely asymmetrical power structures, where an affluent small white land-owning minority established dominance over a poor landless majority of diverse origins. Both were fundamentally shaped by the establishment of a racially hierarchical social structure, and notions of absolute cultural and racial difference, particularly as concerns relations between different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Nonetheless, several crucial contrasts have also become apparent, including fundamentally opposed approaches to each colony's economic growth. We might also add here the contrasting views of the French and British administration as concerns the more recently arrived population of Indian origin.[73] As we shall now see, these contrasts would appear to intensify in the second half of the twentieth century, as the respective governments choose very different paths towards postcolonial development.

The Postcolonial Era: Departmentalisation, Independence and Socioeconomic Transformation

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[71] Jacqueline Andoche, Laurent Hoarau, Jean François Rebeyrotte, Emmanuel Souffrin, *Immigrations réunionnaises: Des populations en provenance et en devenir,* Rapport Acsé La Réunion (La Montagne, La Réunion: Etudes Ethnosociologiques de l'Océan Indien, 2008), <http://www.esoi.fr/images/immigration.pdf> [Accessed 11th October 2013], p. 102.

[72] Catherine Boudet, 'L'émergence de la démocratie consociative à Maurice (1948-1968)', *Annuaire des Pays de l'Océan Indien*, 17 (2003), 325-33, pp. 328-9.

[73] As elsewhere in the colonised world, the French administration favoured religious and cultural assimilation, whereas the British administration in Mauritius was influenced by Orientalism. See Patrick Eisenlohr, *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2006), especially chapter 4, 'Colonial Education, Ethnolinguistic Identifications, and the Origins of Ancestral Languages', pp. 168-201.

Despite divergences in their colonial trajectories, it must first be acknowledged that Réunion and Mauritius both began the twentieth century as sugar-producing colonies, with the majority of their populations living in abject poverty. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, their socioeconomic landscapes had been dramatically transformed. Independent Mauritius was proclaimed as an 'African tiger' thanks to astute state management of limited resources,[74] and Réunion became a French *département d'outre-mer* (DOM), with standards of living in many respects now similar to those of metropolitan France. The two 'sister islands' have thus come to represent rather different postcolonial experiences.

Departmentalisation in Réunion

Following calls for greater social equality between the metropolis and her colonies, in 1946 a political phenomenon otherwise unknown in the history of European colonialism occurred: Réunion, along with the Caribbean territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, was integrated into the French nation, thereby acquiring the same official status as metropolitan French *départements*.[75] The act of incorporating the territories, collectively characterised as *les vieilles colonies*, into the colonial power indeed appears as 'un scénario inédit',[76] given that it occurred at the same time that anti-colonial struggles were taking place throughout the colonial empires.[77] It is however crucial to understand that at the time of its enactment, departmentalisation was perceived as a progressive option, whereas calls for autonomy and independence were associated with reactionary politics.[78] As Chane-Kune observes, the only party to oppose departmentalisation was the land-owning aristocracy, for whom it represented a curtailment of their historic privileges.[79] Raymond Vergès, one of two Réunionese representatives in the *Assemblée nationale*, thus presented departmentalisation as a means of combating the ruling hegemony in Réunion:

> Etre une colonie, est, par définition, être une terre d'exploitation […] Un tel état de
> choses a imprimé au pays une physionomie particulière, une structure simplifiée,
> puisque, entre dix familles de proie et un prolétariat grabataire, la classe moyenne se

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[74] See Barbara Wake Carroll and Terrance Carroll, 'Civic Networks, Legitimacy and the Policy Process', *Governance,* 12: 1 (1999), 1-28; Larry W. Bowman, *Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

[75] Adlai Murdoch, 'Introduction: Departmentalization's Continuing Conundrum: Locating the DOM-ROM between "Home" and "Away"', *International Journal of Francophone Studies (IJFS)*, 11: 1 (2008), 15-32, p. 16.

[76] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion,* p. 7.

[77] Michel Laronde, 'La Départementalisation: Les DOM-ROM entre postcolonial et postcontact', *IJFS*, 11: 1 (2008), 33-47, p. 34.

[78] See Chane-Kune, *La Réunion,* p. 8.

[79] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion,* p. 9.

réduit à presque rien, que les seigneurs du sucre, usiniers ou propriétaires fonciers, ont toujours eu pour eux, on pourrait dire à eux, l'administration, la justice, la force armée, bref l'appareil efficace de l'Etat, cependant que la masse de la population, maintenue dans l'ignorance et la crainte, n'a jamais eu qu'un droit, celui de se tuer à l'ouvrage et de se taire.[80]

Political assimilation was thereby associated with the aim of reducing the colonies' acute social inequality. Furthermore, it was implied that achieving this objective was the responsibility of the metropole. In his role as *rapporteur de la commission des territoires d'outre-mer*, the then Martiniquan *député* Aimé Césaire famously characterised departmentalisation as a logical extension of French colonisation of the *vieilles colonies*:

> L'intégration réclamée ne constituerait pas une improvisation. Ce serait, au contraire, l'aboutissement normal d'un processus historique et la conclusion logique d'une doctrine.[81]

Though he acknowledged that French institutional presence in the *vieilles colonies* indicated that political assimilation was already underway, for Césaire, 'le gigantesque problème social ne saurait être résolu que par la départementalisation.'[82] Similarly, for the Réunionese branch of the *Parti communiste français*, departmentalisation was envisioned as the cure for all social ills; yet, as Chane-Kune observes, it proposes a political solution to what were fundamentally social problems.[83] Nonetheless, when faced with the extreme poverty experienced by the majority of the population, political actors decided to underplay any potentially problematic aspects of assimilation.[84] Thus Léon de Lepervanche, the second *député* for Réunion, would argue in favour of departmentalisation by minimising the cultural differences between the colony and the metropole – differences which would be fervently defended by a subsequent generation of political activists:

> Nous tenons aussi à déclarer que nous ne connaissons pas les profondes différences qui existeraient entre nos populations et celles de la métropole. Il n'y a, en effet, chez nous aucun problème d'ordre linguistique, culturel ou national.[85]

Consequently, the 1946 *loi d'assimilation* was perceived at the time of its enactment as a victory for the left. However, the achievement of political equality with mainland France

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[80] Debates in the *Assemblée nationale constituante*, 1st session, March 26th 1946, p. 1052, <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr/>, [Accessed 27th August 2014].
[81] Debates in the *Assemblée nationale constituante*, 1st session, March 12th 1946, p. 660. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr/>, [Accessed 27th August 2014].
[82] Cited in Chane-Kune, p. 9.
[83] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion, p.* 10.
[84] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion, p.* 10.
[85] Debates in the *Assemblée nationale constituante*, 1st session, March 12th 1946, p. 665.

did not automatically improve standards of living in the DOMs. The historian Yvan Combeau depicts the period from 1946 to 1958 as that of the 'forgotten' department, as successive governments postponed fulfilling the promises of departmentalisation and granting legislative equality with mainland France for economic reasons. Moreover, the Réunionese branch of the Communist party, who had been the initial proponents of 1946 law, withdrew their support for the project.[86] Others suggest that it was not simply economic factors which delayed the enactment of departmentalisation: Héloïse Finch-Boyer affirms that during this initial period, 'the French administration did not want to apply metropolitan social legislation to the DOMs owing to their implicit belief that overseas populations were naturally poor'.[87] Drawing on archival research, she reveals the state racism evident in government documents which portray the Réunionese population as 'a culturally different people who were naturally poor'.[88] She thereby demonstrates that 'La Reunion's prefects and central government did not view DOM populations as the equals of metropolitan French', with the partial exception of the poor white *petits blancs*, 'the only Reunion Islanders that the administration considered worthy of poverty relief' who, according to Finch-Boyer, 'always elicited special concern in official reports.'[89]

Unsurprisingly, then, disillusionment with the project of departmentalisation soon set in. Chane-Kune maintains that achieving social equality with the metropole had been the initial priority once political equality had been attained. Consequently, government policies appeared to show less concern for Réunion's economic development, generating a series of regrettable long-term consequences. As she observes, '[l]es mesures économiques sont le plus souvent limitées à la reconduction des activités antérieures qu'on maintient et modernise à force d'aides et de soutiens'.[90] For example, the sugar industry was one of the first and biggest beneficiaries of departmentalisation, despite no longer playing a central role in the Réunionese economy. The administration thus missed an important opportunity to develop a postcolonial economic development strategy for the island, and the after-effects of this missed opportunity are still apparent today, as can be seen by Reunion's consistently high unemployment rates.[91]

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[86] 'Une île politique' in *La Réunion, une société en mutation*, Univers créoles 7, ed. by Eliane Wolff and Michel Watin (Paris: Économica, Anthropos, 2010), pp. 15-31, pp. 18-9.

[87] '"The Idea of the Nation Was Superior to Race": Transforming Racial Contours and Social Attitudes and Decolonizing the French Empire from La Réunion, 1946–1973', *French Historical Studies*, 36: 1 (2013), 109-40, p. 114.

[88] Finch-Boyer, p. 119.

[89] Finch-Boyer, p. 119.

[90] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, p. 49.

[91] 'Au deuxième trimestre 2011, le taux de chômage à La Réunion s'élève à 29,5 %. Les jeunes, avec 60 % des actifs, sont les plus touchés et se désengagent du marché du travail.' INSEE, 'L'enquête emploi 2011 à La Réunion', <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=17943>, [Accessed 7th September 2014].

Furthermore, due to the delay in applying welfare laws to the DOMs, the majority of poor
Réunionese who had provided popular support for departmentalisation did not benefit from
the change in political status: '[t]he main beneficiaries of social legislation in the DOMs during
the 1950s were full-time salaried workers and civil servants — a minority of the total
populations.'[92]

However, the period from 1958 to 1963 was to mark a turning point in Réunionese
post-departmental history, often seen as the beginning of departmentalisation proper. This
was characterised by accelerated infrastructural development, including the construction of
the *route de littoral* linking the west coast to the administrative capital Saint-Denis, which
opened in 1963.[93] The arrival of Michel Debré, who visited Réunion whilst serving as prime
minister under General de Gaulle in 1959, signalled the end of metropolitan indifference to
social development in the DOMs. For Debré, 'La Réunion could prove the viability of the French
Republic overseas' at a time when the legitimacy of French rule in Algeria appeared
increasingly unconvincing.[94] He therefore 'used his influence as prime minister to improve
awareness of overseas France in government and to create social change through legislation',[95]
and successfully mobilised metropolitan investment to finance development in Réunion, even
prior to his being elected as *député* of Réunion in 1963. Finch-Boyer highlights the significance
of Debré's reforms, which in contrast to previous policies were not only intended to benefit
white recipients: '[f]rom 1960 Debré's "subsidy tap" started flowing', she states, leading to
radical changes as concerns 'economic mobility and racial perceptions in overseas France.'[96]

Yet in spite of these developments, Debré was to prove a particularly controversial
figure in Réunionese political history.[97] Elected at a time when electoral fraud was common
practice, Debré's political career in Réunion reflects the fears and anxieties of the Cold War
political context. This wider context arguably heightened the conservative elite's fear of the

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[92] Finch-Boyer, pp. 122-3.

[93] Combeau, p. 20, p. 22. This represented a significant reduction in journey time between the *chef-lieu*
and the town of La Possession compared the previous route, which involved passing through
mountainous terrain.

[94] Finch-Boyer, p. 124.

[95] Finch-Boyer, p. 124.

[96] Finch-Boyer, p. 125.

[97] Space does not permit me to further elaborate here, but for an overview of Debré's political career in
Réunion see Gilles Gauvin, *Michel Debré et l'île de la Réunion: Une certaine idée de la plus grande France*
(Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2006). For a discussion of the Bureau pour le
développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer (BUMIDOM), created by Debré in
1963, whose projects included taking Réunionese children from their families to repopulate rural areas
of metropolitan France, see Françoise Lionnet, 'Disease, Demography, and the 'Debré Solution': Stolen
Lives and Broken Promises, 1946 to 2006 and Back to 1966', *IJFS*, 11: 1 (2008), 189-210. These children
became known as 'les enfants de la Creuse', and there is a developing literature on this history which
has only come to light relatively recently.

rising popularity of the *Parti communiste réunionnais* (PCR).[98] The PCR's calls for autonomy in response to the failure of departmentalisation were perceived by conservatives such as Debré as a direct attack on France itself. Françoise Vergès goes as far to suggest that any questioning of Réunion's 'Frenchness' constituted 'a threat to an idealized object necessary to Debré's ego.'[99] Indeed, this would appear to be supported by the fact that the 1960 *Ordonnance Debré* permitted the transfer of civil servants in the DOMs to the metropole if they were thought to threaten public order, which included questioning the French nature of the overseas departments.[100] During this period, public assertions of cultural difference were thus treated as politically suspect, and as an intolerable threat to the authority of the metropole in the new overseas department.

Nonetheless, the period also remains significant in that metropolitan welfare and social laws were henceforth gradually applied to the DOMs, although complete equality in terms of social legislation would take 50 years to achieve.[101] However, it would seem that the price the Réunionese population paid for these developments was a constant requirement to declare allegiance to France at the expense of the development of local culture, including the local language. The use of Réunionese Kréol was not permitted in schools: writing in 1977, Axel Gauvin cites an incidence of a student who had been awarded a high mark only to have her work downgraded because she exclaimed her surprise in her native language.[102] Eliane Wolff and Michel Watin thus accurately describe this second phase of departmentalisation as a 'processus de techno-modernisation [qui] s'accompagne d'une forte acculturation'.[103] They maintain that the 1946 law led to far-reaching transformations in nearly all areas of social and economic life, but that these only came into effect from the mid-1960s:

> La période 1960-1980 voit en effet se produire de grandes transformations qui sont, pour partie, explicatives de la situation actuelle de la société.
> Ces transformations sont rapides, structurelles, massives et généralisées. Rapides puisqu'elles se déroulent en à peine un tiers de siècle, structurelles car elles entraînent une modification radical de l'organisation sociale, massives car elles intéressent toute

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[98] 'On Monday, March 18, 1959, the majority of the delegates adopted the program presented by Paul Vergès and voted for the creation of the Parti Communiste de la Réunion', who were thus henceforth entirely separate from the *Parti communiste français*. Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 127.

[99] *Monsters*, p. 144.

[100] See Finch-Boyer, p. 76. Several *militants culturels,* defenders of Réunionese cultural specificity, were thus affected by the law, including the poet Boris Gamaleya and maloya singer Danyel Waro.

[101] The RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*), which guaranteed a minimum income to both the unemployed and those on low salaries, was the first act of social legislation to be enacted simultaneously in the DOM and the metropole. This took place in 1996, exactly 50 years after the departmentalisation law.

[102] *Du créole opprimé au créole libéré: Défense de la langue réunionnaise* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1977), p. 61.

[103] 'Dix questions pour un ouvrage' in *La Réunion, une société en mutation*, pp. 1-14, p. 6, p. 7.

la population réunionnaise et généralisées car elles concernent pratiquement toutes les dimensions de la vie sociale, culturelle et économique.[104]

The authors nonetheless advocate that recent changes must be understood in relation to the island's colonial history.[105] It should thus be noted that this period of accelerated infrastructural, economic and social development was accompanied by intense political scrutiny, in which the distinction between culture and politics was decidedly blurred. Vergès is therefore perhaps right to point out that the process of modernization which Réunion underwent cannot be understood outside of the political context. As she explains,

> Between 1963 and the mid-1970s, a predominantly rural and poor society was modernized [...] Supermarkets, cars and television arrived on the island together with the Cold War, modernization together with political demonology. Conservatives controlled means of dissemination previously unavailable, such as radio, television, and the education system. They reinforced the island's economic and political dependence in ways that are still framing the island's society.[106]

Vergès's analysis of this period, which tends towards an oversimplified depiction of the progressive nature of the PCR in contrast to Debré's political scheming, must however be read alongside other accounts which are more sensitive to the complexities of political engagement in this period. For example, Finch-Boyer's ethnographic research suggests that poor, mainly non-white Réunionese selectively supported and used Debré's policies in order to further their own opportunities for social mobility. She describes how the newly created *Fonds d'Action Sanitaire et Sociale Obligatoire* offered paid work in school canteens to illiterate and uneducated non-white women; however, these women were often required to secure electoral success for the local conservative candidate in order to retain their posts.[107]

However, this phase of accelerated development seemed to gradually ground to a halt. As concerns the education system, for example, Chane-Kune asks why results did not continue to improve with increased investment in infrastructure. She provides two possible answers: firstly, because many students in Réunion continued to live in poverty – even at the end of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon for homes to be without electricity and to have bad transportation links to school. Secondly, she points to the gap between students' lived experience and the world presented to them at school, based on the metropolitan French model.[108] Chane-Kune also questions the assertion that Réunion's current economic situation is explained by a 'mentalité d'assistés' amongst the contemporary population. She argues

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[104] 'Dix questions', pp. 3-4.
[105] 'Dix questions', pp. 3-4.
[106] *Monsters*, pp. 129-30.
[107] See Finch-Boyer, pp. 129-33.
[108] *La Réunion*, p. 41.

instead that funding from metropolitan France must be analysed in detail in order to determine the principal beneficiaries of French welfare.[109] Yet the fact remains that the DOM populations are often perceived as drains on metropolitan finances, even in cases of extreme emergency. Referring to the Réunionese Chikungunya outbreak of 2006, Françoise Lionnet maintains that 'metropolitan perceptions of this "exotic" ailment revealed that many in France had great difficulty taking it seriously',[110] resulting in a significant delay in providing support to French citizens of Réunion suffering from a debilitating illness.

To summarise, the period following departmentalisation was one of dramatic change and vast improvements in living standards. Yet given the unresolved questions of political autonomy, stunted economic development, and the psychological consequences of cultural assimilation, it becomes apparent why many scholars maintain that the social structures developed in the colonial period continue to pervade contemporary Réunionese society. Michel Robert, for example, argues that 'l'histoire des Réunionnais [...] a toujours été celle des colons et des esclaves,' and that whilst '[l]es temps ont évolué', 'les structures de la société restent basées sur l'inégalité'.[111] In the local media and in everyday discussions, Réunion is often characterised as a *société à deux vitesses*, a metaphor which highlights the social division between those in work and those who have no prospect of employment.[112]

Mauritian Independence

Mauritian postcolonial history, on the other hand, is often characterised as one of the rare success stories of Third World development. Yet the island's economic prospects did not look particularly promising at the dawn of independence. The Meade report painted an especially bleak picture of post-independence Mauritius which, it was proposed, was all but doomed to fail due to projected over-population and a lack of natural resources.[113] The island's dependence on sugar production left the national economy at the mercy of price fluctuations in the global market. Yet by the 1980s, government policies had resulted in a successful

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[109] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, p. 147.

[110] Françoise Lionnet, 'Disease, Demography', p. 191.

[111] p. 3, p. 5.

[112] 'La pénurie d'emploi est un facteur déterminant dans la persistance des inégalités'. Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, p. 127. For example, during a discussion regarding 'la vie chère' and prices in Réunion on the programme 'Le Grand Débat' on Réunion 1ère, one commentator reacted thus: 'La Réunion à deux vitesses, les fonctionnaires et les autres. Vivent les chasseurs des primes'. See Gilbert Hoair, 'Le Grand Débat « la nébuleuse des prix » du mercredi 6 mars', (2013) <http://reunion.la1ere.fr/emissions/le-grand-debat/actu/les-invites-du-grand-debat-ce-soir-20h-sur-reunion1ere-pour-titre-la-nebuleuse-des-prix.html>, [Accessed 24th September 2014].

[113] James E. Meade, *et al.*, *The Economics and Social Structure of Mauritius — Report to the Government of Mauritius* (London: Methuen, 1961).

diversification of the Mauritian economy, notably through the development of the tourism industry. At the same time, increased access to education and health services led to a dramatic reduction in birth rates. Jean-Claude Lau Thi Keng suggests that '[l]'apparition d'une idéologie développementaliste dans la période qui succède immédiatement à l'indépendance politique de Maurice est l'un des facteurs qui a probablement fonctionné comme ciment d'une cohésion sociale', and that it is for this reason that 'le thème du développement a été l'une des constantes du discours politique.'[114] The development discourse thus became a kind of founding myth, comparable to the idea of the American dream, in the absence of other unifying elements.

It should also be remembered that independence from Britain was achieved by means of the ballot box, rather than as a result of any organised anti-colonial movement. Independence was achieved primarily through the Indo-Mauritian vote in 1968; however, 44% of those who voted opposed independence. Raj Meetarbhan argues that the fact that Mauritians didn't have to fight for independence has resulted in a lack of national consciousness which may otherwise have been facilitated through a unifying history of anti-colonial struggle.[115] Indeed, the possibility of conflict organised along ethnic and religious lines, was of concern to the colonial administration even prior to independence. It has been suggested that British colonial policy, heavily influenced by the experiences of colonial officers in British India, 'made no attempts at any form of horizontal integration of the various communities' and 'did unintentionally divide and rule and inhibit the development of multi-cultural nationalism', particularly in relation to education and cultural issues.[116] This has resulted in a dominant conceptualisation of Mauritian society as formed not of individuals but of corporate ethnoreligious groups, encapsulated in the national slogan 'unity in diversity'.[117] Belonging to the nation is thus formulated as mediated by ethnoreligious group membership, and it follows that ethnic identity is understood not to detract from but rather form an essential part of national identity. For this reason, ethnicity is generally understood as the primary structuring principle in academic analyses of Mauritian society: 'elle offre un cadre d'interprétation extrêmement puissant et disponible que les individus appliquent à des

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[114] 'Ethnicité, développement et exclusion' in *Towards the Making of a Multi-Cultural Society: Conference Papers*, ed. by S Nirsimloo-Gayan, Conference 'Towards the Making of a Multicultural Society' 18-21 November 1996, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute Press, 2000), pp. 212-4, p. 213.

[115] 'L'évolution politique de l'île Maurice Indépendante: La difficulté d'être une nation' in *Consolidating the Rainbow: Independent Mauritius, 1968-1998*, ed. by Marina Carter (Port Louis, Mauritius: Centre for Research on Indian Ocean Societies, 1998), pp. 1-8.

[116] McPherson, p. 38.

[117] The term 'ethnoreligious' will be used throughout to refer to the different ethnic communities of Mauritius, following Patrick Eisenlohr's terminology. See *Little India*.

multiples circonstances de leur vie quotidienne.' [118] However, this dominant conceptualisation has also been contested by alternative pan-ethnic or supra-ethnic forms of nationalism, which criticise the divisive effects of the 'unity in diversity' approach. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this study.

Therefore, despite divergent political and economic strategies, both Réunion and Mauritius experienced dramatic social and economic transformation in the latter decades of the twentieth century. The dramatic reduction in infant mortality experienced in Réunion in the decades following departmentalisation was described as 'unique au monde'.[119] Economic development resulted in similar transformations in Mauritius. It should therefore not be forgotten that '[d]ans bien des domaines (démographie, éducation, économie, habitat et urbanisation, etc.), La Réunion [et l'île Maurice ont] parcouru en moins de cinquante ans ce que bien des pays européens ont parcouru en un siècle et demi.'[120] This accelerated development has profoundly changed what were previously rural societies where the vast majority of the populations lived in poverty. However, it has also had negative consequences, particularly for those at the bottom of the social structure. The speed of change has caused anxiety over changing living, working and education patterns, which can however be expressed in rather different ways. For example, this anxiety might be detected in the promotion of the cultivation, as opposed to retention, of ancestral cultures in Mauritius, which are often seen as an antidote to the more nefarious effects of Westernization, a side effect of economic development.[121] Or it might be expressed as nostalgia for the Creole language amongst middle class Réunionese parents, who nonetheless insist that their children speak French at home to improve school performance.

In addition, it must also be remembered that despite the dramatic socio-economic transformation in second half of the twentieth century, prejudices are still carried over from the colonial era. For example, the refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the Kreol languages, and the valorisation of lighter skin tones and accompanying denigration of darker skin can be seen to persist into the twenty-first century. Thus, although economic development and

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[118] Jean-Luc Alber, 'Ethnicité indienne et créolisation à l'île Maurice: les Madras, les Tamouls et les autres' in *Ethnicisation des rapports sociaux: Racismes, nationalismes, ethnicismes et culturalismes*, ed. by Martine Fourier and Geneviève Vermèsta (Fontenay St. Cloud: ENS Editions; Paris: L'Harmattan 1994), pp. 126-39, p. 126.

[119] INSEE report cited in Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, p. 21.

[120] Nicolas Roinsard, 'Soixante ans de départementalisation à La Réunion: une sociologie des mutations de l'organisation sociale et de la structure de classe en contexte postcolonial', *Revue Asylon(s),* 11 (2013), <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article1278.html> [Accessed August 22nd 2013].

[121] Eisenlohr argues that '[d]iasporic traditions among Indo-Mauritians cannot be understood as "survivals" from a time before migration to Mauritius', contrary to what promoters of ancestral cultures, including the Mauritian government, may claim. He prefers instead to speak of the 'cultivation' of ancestral cultures. *Little India*, p. 5.

investment led to the development of Mauritian and Réunionese middle classes, in both

contexts the legacy of racial hierarchy persists. Dark skin colour is still associated with low

levels of education and low socioeconomic status, and therefore it is those at the bottom of

the social structure in both locations who feel most acutely the legacy of racial hierarchy and

the double oppression of race and class prejudice. Moreover, the socioeconomic

transformations also brought about new forms of social inequality, whilst aspects of older

power structures remain essentially unchanged.

For this reason, then, and given the speed of development, it would seem more

appropriate to speak of modernities in the plural rather than in the singular. Drawing on Hall's

concept of 'vernacular modernities', Wolff and Watin develop a conceptualisation of

'*modernités réunionnaises*' to better reflect contemporary social reality:

> Le terme de *modernités réunionnaises* est proposé ici pour rendre compte de la
> situation réunionnaise actuelle ; il permet d'échapper à la binarité classique des
> Lumières entre tradition et modernité et à l'idéologie du retard à combler par une
> société dont le développement serait en décalage temporel par rapport à son
> ancienne metropole coloniale. La marque du pluriel s'impose car il n'y a pas une
> modernité unique et purement occidentale, mais *des modernités* qui s'expriment dans
> des temps, des lieux et des espaces différents, mais également dans les multiples
> manières de les vivre. Les *modernités réunionnaises* renvoient à la complexité d'une
> société encore largement marquée par sa douloureuse histoire mais qui invente et
> bricole chaque jour sa façon d'être au monde.[122]

To summarise, then, the rapid development experienced at the end of the 20thcentury does

not mean that the longer colonial histories of Réunion and Mauritius may be forgotten, even

within a study of contemporary popular and youth culture such as this. Furthermore, for the

majority of the populations, this dramatic transformation came at a cost. In Réunion, the

context of Cold War politics required Réunionese citizens to affirm their allegiance to the

metropole, resulting in the privileging of metropolitan French culture and the French language.

In post-independence Mauritius, the need to develop a diversified economy has required a

workforce fluent in English and, to a lesser extent, French. Furthermore, a complex set of

developments have led to the association of cultural values with ancestral cultures specifically,

which are seen to mitigate the negative effects of rapid economic development. Both of these

situations may be seen in different ways to have impeded the development of a sense of

Mauritianness or Réunionness, of an 'indigenous' national identity which in other colonial

contexts provided a stimulus for anti-colonial revolutionary movements. Yet Mauritianness

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[122] Wolff and Watin, p. 10, referencing Stuart Hall, 'A Conversation with Stuart Hall,' *Journal of the International Institute*, 7: 1 (1999), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4750978.0007.107>, [Accessed 10th Jan 2014].

and Réunionness do indeed exist as discursive constructs, albeit sometimes as bitterly contested ones. We will now briefly explore the impact of the political, economic and social transformations of the postcolonial era on the Réunionese and Mauritian cultural spheres, firstly in relation to Kreol language politics (to be discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study), and secondly as concerns the development of popular music.

Evolution of Attitudes Towards Kreol Languages

Today, as a French overseas department and thus politically an integral part of the French Republic, the official language of Réunion is French. Yet Réunionese Kreol (hereafter RK), spoken by 80% of the population, remains the majority language within the local context.[123] As in many multilingual postcolonial contexts, the status of RK remains ambivalent. However, attitudes towards the language, previously considered as a *patois* or dialect, have undoubtedly evolved in the period following departmentalisation in 1946. In the 1970s, reactions provoked by the cultural assimilationist policies of the French administration led to a prominent *militantisme culturel* movement, spearheaded by intellectuals such as A. Gauvin. His essay *Du créole opprimé au créole libéré* aimed to expose the hypocrisy of language policy of the time, and to establish that RK was a language equally as worthy as *la langue noble*, French.[124]

As a result of these efforts, there has been a significant evolution in attitudes towards RK. Whereas French was once the exclusive language of the local media, RK has played an increasingly central role in local radio and television programmes over the last three decades.[125] The significance of the FreeDOM movement should be noted here: Réunion's first private broadcaster Télé FreeDOM offered ordinary viewers a chance to go on camera and to express themselves in either RK or French and set up lively debates on topical issues. This was to prove immensely popular amongst Réunion's poorest and most disadvantaged.[126] Furthermore, RK gained recognition in the sphere of education with the introduction of the *CAPES de Créole* in 2002.[127] It is also taught and studied at the University of Réunion, which now has a Creole studies department. The increasing prominence of RK within the public sphere has thus led some sociolinguists to draw attention to the cohabitation of RK and

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[123] Philippe Vitale, 'Le Créole réunionnais. Jalons d'un nécessaire vivre ensemble' in *Anthropologies de La Réunion* ed. by Christian Ghasarian (Paris: Archives contemporaines, 2008), pp. 113-26, p. 113.
[124] *Du créole opprimé.*
[125] See Bernard Idelson, *Histoire des médias à la Réunion de 1946 à nos jours* (Paris: Le Publieur; Saint-Denis, Réunion: Université de la Réunion, 2006), especially pp. 101-13.
[126] Idelson, p. 105.
[127] The CAPES (Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second degré) is a national recruitment system for teachers in French secondary schools (*collèges* and *lycées*).

French, in which the traditional distinctions between the basolect and the acrolect in diglossic situations are no longer applicable.[128] Jacky Simonin, for example, advocates the analysis not of a continuum between French and RK but of a singular 'parler réunionnais' combining both languages.[129]

Nevertheless, as Philippe Vitale remarks, despite RK's increased visibility in the public domain, popular discourses on language often reveal 'le paradoxe d'une langue qui est, aujourd'hui, majoritairement pratiquée mais qui demeure déconsidérée par rapport au français, langue officielle de la République et de la Nation, tant par les créolophobes que par une grande partie de ses locuteurs.'[130] RK speakers are thus required to negotiate between the language of everyday communication and what is perceived as the language of social mobility. Drawing on qualitative research with RK-speaking mothers, Vitale argues that a complex process of compromise leads them to encourage their children to adopt a French-RK bilingualism. This results from their awareness of different spheres of language use: whereas RK is valued as an authentic means of communication in the domestic sphere, French is promoted in education because of its perceived linguistic capital and value in the employment market place.[131] In the contemporary context, then, where youth unemployment has hit record levels and mastery of French is a necessary pre-requisite in order to find work outside of Réunion, it is perhaps not surprising that French continues to be associated with prestige and progress. Therefore, when presented in opposition to French, RK is construed as (temporally) backward- and (geographically) inward-looking.

In addition, the movement in promotion of RK has also been affected by the tendency to confuse culture and politics in post-departmental Réunion. As Chane-Kune explains,

> la promotion du créole est devenue un enjeu politique. Beaucoup pensent qu'accepter l'entrée du créole dans l'enseignement revient à cautionner les mouvements autonomistes et, pire, indépendantistes.[132]

In response to this, a more recent development has involved the attempt to disassociate the valorisation and promotion of the RK from the articulation of an autonomist or independentist political position. This would appear to be the position espoused by the authors of *Oui au créole, oui au français,* a recent essay written by a number of Réunionese language activists. The essay favours of the promotion of RK within a context of RK-French bilingualism.

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[128] See for example, Gudrun Ledegen, 'Réalités et paradoxes du contact créole-français à La Réunion: « Tééé atta je te raconte un zaffaire »' in *La Réunion, une société en mutation*, pp. 101-21.
[129] 'Parler réunionnais ?' *Hermès*, 32: 1 (2002), 287-96.
[130] p. 117.
[131] Vitale, pp. 121-3.
[132] Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, p. 43.

Furthermore, whilst it acknowledges that in 1960s and 70s, promotion of RK was associated with calls for political autonomy and *indépendantisme*, the essay suggests that the contemporary movement has witnessed an evolution of the situation resulting in the separation of language and politics.[133]

In Mauritius, too, the first attempts to promote and revalorise Mauritian Kreol (hereafter MK) took place in the late 1960s and 1970s. This can be characterised as a parallel *militantisme culturel* movement, in which students and intellectuals played a crucial role. The author and playwright Dev Virahsawmy, then a student of linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, wrote a masters dissertation which aimed to establish, contrary to popular belief, that MK could be considered a language in its own right.[134] However, no concrete developments in terms of language policy were to follow: this would come later with the 1982 elections, resulting in a *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* (MMM) coalition government. Yet their promotion of MK prompted a backlash on the part of conservatives and those in favour of the promotion of ancestral cultures, because MK was seen as a threat to the position of ancestral languages.[135] The failure of 1983 attempt to make MK an official language, which was considered too hasty, appears to have resulted in reluctance to change or develop language policy, which until recently was handled with extreme caution.[136] This was then further exacerbated by the 1995 controversy over inclusion of ancestral languages in Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exam. Thus there were no major changes in the status of MK until its introduction in primary schools in January 2012, as an optional subject rather than as the medium of instruction. Therefore, despite being the native language of the overwhelming majority of the population, MK is still not officially recognised by the Mauritian government.[137] The official language remains English, with French serving as the predominant language of the media and as an officially recognised second language.[138]

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[133] Laurence Daleau, *et al., Oui au créole, oui au français: essai* (Saint-Paul, Réunion: Editions Tikouti, 2006), pp. 12-4.

[134] 'Towards a Re-evaluation of Mauritian Creole', Unpublished Masters dissertation, (University of Edinburgh, 1967).

[135] Patrick Pavaday Clifford, 'Ethnicité et insécurité linguistique: L'Ethnicité est-elle « audible » à L'île Maurice?', Unpublished D.E.A. dissertation, (University of La Réunion, 1996), p. 5.

[136] See Eisenlohr, 'Creole Publics: Language, Cultural Citizenship, and the Spread of the Nation in Mauritius', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49: 4 (2007), 968-96.

[137] Bhojpuri was also once widely spoken in rural parts of Mauritius, but it is increasingly being replaced by MK. See Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, 'Pluralisme linguistique et développement à l'île Maurice: quelques réflexions à partir du recensement de 1990', in *Contacts de langues, contacts de cultures, créolisation: mélanges offerts à Robert Chaudenson à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire*, ed. by Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux and Didier de Robillard, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 387-409.

[138] For example, Mauritian MPs are permitted to express themselves in either English or French during parliamentary meetings.

Unlike in Réunion, MK has not yet found its place into local higher education institutions. A course entitled 'Mauritian Studies' is taught at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute,[139] and a BA (Hons) in Mauritian and Heritage Studies is offered by the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Mauritius,[140] but both are presumably taught in English. As in Réunion, the education system values first and foremost the mastery of the former colonial languages, English and French. In the media, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) provides a 30-minute daily news broadcast in MK. However, the main hour-long nightly news slot is in French. That said, if those interviewed on the program speak in MK, as is often the case, no translation or subtitles are offered. This non-translation of MK elements in the otherwise French nightly news would seem to imply an implicit recognition that MK does indeed function as a non-official national language in Mauritius. MK is thus presumed to be understood by all, but is not seen to be sufficiently prestigious in order to be the main or sole language for MBC's nightly news. In contrast, when 'JT Kreol', a weekly news programme in RK, was introduced on the state channel Réunion 1ère in March 2001, it was shown with French subtitles. The programme was only broadcast once a week on Saturday afternoons, but it was subsequently cancelled. This, in parallel, might be said to imply a reluctant acceptance of the hegemony enjoyed by the French language hegemony in what are considered as serious television and radio programs.

Popular Music in Mauritius and Réunion: A History

Analysis of popular culture can arguably reveal a fuller picture of the Indian Ocean region's cultural heritage than more elitist forms of expression. Edward A. Alpers has argued that because 'African voices [in the Indian Ocean] have been actively silenced in this diaspora[,] to get at the experiences of Africans in the Indian Ocean world and assess their sense of being of or belonging to Africa, we must look to popular culture.'[141] Though Alpers main concern here is to problematise the idea that no elements of African culture has survived in Réunion and Mauritius, I would suggest that, given that it was not solely populations of African descent who experienced oppression, this could be applied to descendants of other historically subordinated groups. The medium of popular music can arguably achieve wider

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[139] 'Centre for Mauritian and Comparative Cultural Studies', *Mahatma Gandhi Institute*, <http://mgi.intnet.mu/academic_struct/centre_ms.html>, [Accessed 4th August 2014]

[140] 'Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities: Department of History and Political Science – Programmes', *University of Mauritius*, <http://www.uom.ac.mu/fssh/index.php/programmes> [Accessed 4th August 2014].

[141] 'Recollecting Africa: Diasporic Memory in the Indian Ocean World', *African Studies Review*, 43: 1 (2000), 83-99, p. 85.

dissemination when compared with other forms of Réunionese and Mauritian cultural output. It would seem that the populations are largely unfamiliar with local literary output, for example, due in part to the fact that neither the Mauritian nor Réunionese (i.e. French) education systems place significant emphasis on the study of local cultural expression.[142] Popular music, on the other hand, has become a medium for critical discussion of important topics such as identity, culture, (neo)colonialism, social tensions and even political debates. When experienced as performance, musical forms such as maloya, sega, reggae, and seggae arguably provide an opportunity for dialogue. In practical terms, the audience plays a necessary and active role in the appraisal of the performance, inclusive of the messages and meanings created therein; in musical terms, the forms used are often based on or reminiscent of a call and response structure, which serves to foreground the communal origins of music in the region:[143] a characteristic that appears to point back to an African or Afro-Malagasy musical heritage.[144]

In relation to the marginalised Creole population of Mauritius, Rosabelle Boswell argues that '[s]inging is […] an important medium for expressing Creole identity in Mauritius and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean'.[145] Again, we might extend this to include all historically subordinated populations, regardless of ethnicity. This view is also reflected in Vergès's evaluation of identity constructions which challenge dominant French discourses in Réunion and articulate alternative conceptualisations of Réunionness:

> Music has remained the main source of dissidence and cultural expression. The democratization of public space and the creation of private radios in the 1980s gave music a central place in cultural production and expression. […] *Sega-reggae*, *malogae*, *maloya* and *sega* embodied the politics of interculturality on the island. Young people, unable to cite the name of a local poet, know by heart the songs of Ziskakan, Danyel Waro, Baster, Granmoun Lélé. Concerts have become the meeting grounds of dissent and affirmation. The performers sing in Creole and use the instruments invented by slaves and indentured workers – instruments brought from the native country and creolized on the plantations. […] They borrow rhythms from reggae, West African music, Indian music, elaborating a relational cultural practice of vernacular cosmopolitanism. The result is *Creole*, but Creole is not a pure ethos – rather, the

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[142] See Valérie Magdelaine Andrianjafitrimo and Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou (eds.), *Un état des savoirs à La Réunion. Tome II: Littératures* (Saint André, La Réunion: Océan Éditions, 2004), p. 13, and Chane-Kune, *La Réunion*, pp. 42-3.

[143] Jérôme Vellayoudoum argues that in its traditional form, '[l]e maloya est essentiellement un chant de communauté'. 'Le maloya', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 2 (2006), 243-8, p. 243.

[144] See discussion of vocal call and response in Peter Manuel with Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1995), p. 9. John Collins describes African music as 'music for all people and all occasions', in that everybody has a right to participate. See *West African Pop Roots* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p 2.

[145] Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), p. 61.

product of borrowing, mimicry, translation. It is a translocal creation that challenges the orthodoxy of national and sedentary identities.[146]

Here we are met with an apparent contradiction. Popular music, which is based upon local traditional forms, but also is demonstrably shaped by wide-ranging non-local musical influences (to the extent that it may no longer be classed within the local musical genre but instead as a separate fusion genre), has become an important medium for the discussion of specifically local issues; the development of a specifically local consciousness and local cultural resistance; and the affirmation of specifically Réunionese and Mauritian identities which are marginalised within official discourses. Réunionese and Mauritian cultural actors thus appear to purposely foreground the interplay between the global and the local in their music as a means of both affirming specific local identities and of positioning and reshaping these identities in relation to other cultural spheres, including others which are considered as creolised, postcolonial and/or peripheral (see Chapters 2 and 3 for a consideration of specific instances of engagement with other cultures within Réunionese and Mauritian popular music).

Yet a brief summary of Indian Ocean musical genres is also necessary to situate the sociological analysis of popular musics in the subsequent chapters. In order to analyse the works of Réunionese or Mauritian bands and artists, it is arguably first necessary to situate their works within the relevant musical contexts. Mauritian and Réunionese musics which are understood to be traditional appear to reflect Malagasy, European, African and Asian cultural practices brought to the islands, but which were not necessarily maintained 'intact' through the process of colonisation. These have instead developed over three centuries through an ongoing process of creolisation,[147] leading to the formation of specific, if to some extent malleable, local musical forms and practices. Traditional musical forms of the Western Indian Ocean show some generic similarities, as can be seen in the common usage of the term sega throughout the region;[148] however, geographic and, in the case of Réunion, political isolation has led to musical contrasts. Additionally, in the context of Réunion and Mauritius, distinct ideological meanings have come to be associated with musical forms such as the sega due to the two islands' divergent socio-political experiences during the twentieth century. I will now briefly consider the development of important musical trends and genres on the two islands,

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[146] 'The island of wandering souls. Processes of creolisation, politics of emancipation and the problematic of absence on Reunion Island' in *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. by Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 162-76, p. 173.

[147] See Vergès, 'The island of wandering souls', p. 166.

[148] The term is also used in Rodrigues. Robert Chaudenson, 'Les musiques créoles' in *Des îles, des hommes, des langues: essai sur la créolisation linguistique et culturelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), pp. 183-206, p. 190.

before reflecting upon how local musical production might position itself within a globalised, predominantly Anglo-American popular music industry.

Mauritian sega

Though previously marginalised due to its 'primitive nature' and sensuality,[149] and, it would seem, its association with slave heritage,[150] sega music is now recognised as a focal element of Mauritian national culture and as a veritable 'national medium of musical expression'.[151] The genre has been revitalised in recent decades, due in part to foreign interest generated through tourism. This trend has proved problematic in some respects, as it invites Mauritian performers to self-exoticise, and/or to play the role of the 'good Negro' performer in order to fulfil the demands of the Western gaze. On the other hand, Boswell suggests that sega performance also provides a means of self-validation, as it allows performers to 'tak[e] on their negative stereotypes [as care-free party lovers] and transfor[m] these into assets'; as well as constituting an important opportunity to benefit financially from their Creoleness and acknowledge the cultural heritage of slavery in a positive manner.[152] Finally, sega music has also been used as a vehicle for cultural resistance and social protest, for example, in the 'sante engaze' movement which emerged in the 1960s performed by groups such as Soley Ruz and singer-songwriters Siven Chinien and Bam Cuttayen.[153] The first phase of Abaim's musical production, the group discussed in Chapter 2, could also be considered as part of this politically-engaged genre.

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[149] Boswell states that 'until the work of a Creole singer, Alphonse Ravaton (alias *Ti Frère*) was popularised in the 1960s, sega was performed in private spaces.' p. 62.

[150] Prabhu discusses an effective silencing of the history of slavery in Mauritius in chapter 4, 'On the Difficulty of Articulating Hybridity: Africanness in Mauritius', pp. 51-84. A parallel may also be drawn here with the Réunionese situation, where '[s]lavery has become a "tragic," traumatic event that it is better to forget for the sake of reconciliation than to remember as a *constitutive* reality.' Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 9.

[151] William F. S. Miles, 'The Creole Malaise in Mauritius', *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), 211-28, p. 220. For an in-depth account of Mauritian sega, see Babita Thannoo, 'Mauritian Sega Music and Dance: Rhythm and Creolisation in the Indian Ocean', Unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Leeds, 2013).

[152] Boswell, p. 64.

[153] 'Sante engaze' (fr. *chanson engagée*) music emerged in the aftermath of Mauritian independence in 1968 within a climate of political, economic, and social instability. The songs generally addressed themes of politics, oppression and injustice in relation to both the local and international contexts, and some members of the 'group kiltirel' (cultural groups) who performed and composed the music were directly linked to left-wing political parties, such as the emerging MMM. Musically, 'sante engaze' often combined traditional Mauritian sega with instrumentation linked to Indian music, for example, the tabla or sitar.

Seggae

Seggae music, a fusion of Mauritian sega and reggae, is sometimes understood as part of a 'modernization of *sega* music'; a move which has also led to the incorporation of instruments more generally associated with rock n' roll and Western popular music, such as 'electric guitars and more elaborate percussion instruments'.[154] Whether seggae is considered a separate genre in its own right, or part of a revitalisation of the traditional sega, the fact remains that Jamaica and the Anglophone Caribbean remains central within this musical configuration. And yet this musical expression of identification and cultural allegiance with the majority Afro-Caribbean population of Jamaica has not, as we might expect given the importance attached to ethnoreligious community belonging within Mauritian society, resulted in increased levels of tension between ethnic communities.[155] On the contrary,

> the popularity of seggae is not confined to the Creoles in the poorer suburbs of Port Louis nor is it to be associated with Rastafarians alone. […] It is a music that is reaching a wider 'subcultural' category – that of *Mauritian youth in general*.[156]

It thus appears that through the music's inherent reference to Jamaica within the framework of a specifically Mauritian musical creation, seggae has been able to reach across religious and ethnic communal boundaries. This music also offers a significant, much-needed opportunity for Mauritians looking for 'a [positive] way to identify themselves as being of Africa',[157] albeit through a Glissantian *détour* of Jamaican Rastafari culture and religion.[158] Fusion genres such as seggae arguably played a fundamental role in the development of Indian Ocean dancehall music, discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

Réunionese Sega and Maloya

In the context of Réunionese popular and folk music, an important distinction has come to be established between two musically related and yet ideologically distinct genres: sega and maloya. Musically, sega is often considered as an overwhelmingly 'Europeanised

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[154] Miles, p. 220. The artist Kaya, born Joseph Reginald Topize, is generally considered as the founder of the séggae genre.

[155] A significant exception to this occurred in February 1999, when Kaya was found dead in police custody, and subsequent rioting soon divided along ethnic lines. For an outsider's perspective of events, see Roger Moss 'The Month the Music Died. A Visitor's Diary: February 1999', *Wasafiri*, 15: 30 (1999), 36-8.

[156] Boswell, p. 64. My emphasis.

[157] Edward A. Alpers, pp. 94.

[158] See Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 28-36.

version' of the first slave dances, whereas maloya is presented as 'the only aspect of [the African or Malagasy slaves'] original cultures to survive acculturation'.[159] However, this convenient polarisation avoids the more uncomfortable fact that both styles are syncretic forms which have combined African, European and Asian influences. The commonly perceived distinction between the two musical styles is thus better understood in ideological terms. As Carsten Wergin notes, this ideological difference can be discussed in terms of two opposing theories of hybridity:

> Séga is meant to represent a *mélange* of tourist imaginations, local cultural values and traditional music from continental France. Today, it plays a prominent role in performances in hotels and at tourist fairs on the island and abroad. Maloya, on the other hand, was first institutionalised by the *Parti Communiste Réunionnais* (PCR) and carries the image of an apparently 'authentic' medium for a Réunionese *métissage*, a cultural and socio-political setting that takes into account the 'violence, brutality and exile' of the island's creolisation. From the 1950s onwards, Maloya music functioned as a political tool for the PCR to support its movement for autonomy, articulating and representing a common Réunionese identity by using an apparently authentic Réunionese medium.[160]

Sega represents a politics of *mélange*, or of cultural mixing. This necessarily recognises the *pluri*cultural nature of Réunionese society; however, in viewing this society as composed of fundamentally different and wholly separate ethnic groups, it echoes colonial discourses of racial 'types' and represents what Homi K. Bhabha terms 'cultural diversity' (as opposed to cultural difference).[161] Maloya, in contrast, represents *métissage*, a cultural politics which challenges rather than reflects hegemonic discourses. The concept has been outlined by Vergès as a means of reappropriating Réunion's difficult history of slavery, exile, indentureship and institutional racism:

> Thinking métissage, I argue, requires accepting a genealogy and a heritage. In other words, the recognition of a past of rape, violence, slavery, and the recognition of our own complicity with the wicked ways of the world. No projection onto the Other, no denial of one's complicity. Projection […] allows a denial but perpetuates the split and the denial of the primal scene. To recognize the split in oneself means to accept that

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[159] Andrew Smith, 'Post-colonial Politics and the Aesthetics of Maloya in Reunion Island', Unpublished Masters thesis, (University of Leeds, 2001), see p. 25, p. 6.

[160] Carsten Wergin, 'T'shéga, Shéga, Séga…: Music, Identity and Creolisation on Réunion Island' in *Multiple Identities in Action: Mauritius and Some Antillean Parallelisms*, ed. by Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, Ralph Ludwig and Burkhard Schnepel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 255-74, p. 257.

[161] 'Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.' *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 50.

one can have conflicting desires and wishes, that an object can be both desired and rejected, that love and hate, envy and jealousy, are part of the human condition.[162]

World Music

Finally, in addition to Réunionese and Mauritian musical forms, the problematic term world music also warrants some consideration here. First used by academics in the 1960s to promote non-Western musical diversity,[163] the term was adopted into the commercial sphere in the late 1980s to allow previously uncategorisable artists to be grouped together in record shops. 'World music' has since taken on an extra-commercial significance, however, and has come to be recognised by some as a musical genre in its own right.[164] This said, as a catch-all term with varying criteria depending almost entirely on where the music is being sold, the phenomenon of 'world music' remains notoriously difficult to pin down, and is often criticised as a neo-colonial trend which is centred on the Western consumer. David Murphy, for example, argues that '[w]orld music is a primarily Western phenomenon: the music is "different" to Western pop music but increasingly repackaged in a more digestible form'.[165]

Whilst this may perhaps give an accurate overview of the marketing and consumption of world music in the West, it does not represent a just assessment of the work of non-Western world music artists, many of whom retain a specific focus on their local or national context even after achieving international success. Moreover, 'hybridised' genres such as seggae and electric maloya which combine local musical influences with features of popular music often recognised as Western are not necessarily any 'more digestible' for the Western consumer than more 'traditional' or 'authentic' Third World musics. Indeed, the way in which such musics appear to blur boundaries between First and Third World, immigrant and citizen, Western cosmopolitanism and Third World cultural 'primitivism', would appear to suggest that the opposite is in fact closer to the truth. Furthermore, it should also be recognised that the world music commercial market offers an important opportunity for non-Western musicians to get their music heard beyond their national or regional contexts. When I first started to meet and talk with musicians in Mauritius, I was surprised to find that they consciously worked

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[162] Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 11.

[163] Steven Feld, 'Sound Worlds' in *Sound*, ed. by Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 173-200, p. 175.

[164] Carsten Wergin, for example, aims to consider 'World Music as an artistic genre, a special form of musical practice and a musical style with characteristic features of its own' in 'World Music: a medium for unity and difference?', presented to The EASA Media Anthropology e-Seminar (22-29 May 2007), <www.media-anthropology.net/wergin_worldmusic.pdf> [Accessed 10th June 2010], p. 1.

[165] 'Where Does World Music Come From? Globalization, Afropop and the Question of Cultural Identity' in *Music, National Identity, and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. by Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 39-61, p. 57.

towards getting their music recognised as belonging to the ambiguous world music genre. This remains the case even if, when viewed from the perspective of Western academic analysis, the artists' strategic use of 'exotic' instrumentation, pleasing syncopated rhythms and memorable melodies could be criticised as approaching the kind of bland 'global pop' sound which advocates of the cultural imperialism thesis argue to be indicative of the 'cultural grey-out'.[166]

Creolisation: Transformation, Mixing, and Cultural Globalisation

It thus becomes apparent that the term creolisation has been used within attempts to theorise the processes involved in development of the languages and musics recognised as indigenous to Mauritius and Réunion, and indeed the birth of the islands' societies and cultures more generally.[167] The adjective Creole has historically been used to reference the cultures, languages and societies of the islands (although it should be noted that when applied to people, the term has a more exclusive meaning in Mauritius where it usually refers to individuals of African or mixed descent).[168] In a straightforward sense, then, creolisation can be interpreted as the process of becoming Creole, or as the transformation of Old World cultures and languages through transportation to a new environment, and it is in this respect that Charles Stewart suggests that the concept 'has a rich and varied history stretching back to the sixteenth century', given that 'the idea arose implicitly the moment the term "creole" was coined'.[169] However, this premise is arguably complicated by the variety of sometimes contradictory definitions and connotations attached to the term Creole within different

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[166] For a full discussion of the cultural imperialism thesis in relation to world (pop) music, see Tony Mitchell, 'Introduction' to *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 1-8. For George Lipsitz, popular music within globalisation is a 'dangerous crossroads,' 'an intersection between the undesirable saturation of commercial culture in every area of human endeavor and the emergence of a new public sphere that uses the circuits of commodity production and circulation to envision and activate new social relations. *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 12.

[167] Vaughan suggests that '[t]here is no moment in the human history of Mauritius that is prior to creolization, or "pre-creole."' She points to the 'cosmopolitan' nature of both French and Dutch settlers and the slaves they brought with them, especially those from Madagascar, 'itself a complex mélange of cultures'; and to the 'circuitous route[s]' by which some slaves reached the island, including those brought from the former French outpost of Fort Dauphin in Madagascar, whose community 'must have been a complex one, culturally and linguistically', pp. 22-3. See also Pier M. Larson's formulation of creolisation 'as the learned capacity of persons to move in and out of the everyday challenges of cultural and linguistic *discontinuity* that characterized colonial landscapes for slaves and other low-status groups', *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 226.

[168] For a more detailed discussion of this usage of the term 'Creole' in Mauritius, see Chapter 2 of this study.

[169] 'Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory' in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. by Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), pp. 1-25, p. 1.

contexts and over different historical periods.[170] It should also be recognised that contemporary academic usage of creolisation as a theoretical concept has a much more recent history: according to anthropologist Richard Price, the first reference in English can be traced back to 1928, and it was only in the 1960s that creolisation became part of a shared terminology used across the disciplines of linguistics and anthropology.[171]

Within more recent academic usage of the concept, there remains a decided lack of consensus over what exactly is meant by the process of creolisation, and how the theory should be applied. There is debate over whether creolisation should be characterised as a process of transformation resulting in differentiation (of the European Creole born in the colony from the metropolitan European, for example) and degeneration,[172] or whether creolisation refers to a process of mixing, whether biological, cultural or otherwise, which appears to have become the dominant interpretation.[173] Moreover, an unresolved disagreement remains over whether the concept should remain confined to analysis of a specific sociohistorical context, usually that of the Caribbean colonial plantation,[174] or whether the term might now be usefully applied to a wider range of contexts, and particularly in the study of contemporary processes of cultural globalisation.[175] Finally, although creolisation has been associated with politically engaged scholarship, the ability of the concept to produce progressive political analyses has since been called into question due to its usage within celebratory accounts of cultural mixing or hybridity which can serve to obscure unequal power

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[170] For a summary of some differential uses of the term Creole with a focus on the Indian Ocean context, see Arnaud Carpooran, 'Créole, créolité, créolisation: Les Contours d'une terminologie floue' *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 2 (2002), 1-14, pp. 1-2.

[171] 'Some Anthropological Musings on Creolization', *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 22: 1 (2007), 17-36, p. 18.

[172] Stewart notes that '[t]he distinction was not a neutral one. Creoles were thought to be lazy, disease ridden, promiscuous – in short, their relocation to a different climate zone, or hemisphere, had caused them to become physically denatured and morally degenerate.' p. 8.

[173] See, for example, the case made by contributors to *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*. In his introduction to the volume, Stewart maintains that '[t]he focus on mixture has, however, obscured the appreciation of creolization as structuring the opposition between metropolitans and colonial-born subjects in the early colonial period', p. 8, and suggests that reconceptualising creolisation as restructuring could help 'move us beyond the current fixation on mixture as the prime characteristic of creolization', p. 18.

[174] See, amongst others, Aisha Khan, 'Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol', *Cultural Anthropology*, 16: 3 (2001), 271-302, and 'Creolization Moments' in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, pp. 237-53; Viranjini Munasinghe, 'Theorizing World Culture through the New World: East Indians and Creolization', *American Ethnologist*, 33: 4 (2006), 549-62; Stephan Palmié, 'Creolization and its Discontents', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35 (2006), 433-56, 'The "C-Word" Again: From Colonial to Postcolonial Semantics', and 'Is There a Model in the Muddle? "Creolization" in African Americanist History and Anthropology', both in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, pp. 66-83, pp. 178-200; and Price.

[175] This position is generally associated with the work of anthropologist Ulf Hannerz: see 'The World in Creolisation', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* 57: 4 (1987), 546-59; and his discussion of the 'global ecumene' in *Cultural Complexity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 217–266.

relations. For some Caribbeanists, these two concerns are linked. Mimi Sheller, for example, has argued that

> Although creolization has become a keyword for processes of dynamic creation, agency, and self-making in the imagery of global culture, […] there is a sense in which the theory of creolization was displaced from its Caribbean context. In that dislocation it was emptied of its resonance as a project of subaltern resistance.[176]

A brief overview of these and other debates surrounding the term creolisation will therefore be provided here in order to clarify why the concept is not applied within this study of contemporary Mauritian and Réunionese sociocultural phenomena. This will focus primarily on the development of creolisation theory within Francophone postcolonial theory, particularly as concerns the work of Martiniquan theorists Édouard Glissant and the *Créolité* movement, before considering how the concept has been applied within Indian Ocean theorising.

Initially drawn from the field of linguistics, creolisation has been used as a theoretical concept to conceptualise cultural contact within history, anthropology, and studies of postcolonial literature and culture. The primary concern within colonial Creole linguistics' appears to have been to transform the lay term Creole into an academic category of analysis so that languages formed through the process of creolisation could be 'objectively' identified according to specific criteria. It should thus be remembered that, as Stephan Palmié observes, 'far from stimulating a revaluation of post-enlightenment conceptions of languages as "natural kinds" (or, at least, "objective" entities) discretely distributed in social space, creole linguistics was firmly anchored in precisely such conceptions right from the start'.[177] Within historical and anthropological scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century, however, the concept of creolisation was used to deconstruct assumptions and formulate a politically engaged critique of Western analyses of creolised societies and their histories. In contrast to previous theoretical frameworks such as acculturation or the plural society,[178] creolisation theory appeared to invite a revaluation of the sociocultural legacies created within situations of colonial oppression which attributed agency to groups categorised as marginalised, subaltern, or subordinate. The historian and poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite used the term creolisation to underline the fact that creativity was also involved in the 'cruel' and violent cultural contact experienced by slaves in the colonies.[179] In contrast to previous linguistic theorisations of

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[176] *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 203.
[177] 'Creolization and its Discontents', p. 444.
[178] See John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1948), and Michael G. Smith, *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965).
[179] *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 307.

creolisation which reflected and sought to lend academic credence to Eurocentric prejudices, then, this politically engaged usage of the concept facilitated an important development in the theorisation of subaltern sociocultural histories which sought to give a central position to those voices previously written out of historical accounts, and allowed for a more nuanced, complex view of slave and postslave cultures which was not limited to the binary logic of culture retention and loss.

It would seem that the attributing of agency to subaltern groups within colonial situations of cultural contact and domination constitutes one of the most important contributions of creolisation theory. In this respect, creolisation is considered as more conducive to politically engaged analyses than concepts such as hybridity, which 'suffers from the disadvantage of appearing to exclude individual agency' due to the implied perspective of 'the outside observer studying culture as if it were nature and the products of individuals and groups as if they were botanical specimens.'[180] The progressive political positioning associated with this revised usage of the concept may have constituted one of the triggers behind the subsequent proliferation of creolisation theory across academic disciplines. This development was also preceded by the emergence of Creole political movements in various newly formed postcolonial states, within which 'Creole people started to articulate an explicit form of cultural politics, mobilizing around the defence and advocacy of a creole identity'.[181] Within the context of the Francophone Caribbean, and in particular in the work of theorists from the French DOM of Martinique, the articulation of a Creole cultural politics within calls for political autonomy appeared to converge with developments in creolisation theory. The concept proved fundamental to the emergence of new conceptualisations of culture which ensued but ultimately diverged from the Africa-centric perspective of Négritude, a previous oppositional movement founded by black Francophone intellectuals Aimé Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who met whilst studying in Paris in the 1930s. For the subsequent generation of Francophone Caribbean intellectuals, Négritude constituted an important cultural legacy, particularly Césaire's formulations which drew in part on the Martiniquan sociocultural context. Nonetheless, the movement was also accused of simply reconfiguring rather than doing away with the Western logic of the racial binary and post-enlightenment conceptualisations of race and culture.

Within their articulation of these critiques, the alternative possibilities presented by creolisation theory were explored by Martiniquan intellectuals who were grappling with the

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[180] Peter Burke, 'Introduction', *European Review*, 14: 1 (2006), 99-103, pp. 100-1.
[181] Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato, 'Introduction. The Creolization Debate: Analysing Mixed Identities and Cultures' in *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, ed. by Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-21, p. 5.

social, political, and cultural consequences of departmentalisation. This can be seen in the early work of Martiniquan novelist and postcolonial theorist Édouard Glissant, whose collection of essays *Le Discours antillais* employs the concept of creolisation to articulate a critique of dominant Western perspectives of creolised societies past and present, even if the term itself is not used at this stage.[182] Here, he reconfigures the Martiniquan history of cultural exchange in order to counter prejudicial accounts of cultural mixing, and calls for recognition of this specificity as a means of combating 'l'universel généralisant', the false universalisms propagated within Western philosophy.[183] For Glissant, the framework of *antillanité* allows the Caribbean individual to move beyond the France/Africa binary which remained intact within Negritude, encouraging the recognition of multiple places of identity including and beyond Africa:

> Aujourd'hui l'Antillais ne renie plus la part africaine de son être, il n'a plus, par réaction, à la prôner comme exclusive. Il faut qu'il la *reconnaisse*. Il comprend que de tout cette histoire (même si nous l'avons vécu comme une non-histoire) est résultée *une autre réalité*. Il n'est plus contraint de rejeter par tactique les composantes occidentales aujourd'hui encore aliénantes, dont il sait qu'il peut choisir entre elles. Il voit que l'aliénation réside d'abord dans l'impossibilité du choix, dans l'imposition arbitraire des valeurs, et peut-être dans la notion de Valeur. Il conçoit que la synthèse n'est pas l'opération d'abâtardissement qu'on lui disait, mais pratique féconde par quoi les composants s'enrichissent. Il est *devenu* antillais.[184]

Creolisation thus allows Glissant to formulate a new perspective on subaltern cultures which have developed through processes of cultural mixing and contact, which focuses not on loss but on cultural creation and enrichment. However, this is not simply a question of casting mixed cultures in a positive light, instead Glissant explicitly disavows the existence of any 'pure' cultures, including the idealisation of African culture within Négritude: 'affirmer que les peuples sont métissés, que le métissage est valeur, c'est déconstruire ainsi une catégorie « métis » qui serait intermédiaire entre deux extrêmes « purs »'.[185] In later works, Glissant refines his position through differentiating between 'créolisation' and 'métissage', terms which are often used interchangeably within scholarship on the Caribbean, which is developed in connection with another of his key concepts, *Relation*. For Glissant, the Caribbean's history of creolisation is the nearest real-life instance of his utopian view of *Relation* as a state of total intercultural connectedness:

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[182] Glissant uses the term 'métissage' in this text to convey this meaning. See *Le Discours antillais*, pp. 250-1.
[183] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 249.
[184] *Le Discours antillais*, pp. 17-8.
[185] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 250.

Ce qui s'est passé dans la Caraïbe, et que nous pourrions résumer dans le mot de créolisation, nous en donne l'idée la plus approchée possible. Non seulement une rencontre, un choc (au sens ségalénien), un métissage, mais une dimension inédite qui permet à chacun d'être là et ailleurs, enraciné et ouvert, perdu dans la montagne et libre sous la mer, en accord et en errance.
Si nous posons le métissage en général comme une rencontre et une synthèse entre deux différents, la créolisation nous apparaît comme le métissage sans limites, dont les éléments sont démultipliés, les résultats imprévisibles. La créolisation diffracte, quand certains modes de métissage peuvent concentrer une fois encore. Elle est ici vouée à l'éclaté des terres, qui ne sont plus des îles. Son symbole le plus évident est dans la langue créole, dont le génie est de toujours s'ouvrir, c'est-à-dire peut-être de ne se fixer que selon des systèmes de variables que nous aurons à imaginer autant qu'à définir.[186]

Whereas the results of *métissage* may be predicted, creolisation is thus defined as process of *métissage* without limits, involving 'la rencontre d'éléments culturels venus d'horizons absolument divers et qui réellement se créolisent, qui réellement s'imbriquent et se confondent l'un dans l'autre pour donner quelque chose d'absolument imprévisible, d'absolument nouveau'.[187] It is precisely this fundamental characteristic of unpredictability which for Glissant leads to cultural creation and enrichment, and which in turn paves the way for the definitive eradication of persistent deleterious perspectives on Creole cultures:

La créolisation est la mise en contact de plusieurs cultures ou au moins de plusieurs éléments de cultures distinctes, dans un endroit du monde, avec pour résultante une donnée nouvelle, totalement imprévisible par rapport à la somme ou à la simple synthèse de ces éléments.
On prévoirait ce que donnera un métissage, mais non pas une créolisation. Celle-ci et celui-là, dans l'univers de l'atavique, étaient réputés produire une dilution de l'être, un abâtardissement. Un autre imprévu est que ce préjugé s'efface lentement, même s'il s'obstine dans des lieux immobiles et barricadés.[188]

It thus becomes apparent that in Glissant's later works, his writings on creolisation increasingly make use of universal and abstract language, as his engagement with the specificities of the Martiniquan context becomes less prominent. It would seem that the principal function of the concepts of creolisation and *Relation* is no longer to highlight the process of cultural creativity and enrichment within the Martiniquan or the Caribbean sociocultural sphere. Instead, the two concepts are now applied to cultural systems throughout the entire world:

La créolisation ne limite pas son œuvre aux seules réalités créoles des Archipels ni à leurs langages naissants. Le monde se créolise, il ne devient pas créole, il devient cet

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[186] Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 46.
[187] Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du Divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 15.
[188] *Traité du Tout-Monde – Poétique IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 37.

inextricable et cet imprédictible que tout processus de créolisation porte en lui et qui ne se soutient ni ne s'autorise d'aucun modèle. Ailleurs, ni la raide hybridation, ni le seul métissage, ni le multi-quoi-que-ce-soit.[189]

Creolisation is thus now formulated as a truly global phenomenon, and therefore now involves even those Western cultures associated with theories of pure, rooted identity which proved so harmful to conceptualisations of Creole cultural autonomy.[190] For some of his critics, this universalised application of creolisation theory forms part of an 'aestheticizing, post-political turn in Glissant's work'.[191] Chris Bongie, who situates this development in relation to Glissant's move from Parisian publishing houses Le Seuil to Gallimard, argues that the increased popularity of later works must be understood to reflect Glissant's 'changing attitude toward [the] "oppositional nationalist politics"' articulated in the *Discours antillais* through its detailed attention to the Martiniquan context.[192] According to Bongie, 'Glissant's parting of ways with such partisan politics after the *Discours*, combined with his strong claims for the global crossing of cultures, meshed well with the belief in that alternative-(to)-politics known as 'cultural politics', which has been so fundamental to dominant versions of postcolonial theory',[193] resulting in increased popularity with academic audiences, but also in the abandoning of the political project which Glissant set out in his earlier work. This assessment of evolutions in Glissant's theorising would thus appear to support critiques of contemporary creolisation theory which claim that through universalising the concept, creolisation has lost much of its subversive political potential.

A second development in Martiniquan postcolonial theory commonly associated with the concept of creolisation, the *Créolité* movement, pays explicit homage to both Césairian Négritude and to Glissant's formulation of *antillanité* within its formulation of a new Francophone Caribbean identity which valorises and centralises the place of Creole language, culture and social identity. [194] The movement was marked by the publication of the manifesto *Eloge de la créolité* in 1989, but also refers to a wider intellectual engagement built on the

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[189] Glissant, *La Cohée du Lamentin – Poétique V* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 229-30.

[190] See, for example, Glissant's evaluation of the politics of métissage in *Le Discours antillais*, pp. 250-1: 'Le métissage comme proposition souligne qu'il est désormais inopérant de glorifier une origine « unique » dont la race serait gardienne et continuatrice. Dans les traditions occidentales, la filiation est le garant de cette unicité, tout comme la Genèse légitime la filiation.' p. 250.

[191] Chris Bongie, 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality' in *Postcolonial Thought in the French Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 90-101, p. 100. See also Peter Hallward's critique in 'Édouard Glissant: From Nation to Relation' in *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 66-125.

[192] 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality', p. 96.

[193] 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality', p. 96.

[194] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité. Édition bilingue francais/anglais* transl. by M. B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), [1989], pp. 18-22.

research of the Groupes d'Études et de Recheches en Espace Créolophone (GEREC) established at the Centre Universitaire Antilles-Guyane in the 1970s and led by linguist and co-author of the *Eloge* Jean Bernabé.[195] For the *Eloge* authors, 'le processus de créolisation […] désigne la mise en contact brutale, sur des territoires soit insulaires, soit enclavés […] de populations culturellement différentes'.[196] The relative isolation of colonial plantation is thus presented as a significant factor in the facilitation of complex processes of cultural, social, and linguistic creolisation:

> Réunis en général au sein d'une économie plantationnaire, ces populations *sont sommées d'inventer de nouveaux schèmes culturels permettant d'établir une relative cohabitation entre elles*. Ces schèmes résultent du mélange non harmonieux (et non achevé et donc non réducteur) des pratiques linguistiques, religieuses, culturales, culinaires, architecturales, médicinales, etc., des différent peuples en présence.[197]

Though their presentation of the process of creolisation thus recognises the role of colonial violence and force, the authors' attitudes to *Créolité*, which is conceptualised as the end result of this process, are shown to be overwhelmingly positive, as is signalled by the manifesto's title. *Créolité* is defined as '[l]'agrégat *interactionnel ou transactionnel*, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réuni sur le même sol'.[198] However, the authors' listing of the different cultural elements involved in this process has provoked the criticism that theorising creolisation in this way in fact reproduces the idea that cultures remain stable, pure and rooted prior to creolisation. Furthermore, their choice of terminology suggests that creolised cultures may again become fixed and homogenous, as is implied by addition of the *-ité* suffix to form *Créolité*. The opening line of the manifesto, '[n]i Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles',[199] has been subject to a similar critique: Bongie has argued that in this representation of Creole identity, the *Eloge* authors reveal 'a foundationalist politics of identity that is logically equivalent to the Old World identities that are being renounced'.[200] Although the manifesto claims to break with modern conceptualisations of culture and identity grounded in Western post-enlightenment philosophy, it therefore becomes clear that these continue to reappear within the authors' elaborations on *Créolité*.

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[195] For a summary of the context leading to the publication of the *Eloge*, see Shireen K. Lewis, *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 91-5.
[196] Bernabé *et. al*, p. 30.
[197] Bernabé *et. al*, pp. 30-1. Emphasis in original.
[198] Bernabé *et. al*, p. 26. Emphasis in original.
[199] Bernabé *et. al*, p.13.
[200] Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 64.

As critics such as Mary Gallagher have pointed out, the slippage between postmodern and decidedly modern conceptualisations of identity forms one aspect of the paradoxical conceptualisation of *Créolité* as presented within the *Eloge* manifesto.[201] This can also be seen in the contrast between the authors' future-oriented outlook, evident in their claim that *Créolité* prefigures global postmodernity ('cette nouvelle dimension de l'homme, dont nous sommes la silhouette préfigurée'),[202] and the symbolic importance attached to the plantation context of Martinique's colonial past. As Gallagher notes, the first element outlined within the manifesto's extended discussion of *Créolité* is oral tradition, which is presented as a privileged mode of *Créolité* and an important means of reconnecting with the plantation past.[203] She is thus led to conclude that '[a]lthough the *Créolité* vision is inherently programmatic and future-oriented, the aesthetic outlined in the main body of the manifesto is strikingly retrospective'.[204] This assessment concurs with Richard Burton's evaluation of the wider *Créolité* movement, inclusive of representations of Creole authenticity within novels of *Eloge* co-authors Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant:

> Prospective and progressive in theory, Créolité is in practice often retrospective, even regressive, in character, falling back, in a last desperate recourse against decreolization, into the real or imagined creole plenitude of *an tan lontan* (olden times), of Martinique and Guadeloupe as they were before the 'fall' of departmentalization or the massive disruptions of the 1960s.[205]

The authors' claims to a progressive cultural politics are thus troubled by the persistence of what we might term Creole cultural conservatism, in which 'creole cultural authenticity is overwhelmingly predicated […] on the colonial past'.[206] This has led to criticism regarding the *Créolité* movements' conceptualisation of gender relations,[207] and can also be seen in the defensive positioning adopted in relation to contemporary processes of cultural globalisation, which are interpreted as indicative of cultural alienation, especially where these involve the consumption of Western cultures. Thus Chamoiseau and Confiant bemoan the contemporary 'système de consommation globale de la chose extérieure', which is thought to encourage a

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[201] Mary Gallagher, 'The *Créolité* Movement: Paradoxes of a French Caribbean Orthodoxy' in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, pp. 220-36.
[202] Bernabé *et. al*, pp. 33-6.
[203] Bernabé *et. al*, p. 26.
[204] Gallagher, 'Paradoxes of a French Caribbean Orthodoxy', p. 228.
[205] 'Ki moun nou ye? The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought', *New West Indian Guide*, 67 (1993), 5-32, p. 23.
[206] Gallagher, 'Paradoxes of a French Caribbean Orthodoxy', p. 229.
[207] See A. James Arnold, 'The Gendering of *Créolité*: The Erotics of Colonialism' in *Penser la créolité*, ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995), pp. 21-40.

process of mimicry which leads Martiniquans 'à confondre liberté et assimilation, urbanité et civilisation, liberté et francisation'.[208]

A related aspect of this contradiction can be identified in the tension between the grounding of *Créolité* within a specific sociocultural context, and the authors' global ambitions. The manifesto makes the explicit claim that '[l]e monde va en état de créolité,'[209] reflecting the gradual emergence of 'une nouvelle humanité qui aura les caractéristiques de notre humanité créole: toute la complexité de la Créolité.'[210] As in Glissant's later work, then, the authors thus expand the remit of creolisation beyond the context of the colonial Caribbean plantation, as *Créolité* is now presented as a totality which would appear to encompass global cultural phenomena:

> Craignant cet inconfortable magma, nous avons vainement tenté de le figer dans des ailleurs mythiques (regard extérieur, Afrique, Europe, aujourd'hui encore, Inde ou Amérique), de chercher refuge dans la normalité close des cultures millénaires, sans savoir que nous étions l'anticipation du contact des cultures, du monde futur qui s'annonce déjà. Nous sommes tout à la fois, l'Europe, l'Afrique, nourris d'apport asiatiques, levantins, indiens, et nous relevons aussi des survivances de l'Amérique précolombienne. La Créolité c'est « *le monde diffracté mais recomposé* », un maelström de signifiés dans un seul signifiant : une Totalité.[211]

The authors thus bring up what has become a central point of contention within later debates regarding the application of creolisation theory: the idea that the sociocultural context of the Caribbean can be seen to prefigure the modern globalised world due to its history of cultural mixing and exchange, as was famously expressed by the anthropologist James Clifford's 'we are all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagoes'.[212] It would thus seem that the *Eloge* 'does not simply theorize Caribbean cultural identity; it also lays claim to certain truths about global cultural identity in the present and future.'[213] Therefore, although the text begins by outlining its deconstruction of false notions of 'l'Universel' governed by Western values,[214] the *Eloge*

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[208] Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature, 1635-1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991), p. 67.

[209] Bernabé *et. al*, p. 51.

[210] Bernabé *et. al*, p. 52.

[211] Bernabé *et. al*, pp. 26-7.

[212] *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 173. See Khan, 'The Caribbean as Master Symbol' for a critical account.

[213] Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950: The Shock of Space and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 31.

[214] See Bernabé *et. al*, p. 21.

authors ultimately appear to create a new formulation of the universal, albeit one based on Creole and creolised sociocultural experience.[215]

Within Francophone postcolonial theory, then, the concept of creolisation has most commonly been associated with the French Caribbean, and more specifically with the Martiniquan context which produced the theoretical developments discussed above. However, this is not to say that there has been no engagement with concept of creolisation in the Indian Ocean region. In the essay text *Amarres*, Françoise Vergès and Carpanin Marimoutou develop the concept of 'indiaocéanité' as a means of clarifying and contextualising academic theorising on creolisation. The text appears to demonstrate a desire to distinguish Indian Ocean creolisation from previous Caribbean theorising, as is demonstrated by their choice of metaphor, 'amarres', which would appear to privilege a sense of anchorage over free-floating conceptualisations of postmodernist identity. In further contrast to Francophone Caribbean theorising, the existence of the Indian Ocean as a region resulting from creolisation is itself problematised, since it is acknowledged to be a 'communauté imaginée et concrète, ancienne et en formation'.[216] The authors thus appear to adopt a more tentative, questioning approach to creolisation when compared with the bold statements which characterised the *Eloge*, whilst persistently countering the assumption that creolisation is *a priori* a Caribbean concept.

Throughout the text, Vergès and Marimoutou appear to adopt an overtly critical approach which actively addresses problematic aspects within both creolisation theory and Réunionese society as a site of creolisation. For example, an awareness of the tendency for discussion of creolisation to lead to simplistic celebrations is explicitly announced in the opening section of the essay. Instead, the authors conceptualise creolisation as a constant process which forms part of Réunionese social reality without resulting in a fixed state, as opposed to the *Eloge* authors' conceptualisation of *Créolité*. This process is marked by a 'philosophie de l'emprunt, de la contrefaçon, de l'imitation et [...une] dynamique du rafistolage, du bricolage'.[217] However, the authors' insist that this process of mixture, borrowing and restructuring is not to be idealised, nor stigmatised, nor reduced to a harmonious melting-pot or 'célébration béate de la créolité'.[218] As they explain,

> La créolisation n'est pas un agrégat, une somme des différences. Elle se sait inachevée, soumise aux mutations, à la perte. Elle est emprunt, elle est mimétique et créatrice. Elle ne craint pas de s'enraciner car pour elle la racine n'est pas nécessairement

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[215] This can be seen at various points within the manifesto: see, for example, '[n]otre plongée dans notre créolité, avec les ressources de l'Art, est une mise en relation avec le monde, des plus extraordinaires et des plus justes. Exprimer la Créolité sera exprimer les *étants* mêmes du monde', Bernabé *et. al*, p. 52.
[216] Vergès and Marimoutou, p. 7.
[217] Vergès and Marimoutou, p. 43.
[218] Vergès and Marimoutou, p. 10.

mortifère, si elle amarre c'est pour mieux laisser partir. Pas d'idéalisation du mouvement, mais une intégration de la distance à la terre, au lieu, à l'autre. L'amarre est relation qui accepte le lien, que ne craint pas d'être soumise aux sens, au désir, qui accepte le renoncement'[219]

It would thus seem that overall, *Amarres* addresses a number of the blind spots in the *Eloge* manifesto which were outlined above. The text readdresses the balance between accounts of historical creolisation in the colonial era, including their continuing legacy, and an evaluation of contemporary Creole (here, Réunionese) society, as the authors provide a detailed critical account of the present-day context in Réunion, which draws on statistical as well as analytical evidence, within their engagement with the concept of Indian Ocean creolisation. This includes a detailed critical consideration of gender relations in Réunion from both a historical and contemporary perspective, which examines the legacy of Réunion's historical gender imbalance in relation to contemporary social problems such as domestic violence and prevalent homophobic attitudes.[220] The authors also examine how creolisation relates to discourses of exclusion, taking note of the propagation of stereotypes which have served to stigmatise lower class Réunionese, including descendents of slaves and indentured labourers.[221] That the text represents an attempt to theorise creolisation in relation to analysis of the contemporary as well as historical context can be seen in the authors' suggestion that Réunionese should '*s'amarrer* dans l'histoire et non pas à l'histoire', a positioning which involves recognising historical continuations but also taking responsibility for present circumstances, inclusive of the Réunionese natural as well as social environment.[222]

Furthermore, the text addresses issues pertaining to global perspectives, globalisation, and the peripheral positioning of Réunion from the start, and demonstrates a critical awareness of the rhetorical power of Creole cultural conservatism to which the *Eloge* authors appear to succumb on occasions.[223] Yet, despite the authors' detailed, if not exhaustive, attention to the specificities of the Réunionese context within these various analyses, we cannot help but notice than their formulation of Indian Ocean creolisation in the section entitled 'Créolisations india-océanes' remains expressed in abstract language which appears to lean towards universal pretensions.[224] Thus, following the definition of creolisation reproduced above, it is asserted that 'l'autre ne peut plus être évalué à la mesure de l'Un.'[225] The text also reveals its own contradictions, notably in relation to the authors' position on language politics

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[219] Vergès and Marimoutou, p. 57.
[220] See Vergès and Marimoutou, pp. 16-8, and pp. 48-9.
[221] pp. 20-1.
[222] p. 23.
[223] pp. 38-9.
[224] See pp. 57-60.
[225] p. 57.

and policies. It is firstly suggested that structuring of the Réunion linguistic situation around a French/RK binary is not sufficiently nuanced, in that it obscures other aspects of multilingualism in Réunion, including the practice of Gujurati, Chinese, Malagasy, and Tamil,[226] although the authors do not acknowledge that this may result from a conscious cultivation of ancestral languages, rather than simply reflecting linguistic continuations. Yet later in text, as the authors expand upon how examining the Creole language and subaltern cultural practices such as *maloya* can facilitate an understanding of creolisation, the discussion is framed by the subheading 'Une langue, le créole'.[227] Finally, it should again be recognised that despite an apparent desire to promote RK, Vergès and Marimoutou choose to write in French, although they do also include a glossary of RK and other terms specific to the Réunionese context. What is perhaps more problematic is that on occasions when the French language is shown to be unable to express concepts within the text's theoretical explorations, the authors turn to English concepts from Anglophone scholarship, such as 'seascapes',[228] rather than exploring alternative conceptualisations drawn from the Réunionese context.

However, in one respect, it may be unfair to compare the two accounts of creolisation in this way, as the principal concerns explored within both the *Eloge* manifesto and *Amarres* can be understood to respond to the context of the period leading up their publication. The *Eloge* thus reflects an earlier context in which Creole languages and culture were in more urgent need of valorisation, resulting in a privileging of their inclusion within universal conceptualisations of Art and Culture in response to the risk of being confined to folklore. In turn, *Amarres* can be seen to respond to earlier celebratory accounts of creolisation as cultural mixing, and thus attempts to develop a more critical account of Indian Ocean creolisation. Nonetheless, it would seem that within all of the examples of creolisation theorising discussed here, creolisation as a concept appears to be caught in a bind between a desire to revalorise Creole cultures, inclusive of aspects commonly recognised as folklore, and a desire not to be defined or constrained by the latter, which is often expressed through a turn towards to universal. It would seem that this turn has been further facilitated and encouraged by developments in academic theorising of cultural contact, which characterise the whole world as being 'in creolisation.'[229] Thus, like the *Eloge* authors and Glissant before them, Vergès and Marimoutou are not able to resist appealing to the idea that through its unacknowledged history of global exchange, the Indian Ocean region can be characterised as a precursor to globalised society in order to legitimise their claims to universal relevance: 'Radicalement

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[226] p. 33.
[227] p. 58.
[228] p. 25.
[229] See Hannerz, 'The World in Creolisation'.

marqué par le divers, l'hétérogénéité, il préfigure le monde mondialisé en formation, avec ses

inégalités, ses tensions, ses guerres potentielles, son cosmopolitisme, sa multipolarité, son

dynamisme, sa créativité.'[230] Therefore, though the present study recognises the significant

role that creolisation theory has played in the revalorisation of Creole languages and cultures,

it must also be recognised that this theoretical *impasse* would appear to limit the theory's

potential to produce critical, politically engaged analysis of contemporary sociocultural

phenomena.

Secondly, as has been acknowledged, within the context of Francophone and French

Creolophone academic enquiry, creolisation theory is still associated primarily with the French

Caribbean, and in particular the work of Martiniquan intellectuals. For this reason, it would

seem that applying the concept to the Mascarene Islands of Réunion and Mauritius brings up

an unproductive line of debate over whether the latter can be considered as equally Creole,

and thus equally entitled to make claims on creolisation theory, when compared with

Caribbean region which till now appears to have held a monopoly on the theorising of Creole

cultures. Yet as Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato have noted, 'there are clearly many creole

places that are simply not credited with this label by those only familiar with the Caribbean,

who have dominated the discourse'.[231] Stephan Palmié, for example, defends Caribbean-

specific usage of creolisation theory on behalf of 'those of us who actually study the region

from which terms such as "creole" and "creolization" originally diffused into their current

global, transdisciplinary discursive economy.'[232] For Cohen and Toninato, defensive reactions

of this kind are symptomatic of 'a barely-concealed resentment that the struggles for self-

expression that emerges with such pain and difficulty in the Caribbean are being cavalierly

expropriated by other people who somehow do not deserve to have their identities recognized

in this way'.[233] The subsequent analysis thus does not make use of creolisation theory as a

means of avoiding the repetition of these debates.

Finally, the intention to attend to social class as well as racial and ethnic social

structures outlined earlier in this introductory chapter has confirmed my decision not to use

creolisation as a theoretical framework. Although it was once understood as a politically

engaged concept, the subsequent association of creolisation theory with literary and

intellectual movements would appear to suggest that in the contemporary context, it is not

best positioned to promote critical engagement with social class in Creole or creolised

societies. In addition, it should also be remembered that within lay usage of the term, Creole

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[230] Marimoutou, 'Littératures indiaocéaniques', p. 131. Vergès and Marimoutou, p. 27
[231] 'The Creolization Debate', p. 16.
[232] 'Is There a Model in the Muddle?', p. 193.
[233] Cohen and Toninato, 'The Creolization Debate', pp. 16-7.

can in certain contexts refer to both the stigma of low social class and of dark skin and African phenotype, as is the case in Mauritius. The application of creolisation theory which aspires towards universalism to contexts such as this would thus appear to be incompatible with local interpretations of what it means to be, and to become, Creole. In the subsequent analysis, Creole is recognised as a meaningful social category which differentially positioned Mauritian and Réunionese individuals may or may not choose to identify with. Representations of Creoleness are understood to serve as important sites of contestation; for this reason, these representations form the basis of critical discussion in the following chapters.[234] However, given the lack of common consensus over where and how it might be applied, existant accounts of creolisation theory do not appear to offer a productive framework for the analysis of contemporary popular culture in Réunion and Mauritius. Moreover, it would seem that the association of creolisation theory with universalising literary and philosophical analysis in the context of Francophone postcolonial studies makes it fundamentally unsuitable for this analysis of contemporary social and cultural phenomena relating to Réunionese and Mauritian popular and youth cultures.

The Position of the Researcher

During the course of my research, I was often asked how I had come to research this topic, often with open expressions of puzzlement. As time went on, it was assumed in Mauritius that I must be Réunionese, and in Réunion that I was perhaps born in the UK, but of Mauritian parentage. Yet despite my lack of family ties to either context, it would be unfair not to admit that there is also a personal motivation behind this study. My interest in the Réunionese context was first triggered by an eight-month stay on the island as an English language assistant. I was 20 years old, and I had never travelled so far away from home before. As I walked through the arrival gate at Roland Garros airport and caught my first glimpse of Réunion's geographical features, I marvelled at the mountains which rose up dramatically from the coast, contrasting against the sky which was an unfamiliarly bright shade of blue. The connections with the context I developed in this period working in a *collège* and *lycée* were, in retrospect, severely limited; yet, ironically, being employed within the state education system meant that I was able to speak with teachers who had strong opinions about multi- and

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[234] See 'The Creole Population of Mauritius: Issues of Terminology, Race, and Social Class' in Chapter 2, the discussion of how Réunionese dancehall music engages with competing representations of Creoleness in Chapter 3, and of gendered representations of Creoleness in 'Conceptualising the *Zorey*: Colonial References, Youth, Gender', Chapter 5.

intercultural politics within the Réunionese school. It also gave me a very brief and partial glimpse into the lives of my students, and it was thanks to my experience of teaching that a handful of moments over the course of the year began to sow the seeds of later reflections. One such occasion arose in one of the last classes I taught, with a group of *seconde* students aged 15 to 16. On noticing one student scribbling Tupac, the name of the deceased US rapper, in his *cahier* rather than completing the exercise that I had given them, I saw an opportunity to inspire interest in learning English using his popular cultural references. However, the connection was lost somewhere in the numerous barriers of language, culture, race, gender, and social class which structured our interaction. It is perhaps understandable that the student was unable to see a connection between Tupac, a globalised symbol of an assertive oppositional black masculine identity, and myself and the language I represented, as a white European woman who might be assimilated into the metropolitan French population on the island, given that I was young, university educated, and living there temporarily. Yet in retrospect, this brief episode would seem to point to a sense of hope regarding the political potential of popular culture, even in its most commercialised forms, to bridge cultural divides, and to provide meaningful ways of relating to the wider world, even in unimaginable and unknown contexts.

The experiences and initial reflections which eventually led to the research questions examined in this thesis were thus from the outset accompanied by an attempt to recognise and take into account the social identities I was ascribed in the Réunionese context. A growing awareness of my being associated with the metropolitan French or *zorey* population, and of how this could shape research relationships, ultimately led me to address the construction of whiteness and social class in relation to this social identity within my research. This decision was also shaped by reflections on whiteness resulting from fieldwork in Mauritius, where my previously abstract understanding of white privilege was rendered particularly concrete within certain interactions. In tandem, these developments were interlinked with an awareness that my ascribed identity as white or *zorey* in both locations was also gendered. Whilst my explicit foreignness as a white woman sometimes allowed me to evade social expectations relating to gender roles, in some situations it also meant that I was associated with particularly visible constructions of femininity and female sexuality. Within my research with young people, I noticed that some male participants appeared to follow a pattern of testing my gender identity in initial interactions through their attempts to publicly position me as an object of heterosexual desire. This reaction appeared to reflect a desire to establish the pre-eminence of their claims to patriarchal male superiority over my racial or class privilege within the immediate context. It may also have served to clarify ambiguities created by the 'honorary man' conceptualisation of white female identity by enforcing an exaggerated schema of

normative gender roles. Furthermore, this contestation of gendered and racial privilege was arguably only made possible by my age, which meant that despite my being older than my participants, I was still identified as a young person. Yet in other interactions, other aspects of my white identity appeared more salient, including the association of whiteness with tourism (especially in Mauritius), relative affluence, and a problematic conceptualisation of the benevolent benefactor. As a result of the various complexities and contradictions I became aware of within my own interactions, then, I thus began to consider whether insights from the academic field of critical whiteness studies could be usefully applied within the study of Réunionese and Mauritian youth cultures, and particularly in order to facilitate analysis of the invisible, normative nature of whiteness within constructions of Frenchness. As a consequence of this line of enquiry, the subject matter of this thesis was extended in order to provide critical discussion of the *zorey* population in Réunion and of representations of the *zorey* in popular discourses, which can be found in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Methodology

I returned to the Indian Ocean in October 2011 to begin fieldwork research in Mauritius. Having originally planned to combine qualitative interviews with participation in youth associations, my interest in young people's lived experience resulted in my privileging of participatory research, the reasoning behind which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. Over the course of seven months (October 2011 – May 2012), I attended meetings and rehearsals with two youth groups: Abaim in central Mauritius, and ELI Africa in the north. These associations were chosen firstly because they were based in disadvantaged areas, and secondly, because they were not affiliated to any one ethnoreligious group in particular. Both associations also facilitated my attempt to take on a non-authoritative researcher role, and to interact with children and young people in their native language, MK. In Réunion, my research was mostly centred around the town of Le Port, an area of Réunion which is often stigmatised and presented in the media in association with youth delinquency.[235] I conducted participatory research with Titan Maloyèr, a youth music group which performs maloya, attending and participating in rehearsals over a five-month period (March to July 2013). This was complemented by my volunteering involvement with a sociocultural centre from December 2012 to July 2013, during which time I helped with an after-school homework club for children at the end of the primary school cycle, aged nine to eleven. These children were thus younger than the age range I had worked with during my fieldwork in Mauritius, and my position within

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[235] For a more detailed discussion, see Médéa, *La délinquance juvénile*.

the organisation required that I take an active role in disciplinary matters when necessary. Yet in spite of these issues, I also recognise that this period of volunteering was also very productive in shaping my views on young people's engagement with, rather than simply passive consumption of, popular culture. It became apparent that various aspects of popular culture provided individual children with important avenues for self-expression, and this was of heightened significance to those marginalised within the education system.

In some cases, the relationships established through the fieldwork described above have extended beyond the initial period of research. This may have subsequently resulted in a sense of betrayal regarding the idea of writing about individuals who I had come to experience some level of friendship with. In retrospect, it is perhaps for this reason that I have structured chapters around particulars trends within popular music and youth culture, and consequently my fieldwork research is less prominent within the thesis. Thus, paradoxically, the attempt to become closer to participants through participatory research may have ultimately resulted in a more distanced thesis, because I felt uncomfortable about the idea of trying to reproduce aspects of participants' lives which were shared with me in written academic text. However, it should also be emphasised that the subject matter and analysis in all of the subsequent chapters were directly inspired and informed by my interactions during fieldwork. The following analysis represents my attempt to write about the music which best reflected social and political currents and issues which appeared pertinent to the lives of my participants.

This has also affected decisions regarding the referencing of data collected within my participatory research. As will become apparent, in this thesis there are no direct citations from the fieldwork diaries which constituted the principal means of documenting my research. Fieldnotes are understood here not as an objective source of data which can be treated as a separate research document once fieldwork has ended, but rather as inherently interconnected with and shaped by 'our ever-evolving memories of the field'.[236] The inclusion of exchanges and interactions in this thesis within the main body text rather than within references to fieldnotes thus reflects a conscious decision to present my research in a manner which acknowledges that the subjectivity of the researcher is always implicated not only in the analysis, but also within the collection of research data. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the subsequent chapters contain relatively few references to fieldwork. This reflects both the hesitation I experienced as an unexperienced researcher at the beginning of the project, and my choice to ultimately favour the possibility of developing long-term research relationships with associations and research participants over the short-term aim of collecting a maximum amount of research data.

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[236] Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999), p. 112.

Methodology II: Comparative or Multi-Sited?

The decision to examine popular music and youth culture in both Mauritius and Réunion in this study arose originally from a desire to situate Réunion in its geographical, and arguably geocultural and geohistorical, context, rather than conduct a comparative analysis with, for example, the French Caribbean DOMs on the basis of their shared political status. Moreover, the two islands societies are rarely considered together in academic analysis, given the tendency to group Réunion with France and/or other French territories, and to consider Mauritius alongside other Commonwealth contexts. It would seem that comparative academic analysis of this sort also risks partially generating its own conclusions when the decision is made over the choice of contexts.

Furthermore, conducting comparative research begs the question of on what level the comparison is to be undertaken. Comparative approaches can sometimes be taken to imply simplistic research questions, which may even lie beneath more nuanced accounts, such 'which context is better in this regard?' 'Which is more 'progressive'? Or which might be considered as the more unusual or 'exotic' for the presumed Western academic readership? When I first travelled between the two islands during my first period of fieldwork, I was invited to two dinner parties in the space of two days; the first shortly before leaving Mauritius, and the second upon my arrival in Réunion. When I told my Mauritian hosts of my plans to travel to Réunion for research purposes, one of the first questions which was asked of me was 'but don't they still have a colonial mentality in Réunion? After all, it is still a colony, for all intents and purposes...' The next evening, having arrived in Réunion, my Réunionese hosts struggled to hide their dismay at what they saw as an unofficial policy of ethnic segregation: 'mais à Maurice, c'est cloisonné, les gens ne se mélangent pas, pas comme ici'.

On balance, it would seem that a comparative approach can prove very productive. This has been particularly useful in the process of studying abstract notions such as cultural politics, discourses on language and the politics of belonging, in that keeping track of two or more contexts means that no one set of politics are taken to be normative. However, my analysis has also tried to account for the specificities of each context, and has actively avoided the implication that Réunion and Mauritius can be seen as essentially the same due to historical and sociocultural parallels. Furthermore, my experience of field work differed dramatically in some respects, not least in the process of learning the two Kreol languages. Whereas I was soon accepted as an anomalous Kreol-speaker in Mauritius, the fact that I was subsumed into the larger, non-RK speaking *zorey* population in Réunion made my attempts to

converse in RK culturally illegible, even if I was understood to have passive knowledge of the language.[237] For these reasons, the following chapters deal with each context individually, with the exception of my consideration of dancehall which covers elements of a cultural dynamic common to both islands. On reflection, it is perhaps more accurate to describe my research as multi-sited, in that I privilege attending to contextual specificities over drawing neat comparative conclusions.

The methodological choices which were made during my fieldwork research will now be discussed in further detail in Part I, Chapter 1. This will include a detailed consideration of thick participation as research methodology, drawing on the work of anthropologist Gerd Spittler.[238] As will be discussed, thick participation is formulated in response to criticisms of participant observation, in order to build on the specific strengths of this type of research. The chapter will justify the suitability of this methodology to this particular research project within its discussion of apprenticeship, natural conversation and shared lived experience, which are all identified by Spittler as central elements of thick participation research. Spittler's formulation will then be expanded upon through a consideration of potential ethical issues which may arise within thick participation research stemming from involvement in participants' everyday lives. Though there may be no simple solutions to these ethical problems, it will be suggested that thick participation research can provide a means of foregrounding the human nature of all research relationships. Furthermore, it will be argued that whilst the differential status of the researcher may always impose limits on shared experience and participation in everyday life, the attempt to participate can be interpreted as a political act, the significance of which lies in its refusal to accept the incommensurability of researcher and researched.

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[237] This might be compared with Espelencia Marie Baptiste's reflection on language issues which arose during her fieldwork in Mauritius: 'Language became my tool in negotiating different situations. My use of English, French or Kreol determined whether I had access to a particular person or information. Speaking English, I placed myself in a position of power vis-à-vis my interlocutor. Using English allowed me to display my educational and foreign status. My use of English was usually met with surprise. In my fieldnotes, I constantly referred to these interactions as 'the alien landing.' My interlocutors usually had to take a moment to associate the person with the sound. Language became a different kind of ethnographic method. Not only did language help in acquiring data, but it also helped me to understand the attitudes of Mauritians of different ethnicity toward people who look like me. Through code switching and language use, I was able to get access to the different kinds of relationships at play in Mauritius. [… E]very time I used the wrong or unexpected language, I was able to force my interlocutors into a different sphere where they have to rethink they [sic] way they think of me and what I represent. Thus, my person undermined their perceptions of social reality. The times when I used the wrong language inevitably meant a delay in getting access to the person of information that I was seeking. […] Through manipulating English, French and Kreol, I was able to move in and out of different class statuses.' 'A Nation Deferred: Language, Ethnicity and the Reproduction of Social Inequalities in Mauritian Primary Schools' Unpublished PhD thesis, (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 2002), pp. 46-7.

[238] See 'Teilnehmende Beobachtung als Dichte Teilnahme' ['Participant Observation as Thick Participation'], *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 126 (2001), 1-25.

As will become apparent, the concept of thick participation is employed in this study in two respects. Firstly, my research with Abaim discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 may be considered as a concrete application of thick participation as a research methodology. Secondly, in a more general sense, the research epistemology implied by thick participation arguably involves an active positioning of the researcher which has informed all my interactions during fieldwork periods, and indeed the overall approach to the research project. In this understanding of the concept, thick participation is characterised by the prominence of researcher reflexivity; that is, an attempt to take account of my own position within processes of judgement. This may at times also involve delaying academic judgement in favour of openness to other forms of knowledge production. One result of this ongoing process of researcher reflexivity has been the extension of the study in order to include the critical discussion of the metropolitan French *zorey* population of Réunion presented in the final chapter of this thesis. Given that during fieldwork in Réunion, salient aspects of my social identity such as my socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and age generally coincided with that of common perceptions of the *zorey*, it appeared ethically imperative to consider the implications of this social identity in further detail.

Given the disparity between these two understandings of thick participation, it must be acknowledged here that there is asymmetry between how the methodology is applied to the sociocultural contexts of Mauritius and Réunion, and to the case studies which are discussed in the remainder of this thesis. This has also influenced my decision to adopt a multi-sited rather than comparative approach in this study, as conceptualising the study as multi-sited opens up the possibility of applying greater methodological flexibility in response to the specificities of each individual research context. Given the time limitations involved in the production of a PhD thesis, it would not have been possible to undertake thick participation research with all groups involved in this study. Furthermore, it is not always practically possible to conduct thick participation research as to do so requires the consent of the group or association. Therefore, given the differential application of the methodology of thick participation, multi-sitedness again appears as a more appropriate way of theorising the approach taken within the subsequent analysis of the cultural politics of Mauritian and Réunionese popular musics and youth cultures.

The remainder of the thesis presents four case studies which are considered in relation to two overarching themes: the politics of language in Part II (Chapters 2 and 3), and the politics of belonging in Part III (Chapters 4 and 5). Chapter 2 considers the musical production of Abaim, a community youth music group and NGO working in a deprived area of central Mauritius. Chapter 3 analyses the cultural and language politics of Réunionese dancehall music. In both cases, the concern to challenge the stigma attached to the Kreol languages

appears interlinked with a desire to produce more inclusive representations of childhood and young people, particularly those experiencing racial and/or class-related prejudice, and to thereby counter restrictive conceptions of cultural authenticity. Both chapters thus highlight the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to studies of popular music and youth cultures. In Chapter 2, Abaim's musical representations of childhood will be shown to engage with complex emotions of simultaneous shame and affection experienced within Kreol language contexts where the mother tongue co-exists alongside one or more languages of prestige. By associating the Mauritian Kreol language first and foremost with childhood, the music articulates an implicit critique of the language policies of the post-independence Mauritian state, which instead promotes the dissemination and learning of ancestral languages which are considered as the property of the ethnic groups who identify with them. Furthermore, Abaim's musical translations convey both a sense of equality and complementarity between MK and more 'prestigious' languages. Yet at the same time, their translations' divergence from the source text would appear to point towards an autonomous Mauritian sociocultural experience, which itself can be seen to coexist and interact with globalised popular culture within the national cultural sphere.

Chapter 3 then considers the language and cultural politics of Réunionese dancehall music as a 'new' form of black music facilitated by technological developments since the 1980s. Despite its commercialised nature and tendency to reproduce clichéd tropes of sex and machismo, it will be argued that the musical production of dancehall artists in Réunion can be seen to engage with existing discourses on Réunionness, authenticity and modernity. Analysis of the juxtaposition of English and Réunionese Kreol in dancehall lyrics will demonstrate that the practice serves as a creative means of drawing on globalised popular cultural references in order to accord prestige to the Kreol language. Dancehall will therefore be seen to challenge the presumed mutual exclusivity of authentic Creoleness and global modernity, which arguably serves to further marginalise unemployed Creolophone young people in Réunion. Despite their very different cultural aesthetics and musical styles, then, the youth music group Abaim and dancehall artists in Réunion and Mauritius would appear to employ similar strategies within their engagement with globalised popular music, which is drawn upon as a strategic resource in the development of an oppositional language politics which challenges common preconceptions about the Mauritian and Réunion Kreol languages. Furthermore, in both cases, the revalorisation of Réunionese Kreol is conceptualised as central to resisting the marginalisation of lower-class youth.

The next two case studies presented in Part III explore engagement with the politics of belonging within popular cultural practices and output, particularly as concerns competing discourses on the nation and community, and the differing conceptualisations of race and

ethnicity these discourses produce. Chapter 4 considers how recent nationalist youth protest movements have been reflected upon within popular music in the Mauritian context. These movements characterise themselves as a progressive social force in opposition to communalism, the term commonly used to refer to systems of solidarity which reinforce social divisions between ethnoreligious groups. My analysis of the representation of the Mauritian national community in the music of Tritonik will reveal that a burgeoning cultural nationalism has developed in tandem with political nationalist protest movements. This provides the artists with a conceptual framework which posits the existence of a 'natural' national community, thereby making it possible to recognise the meaningfulness of ethnoreligious identities without asserting their primordialism. In addition, Tritonik's cultural nationalist representations of community also address social divisions related to class which may be overlooked within the political nationalist focus on ethnic or religious difference.

The final chapter considers what appears as a very different kind of social division in the Réunionese context, which nonetheless again highlights the importance of approaching race and social class from an intersectional perspective. A result of the ongoing process of reflexivity in my research practice, the chapter undertakes a critical consideration of the representation of the *zorey* (metropolitan French) population within popular discourse in Réunion, a social identity which I was generally ascribed during fieldwork. As will be seen, the *zorey* are commonly associated with and represented within youth culture, both in relation to certain leisure activities, and as a figure of contention and the target of the anger of Réunionese youth regarding social inequality. The chapter will thus bring insights from the academic field of critical whiteness studies into dialogue with the study of popular discourse on race and socioeconomic status in the Réunionese context, in order to demonstrate that the naming of the *zorey* can be interpreted as a political act which refutes the supposed invisibility and non-racialisation of whiteness, and counters persistent implicit associations of Frenchness with whiteness. At the same time, however, naming the *zorey* can also be understood as an inclusive gesture in that it creates a racially marked category for the growing metropolitan French population within popular discourse which serves to legitimise their position as part of Réunionese society.

Finally, the concluding section of this thesis will return to the thesis outlined at the beginning of this introductory chapter, arguing that the analysis of the case studies presented here demonstrates that Réunionese and Mauritian popular musics and youth cultures engage with political and social issues specific to each context, and that the contemporary sociocultural phenomena discussed here can be understood to provide particular insights as concerns broader sociocultural dynamics regarding cultural and language politics, and the politics of belonging in both societies. The analysis of the previous chapters will then be

brought together in order to argue for the validity of the concept of cultural politics, which can provide a means of bringing issues of cultural difference and social inequality together within politically engaged scholarship, rather than serving as an obstacle to social justice.

Part I: The Politics of Research

1. Conducting 'Thick Participation' Research: Some Methodological Reflections

On Christmas Eve in 2011, I took part in the last of a series of concerts in the run-up to Christmas with Abaim, at the home of a friend of founding members Alain Muneean and Marousia Bouvery, in Beau-Bassin, central Mauritius. At this point I had been attending rehearsals and the group's Saturday program for nearly three months, and had begun to speak in MK. Part way through the performance, Alain suggested that I introduce myself to those present, which I attempted to do in my best MK, falling back on French when necessary. As an additional explanation for my presence at the concert, Alain added that I was conducting participant observation research. Offering further clarification for those less familiar with the terminology of social research, he said, not without some pride, '*sa vedir li fer tou zafer parey kouma nou*', 'this means she does everything exactly the same as we do'. And this was indeed true: since my first visit to the organisation, I had been invited to take part in all activities, from singing and music rehearsals to practicing dance routines, from informal learning and teaching of the ravann, the hand-held drum which serves as the principal instrument in traditional sega music, to the meal prepared by Abaim volunteers which we all shared at Saturday lunchtimes. I hoped that I had been seen to greet this invitation to participate with enthusiasm and gratitude, if not always with expert ability or knowledge. Yet it was never a primary aim of my research to become a member of the group; indeed, to do so seemed futile in the face of the wide-reaching differences between myself and other members of the group.[239] Although it may now sound naïve, until Alain spoke these words I had not questioned how I might theorise my interaction with the group as it had developed, seemingly naturally, over the previous months.

My specific use of participant observation in this first period of fieldwork could in some respects be termed an accidental, or serendipitous, research strategy. I had originally thought that participating activities within youth organisations would constitute an initial stage to my research, which would principally serve to build rapport with future research participants, as well as providing additional benefits such as facilitating my learning of MK, the participants' native language. I considered this a necessary stage to be completed prior to beginning 'real'

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[239] As an honorary and temporary member of the group, I obviously stood out due to, amongst other things, my white skin and foreign accent, even after I had begun to speak MK. Amanda Coffey suggests that '[i]t is extremely self-centred of us to think that we can ever be a 'fully paid up member' [of a community] ... Far more likely, however, we remain an honorary member or 'friend' of the setting, despite or because of our self-conscious relationship with the field', p. 37.

research: that is, activity-based research which would provide me with 'real', tangible data in the form of photographs, videos, and perhaps also recorded discussions. I imagined that during this second stage of the research I might also gradually reduce my level of engagement with the associations outside of the activity-based research sessions. However, my preconceptions about how my fieldwork research would progress were challenged by the experience of undertaking research and by the role which research participants of all ages invited me to take.

The essentially 'messy' nature of ethnographic research, and perhaps of all research which involves participation in the everyday lives of others, is now generally – if reluctantly – accepted and increasingly widely documented.[240] However, whilst increasingly accepted, the messy nature of ethnographic research may still be seen as an unfortunate, if inevitable, part of the research process which may consequently be downplayed in written manuscripts, or even written out altogether.[241] What is less frequently considered is that the messy nature of this type of research may itself be, at the same time, something which may lead to productive forms of knowledge production.[242] However, it may also take time for us as researchers to find the words to try to convey how much we have learnt through others' kind and generous inclusion of us in their lives. In short, messy research is also rich, powerful, and multidimensional, and can be rewarding in a personal as well as research-related sense. In comparison, more systematic forms of social research may appear 'cleaner', but when used alone, they cannot produce nuanced, multidimensional research. This chapter aims to provide an account of my own messy research process, and of what I have learnt both as a researcher and human being through the various interactions which took place during two periods of fieldwork in Réunion and Mauritius. This account also retains an appreciation for the negative connotations of 'messiness' through its consideration of ethical issues. The chapter can thus be seen to keep to the conventional objective of methodology chapters; that is, to present a convincing case that the way in which I chose to undertake my research was the way which was best suited to the project, though it may do so in an unconventional way.

The term thick participation is used in here to convey two related meanings. Firstly my research with Abaim and becoming a temporary member of the group may be considered as a

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[240] Enlightening reflexive accounts of the research experience can be found in, amongst others, Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa H. Malkki, *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), and Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes, *In Sorcery's Shadow. A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[241] John Van Maanen speaks of a tendency for ethnographers to write separate 'confessional tales', which offer a different account of fieldwork experiences, but stand alongside rather than replace traditional 'realist' accounts: see *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), [1988], p. 75.

[242] There are a number of important exceptions here: see, amongst others, Allaine Cerwonka, 'Nervous Conditions. The Stakes in Interdisciplinary Research' in *Improvising Theory,* pp. 1-41.

concrete application of elements of thick participation as outlined by the anthropologist Gerd Spittler, as will be discussed below.[243] Secondly, in a more abstract sense, thick participation also refers to as an ethos which has informed all my interactions during fieldwork periods and perhaps all aspects of my research. In this regard, thick participation is characterised by researcher reflexivity; that is, an awareness of my own position within processes of judgement. This is in turn informed by an awareness of the always imperfect nature of our analysis, despite our striving to avoid cultural relativism on the one hand, characterised by the notion that 'everything is as good as everything else', and notions of absolute difference which deny the possibility of comparative judgement on the other. The following chapter thus attempts to outline a form of participatory research which might allow us to follow the advice of Paul Gilroy, who suggests that we

> adopt a more future-oriented stance and that we make the most of our historic opportunity to rethink the whole question of how value is assigned to cultural forms of ethnic differences. […] This should be done, not so that we can say with an affected pseudo-toleration that everything is somehow suddenly as good as everything else, but so that we can speak with confidence from somewhere in particular and develop not only our translation skills but the difficult language of comparative (not homologizing) judgement. This programme is premised upon the idea that any discoveries we might make could transform our understanding of the cultures from which we imagine ourselves to speak as well as the cultures we struggle – always imperfectly – to judge.[244]

My application of thick participation as research methodology is thus variable in relation to the case studies presented in the following chapters of this thesis. The method was of most relevance to my research relationship with Abaim, and thus the data produced through this type of research is most prominent within Part II, Chapter 2. It is also present, though to a lesser extent, within Chapter 3 in the brief discussion of how my involvement with a *maloya* youth performance group in Réunion informed my analysis of the cultural politics of dancehall music. The other case studies presented in Part III were chosen in order to explore important developments in the conceptualisation of national belonging within popular culture and discourses as witnessed and experienced during my periods of fieldwork from 2011 to 2013. In contrast to the general subject matter of in Chapters 2 and 3, I had not known prior to fieldwork that the sociocultural phenomena discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively a renewed anti-communal nationalism centred around representations of youth in Mauritius, and the social identity of the *zorey* population in Réunion, would form part of my examination

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[243] See Spittler.
[244] *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 253-4.

of popular cultural politics. As a result, my analysis of these case studies developed somewhat differently to those presented in Part II, in that the chapters produced were largely written retrospectively after fieldwork had ended. Consequently, thick participation research data does not feature in the final chapters. However, as acknowledged within my outline of the thesis, the impetus behind my incorporation of Chapter 5 stems from a process of researcher reflexivity which itself is fundamental to my understanding of thick participation as research methodology. It is therefore suggested here that the epistemological and philosophical implications of thick participation are of relevance to this study as a whole, despite the variable application of the research methodology in the stricter sense of the term.

As concerns this more concrete application, my involvement with the NGO and youth music group Abaim in Mauritius involved participation in activities with the group over a period of seven months (October 2011 to May 2012), and subsequent visits in October 2012, March, and August 2013. This chapter aims to explore my some of the practical and political issues involved in conducting thick participation research with young people and children in postcolonial contexts and from backgrounds less privileged than my own. It will be asked whether thick participation research may be a particularly useful research strategy in situations where there are significant differences in power between researcher and participant, and whether it might provide a means of conducting a more 'human' form of research: that is, research which recognises and respects the humanity of both researcher and participant. This could also provide a means of adhering to the pleas of indigenous and Third World scholars who call on Western researchers to formulate a more 'humble' way of doing research.[245]

Reformulating Participant Observation: What is 'Thick Participation'?

The concept of thick participation referred to in this chapter was developed by Gerd Spittler, who characterises thick participation as a 'radicalised' form of participant observation.[246] Participant observation is thought to be the central and perhaps defining method of anthropology and ethnographic research, yet there remains some debate as to what extent it can be considered a method at all. It has been characterised as an all-

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[245]Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that 'indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity.'
Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (London: Zed Books; Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999). p. 5.
[246] See Spittler.

encompassing method, and even as 'a predicament transformed into a method'.[247] For the purposes of this chapter, Spittler's definition is perhaps a useful one: participant observation can be understood as 'research methods and practices in which the researcher lives in and amongst the group s/he is studying over a long period of time, speaks their language and takes part in their activities in a more or less intensive manner'.[248]

Such a definition is however necessarily imprecise, because participant observation involves participation in everyday life, and therefore cannot be qualified as systematic. As a result, participant observation has been criticised in comparison to other qualitative and quantitative methods available to researchers. Spittler gives the following summary of some contemporary criticisms of participant observation:[249]

- It lacks verifiability and representativity/generalisability,
- It is an archaic and technically 'primitive' method which has not been modified since the early twentieth century, and which does not reflect the globalised nature of our times,
- It lacks the precision and systematisation of observation methods focused on measurement,
- It may fail to take into account wider historical and political processes and thus risk viewing 'a culture' in isolation and producing essentialising and/or exoticising representations,
- It is time-consuming and therefore old-fashioned,
- It risks producing representations which claim authority through literary devices, as has been shown through postmodernist critiques of ethnographic monographs.[250]

Whilst he recognises that such criticisms are often justified, he argues that participant observation should continue to play a central role in ethnographic research because it has

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[247] Harry F. Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek; Oxford: Altamira Press, 2005), p. 80, referring to James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 93.

[248] 'Unter *Teilnehmender Beobachtung* […] verstehe ich […] Forschungsverfahren, bei dem der Forscher für eine längere Zeit in der Gruppe, die er untersucht, lebt, ihre Sprache spricht und an ihren Aktivitäten mehr oder weniger intensive teilnimmt'. p. 2. This and all further translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

[249] Some of the criticisms in this list, such as questions of generalisability and verifiability, appear to imply a positivist framework, i.e. one that assumes the possibility of obtaining a singular truth through systematic research. This study, however, is understood from an interpretative framework which rejects the notion of the singular truth in social research.

[250] See Spittler, pp. 3-5.

particular strengths.[251] Instead of abandoning participant observation research in favour of more systematic, replicable, or time-efficient methods, Spittler advocates thick participation as a radicalised form of participant observation which aims to capitalise upon these inherent strengths. As may be inferred from his terminology, thick participation is a variant of participant observation 'which above all emphasises participation'.[252] His use of the adjective 'thick' draws on Clifford Geertz's concept of ethnographic writing as 'thick description'.[253] He further clarifies that '[t]he "thick" in "thick participation" also means social proximity and shared experience'.[254] In the remainder of this chapter, I will first outline Spittler's defence of participant observation and formulation of thick participation. I will then discuss how the concept might be used to theorise and better reflect upon my experiences of fieldwork research in Réunion and Mauritius.

Spittler proposes that participant observation's strengths become apparent upon comparison with three alternative research strategies: he posits that '[p]articipant observation as a true-to-life and little systematized method has advantages in situations where language based research (especially interviews), systematic observation and strictly theory-guided research reach their limits.'[255] As has been acknowledged above, '[p]articipant observation is often unsystematic due to its closeness to reality and lived experienced'.[256] However, Spittler suggests that this can be of benefit to researchers in situations where systematic research is no longer a viable option. In contrast to the natural and behavioural sciences where symbolic meaning does not constitute a relevant analytical category, for Spittler, ethnographic research '[o]bservation must always incorporate interpretation of meaning',[257] which renders systematic observation impossible. Participant observation thus appears as a more suitable research strategy. He further elaborates that the forms of observation involved in participant observation are in fact closer to everyday practices of 'seeing' and 'looking' than to systematic scientific observation.[258] Spittler conceptualises this form of observation-as-seeing as an inherently subjective process:

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[251] 'Dennoch sollte die Teilnehmende Beobachtung einen wichtigen Platz im Methodenspektrum der Ethnologie behalten, weil sie besondere Stärken besitzt.' p. 1.

[252] '[…] die vor allem die Teilnahme betont.' Spittler, p. 12.

[253] 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30.

[254] 'Dicht bedeutet auch soziale Nahe und gemeinsames Erleben.' Spittler, p. 12.

[255] Spittler, p. 1.

[256] 'Teilnehmende Beobachtung ist wegen ihrer Realitäts- und Lebensnähe oft unsystematisch. Das ist dort ein Vorteil, wo systematische Forschung an ihre Grenzen stößt.' p. 7.

[257] 'Die Beobachtung muss immer die Interpretation des Sinnes mit einschließen.' p. 10.

[258] Spittler, p. 10.

> Seeing is by no means straightforward and objective; instead, we take in a selection of what we see, and moreover we have to interpret what we have seen. The process of selection means that we perceive certain things, but not others.[259]

Whereas within the dominant positivist paradigm, researcher subjectivity is often considered as a form of contamination which affects the validity of the research, Spittler's formulation of observation-as-seeing can be said to reflect interpretative critiques which reject the possibility of complete objectivity. This recognition of the necessarily subjective position of the researcher-as-participant-observer could be linked to the position outlined by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*,[260] which posits that subjectivity is a necessary requirement in the process of understanding. As Allaine Cerwonka has remarked of Gadamer's argument,

> understanding inevitably involves the concrete, historically situated personhood of the researcher. He claims *more* than that the positivist ideal of objectivity can never be reached; he asserts that *we can only ever understand something from a point of view*.[261]

Observation-as-seeing is thus perhaps best understood as a form of observation which proceeds from the assertion that the researcher's position is always already influencing the interlinked processes of observation and interpretation. This is however reformulated so that it is no longer seen as a form of contamination, but rather a necessary starting point to understanding which is also benefit to the research. Thus, through this process of reflexivity, it becomes apparent that within thick participation research, it is also the process of participation, and not just the act of observation, which provides us with research data.

Secondly, Spittler also acknowledges that participant observation is often criticised for its lack of theoretical grounding.[262] This view is often justified by critiques of traditional ethnography which aimed to give an all-encompassing, monolithic account of 'a culture' or 'a society'.[263] Yet, as he points out, even in the case of traditional ethnography,

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[259] ''Sehen ist keineswegs etwas Eindeutiges und Objektives, sondern wir nehmen immer eine Selektion vor bei dem, was wir sehen, und wir müssen überdies das Gesehene interpretieren. Selektion heißt, bestimmte Dinge wahrnehmen, andere nicht.' Spittler, p. 17.

[260] 2nd rev. ed., translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1999). Originally published as *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965).

[261] Cerwonka p. 25, referring to Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 396. Emphasis in original.

[262] See p. 11.

[263] Spittler refers to this as 'collection-centred' ethnography ['sammelzentriert'], p. 11.

there is no such thing as an unstructured observation, we are always already working with at least implicit theories. Not being aware of this leads to naïvity in our research.[264]

Cerwonka also suggests that 'one always reads empirical details in the field through theory, whether self-consciously or not.'[265] Conversely, in the research process, 'theory is challenged and also reshaped by the complexity and richness of everyday social practices and processes.'[266] She thus proposes that instead of seeing the empirical research carried out through fieldwork and theory-based research as two separate processes, we would do better to understand ethnographic research as exemplifying 'a processual approach to knowledge production' which she argues 'yields more complex, ethical, and life-affirming research.'[267] She argues that this type of ethnographic research invokes a hermeneutical epistemological approach. As she explains, the hermeneutics of ethnography

> involves a reading of social practices through theoretical concepts without simply reducing the practices to a mere 'illustration' of the theory. […] Such analytical insights necessarily grow out of hermeneutic process that continually and self-consciously moves between theory and empirical, ethnographic detail.[268]

This approach would appear to reflect Spittler's formulation of 'problem-centred' ethnography, which he suggests may ultimately produce more nuanced accounts than strictly 'theory-centred' ethnography. Regarding the legacy of Bronisław Malinowski's ethnographic œuvre, which Spittler maintains has been wrongly criticised as lacking in theory;[269] it is suggested that retaining a critical approach to theory within ethnographic research, and moving between abstract theory and ethnographic detail, could in fact lead to fuller, richer accounts:

> Problem-centred research, following Malinowski, is not anti-theoretical, instead it remains sceptical about its own theoretical groundings. It is not only prepared to call these into question, but is also always aware of the reductionist nature of all theory.[270]

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[264] '[…] dass es keine unstrukturierte Beobachtung gibt, dass wir daher immer schon zumindest mit impliziten Theorien arbeiten. Sich dessen nicht bewusst zu sein führt zu einer naiven Forschung', p. 11.
[265] Cerwonka, p. 4.
[266] Cerwonka, p. 4.
[267] Cerwonka, p. 38.
[268] Cerwonka, p. 16.
[269] 'Malinowskis Arbeiten werden zu Unrecht oft als theoriearm bezeichnet'. p. 11.
[270] 'Problemzentrierte Forschung in der Tradition Malinowskis ist nicht theorielos, doch bleibt sie skeptisch gegenüber der eigenen Theorie. Sie ist nicht nur bereit, diese zu revidieren, sondern ist sich immer des reduktionistischen Charakters jeder Theorie bewusst', p. 12. Referring to Bronisław Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, vol. 1 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935).

Thirdly, in relation to language-based research, Spittler acknowledges that qualitative interview methods have been developed in response to recognition of the highly artificial nature of the interview situation.[271] But as he points out, 'these interviews are still interviews rather than conversations',[272] thus implying that even in more informal or unstructured interviews, the interview situation itself may still affect and limit what type of information the researcher can gather. However, this is not to say that conducting interviews, whether formal or informal, is always an inappropriate research strategy in ethnographic research. I would suggest that this depends on three aspects of the research: the research design (is it an exploratory study or does it have a relatively narrow focus?); the research questions (can they be put to participants directly? If asked directly, would you expect to get a helpful or honest answer?)[273]; and thirdly, whether participants are likely to be familiar with the interview context, or whether this could make them feel intimidated or uncomfortable. The last variable may be considered in relation to participants' age and occupation, as well as symbolic power relations between researcher and researched. Thus, though interviewing might constitute an effective method of gathering data in the context of other research, this particular study called for alternatives, given that it was exploratory in nature at the outset, that it aimed to explore 'underlying' questions regarding culture and everyday processes of meaning-making which cannot be asked directly, and that the participants, young people from disadvantaged areas of Mauritius and Réunion, were not familiar with the interview environment. In addition, my position as a white European researcher would affect power dynamics between myself and participants. Being an Anglophone native speaker could also be said to accord a particular form of privilege, both in terms of the international value placed on the English language, and especially in Mauritius where English is used as the medium of education in public schools, and thus proficiency in English is a pre-requirement for any form of academic success.

Spittler also draws our attention to the different values which may be attached to the act of interviewing and asking questions in non-Western contexts, where it is possible that only figures of authority have the right to ask questions. Thus the act of interviewing itself may

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[271] p. 7.

[272] 'Aber auch diese Interviews sind Interviews und keine Gespräche', p. 7.

[273] In a similar vein, Wolcott discusses different types of questions which may be addressed to participants: '[t]here are things one can learn quickly by asking direct questions revealing of what one wants to know. There are things one can ask directly without much assurance about the answer. There are things about which we do not ask, guided by our own standards, or about which interviewees do not offer answers, guided by theirs. And there are underlying questions, often the kinds of questions that undergird social research, that can neither be asked nor answered directly: What is your world view? Why do we have schools at all? When everyone seems so dissatisfied, why do you continue to support your form of government?' p. 102.

evoke aspects of social control.[274] Researchers should also remember that ethnographic research once formed part of the colonial project, and this may still affect how participants react to researchers. The indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that '[f]rom the vantage point of the colonized', 'the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism':

> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals [sic] us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations.[275]

This does not mean that conducting research in postcolonial contexts is impossible for Western researchers. I would instead suggest that our awareness of the consequences of previous ethnographic research should instead encourage us to reflect upon and reconsider traditional research strategies in favour of more creative and flexible methods which could help us work towards Tuhiwai Smith's proposed goal of 'humble and humbling' research.[276]

In addition to revealing the limitations of research interviews, thick participation as methodology also brings into question what might be described as an academic tendency to privilege verbal information which can be transcribed and represented as text. Although it is often assumed that verbal representations are more thorough and/or easier to obtain, Spittler maintains that this is not always the case. He proposes that in some contexts, observation is more practical and efficient than asking questions (for example, in relation to spatially organised aspects of social situations), and that it is particularly useful in cases where verbal expression comes up against difficulties due to the need to protect secrets or remain silent about certain issues.[277] Thirdly, observation can be considered as a more appropriate research strategy in cases where skills and activities which can only be imperfectly expressed through language.[278] In regard to this last possibility, Spittler refers to Michael Polanyi's concept 'tacit knowledge', which, in contrast to 'explicit knowledge', cannot be easily related and transferred through verbal explanation.[279] Through my involvement with Abaim in Mauritius, my own research involved learning various practical skills. The most immediate of these were perhaps

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[274] 'In vielen anderen Kulturen bleibt dagegen das Fragen Autoritätspersonen vorbehalten und enhält ein Element der sozialen Kontrolle', p. 7.

[275] p. 1.

[276] p. 5.

[277] Spittler, p. 8.

[278] Spittler, p. 8.

[279] As developed in *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), [1958], and *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), [1966].

learning songs and some choreographed routines from Abaim's repertoire, learning to play the *ravann*, a circular drum used in Mauritian sega music. Though the acquiring of these specific skills was not the subject of my research, nor something I had purposefully set out to do at the beginning of the research process, my participation in these activities was in some respects crucial to my credibility as a member of the group. Indeed, the process of working towards acquiring these skills was a necessary pre-requirement in order for me to be considered as a member of the group, even in a temporary and bracketed sense.

Having thus demonstrated the continued relevance of and need for participant observation in ethnographic research, Spittler suggests that 'we should try less to eradicate its inherent weaknesses, but rather use and strengthen its strong points'.[280] In order to achieve this, he advocates thick participation as a 'radicalised form of observation' which 'implies apprenticeship and practice, natural conversation and observation, lived experience and sensuous research'.[281] These three elements will now be discussed further in relation to my own fieldwork research, in order to further expand upon the concept of thick participation as research methodology. Ethical issues which might arise in such research will also be considered. The subsequent discussion will seek to establish that thick participation as a methodology may be helpful to researchers who wish to conduct ethnographic research in a way which respects the humanity of both participants and researchers, and which reformulates the unequal relationship of researcher-participant into one which recognises both parties as human beings above all else.

Thick Participation: Conducting Research, Being Human

The concept of apprenticeship as fieldwork method, as developed by Michael W. Coy, James W. Fernandez and Michael Herzfeld, and Michael Jackson, can arguably be situated as part of a wider movement in anthropological research which considers the traditionally espoused role of the neutral observer as neither possible nor desirable, and focuses instead on increased participation.[282] Though this position has been outlined by anthropologists who have undertaken actual work-related apprenticeships, it is also shared by others: Harry F. Wolcott

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[280] p. 1.

[281] Spittler, p. 1.

[282] Michael W. Coy (ed.), *Apprenticeship: From Theory to Method and Back Again* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); James W. Fernandez and Michael Herzfeld, 'In Search of Meaningful Methods,' in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. by H. Russell Bernard (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1998), pp. 89-219, see p. 107; Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1989). Jackson argues for the full bodily participation of the researcher in everyday activities such as cooking and dancing.

suggests that '[t]he key to participant observation as a fieldwork strategy is to take seriously the challenge it poses to participate more and to play the role of the aloof observer less'.[283] Whilst there may be similarities, Spittler differentiates between the role of researcher-as-apprentice and the depiction of fieldwork given in ethnographic textbooks which sometimes evoke a 'second socialisation', thus placing fieldworker in the position of a child.[284]

Whilst I would not claim to have employed apprenticeship as a method in my fieldwork, my research can be said to reflect the idea of apprenticeship in that it involved learning practical skills alongside and from participants. This often occurred in brief moments in informal settings, such as the hour set aside for instrument practice in Abaim's Saturday Care program. The element of apprenticeship in the context of my research could be said to be complicated by the fact that I was often learning from participants who were younger than myself, contrary to the commonly held perception that apprentices learn from their elders. However, showing that I was willing to learn from participants who were younger than myself, sometimes significantly so, arguably helped to establish rapport with participants. Moreover, it also reflected the ethos and pedagogical principles of Abaim, which are premised on the assertion that the learning process should ideally be a two way process and that adults can also learn from children.[285]

Employing apprenticeship as method in fieldwork also requires researches to give up control of the study to some degree. Spittler notes that researcher-apprentices do not necessarily decide to adopt the role of apprentice, but may instead be chosen by the individual(s) or group who initiates them.[286] Even where contact is first made by the researcher, as was the case in this study, apprentice-like research would not be possible without the agreement of group leaders or 'gatekeepers', which may later be withdrawn or subject to restrictions. The idea that the researcher-as-apprentice cannot fully control the learning process because s/he is also dependant on participants who decide when and if to share knowledge could also be, paradoxically, to the researcher's advantage, in that it signals a more equal relationship between the researcher and participants.

In addition, we might also consider the possibility that using apprenticeship as a method and adopting a researcher-as-apprentice position may serve to highlight the human nature of all research relationships, which can sometimes be obscured by the language of

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[283] p. 94.
[284] Spittler, pp. 12-3.
[285] In the 'Prefas' to Abaim's most recent album, *Zoli letan pou zanfan* (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Abaim, 2013), Alain Muneean stresses the importance of young group members' contribution to knowledge.
[286] See his discussion of Paul Stoller's research, p. 14, referring to Stoller and Olkes, *In Sorcery's Shadow.*

traditional social research.[287] Drawing on his experiences of apprenticeship with a Tugen blacksmith in Kenya's Kerio Valley, Michael Coy maintains that

> [a]pprenticeship, wherever it is found, is a variety of human relationship. Anthropologists are as human as anyone else (sometimes in spite of their best efforts to the contrary) and they can be made into apprentices more genuinely than the anthropological tradition would have us believe. The results of being made a "real" apprentice are at times comical, frightening, intensely anxious, and extraordinarily productive in terms of field work experience.[288]

He thus suggests that through employing apprenticeship as method, we might reach a more satisfactory level of authenticity in the relationships with participants than is usually achieved, or even deemed possible, through other forms of ethnographic research. Accordingly, adopting the role of a 'real' apprentice can be both intensely challenging and particularly beneficial to the research (and researcher).

The second characteristic of thick participation discussed by Spittler is the simultaneous use of observation and '*natürliche Gespräche*', or naturally-occurring conversations.[289] For him, this combination allows us to combat the limitations of both language-based research in general and of interviews in particular discussed above, yet he also reminds us that 'observation in ethnographic research is no more exact a method than *Gespräch* (conversation), rather both enhance each other.'[290] He thus argues that conversation and observation should be seen as complementary rather than opposing practices.[291] For example, observation may allow researchers to use appropriate vocabulary and to better match our questions to participants' everyday experience.[292]

Spittler presents *Gespräch* or (natural) conversation as an alternative to interview-based research. However, before conversations with participants can take place, the researcher must work to build the right environment. As he explains,

> If we want to avoid artificial interview situations with their unavoidable distortions, then we must focus more decidedly on situations which involve and encourage naturally occurring conversation. This, however, requires a [period of] participant observation. Such situations which enable naturally occurring conversation cannot be initiated at will, one must instead wait for appropriate opportunities.[293]

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[287] Choosing to refer to people as research 'subjects', for example, could be said to have this effect.
[288] Michael Coy, 'Introduction' in *Apprenticeship: From Theory to Method and Back Again*, pp. xi-v, p. xiv.
[289] Spittler, p. 6.
[290] 'Beobachten in der ethnologischen Forschung ist keine exaktere Methode als das Gespräch, sondern beide erganzen sich.' p. 18.
[291] See pp. 15-9.
[292] Spittler, p. 17.
[293] 'Will man artifizielle Interviewsituationen mit ihren unvermeidlichen Verzerrungen vermeiden, dann muss man sich stärker auf natürliche Gesprächssituationen konzentrieren. Diese setzen aber eine

In the context of my own research, I found that participation in activities alongside participants, such as in rehearsals with Abaim, could be considered as providing a context which enabled naturally occurring conversation with participants. This may be because the shared participation in activities provided a basis for relationships between with participants other than the fact that I was there to conduct research, and thus went some way towards mitigating the artificial nature of all research relationships. Participation in activities also allowed me to maintain contact with participants whilst 'waiting for appropriate opportunities', and without putting pressure on them to share information with me. This means that the participants could choose if and when to speak to me. In light of observations made by other ethnographers who have worked with children, this may be considered as especially significant in the context of research with children and young people, who are used to adults initiating contact with children and being 'primarily *active* rather than *reactive*.'[294] William A. Corsaro and Debbie Epstein suggest it may be more productive for researchers working with children to adopt a 'least adult role' through, for example, 'waiting for children to approach [us], rather than initiating conversations or play with them', and by trying 'to speak to the children on their own terms at all times'.[295] This is arguably facilitated by thick participation research.

Using conversation as a research method may appear as a somewhat passive research strategy. It certainly goes against traditional advice to students to 'constantly peste[r] those being observed to explain what they are doing and why'.[296] However, I would suggest that Spittler's endorsement of 'waiting for appropriate opportunities' is possibly a more difficult research strategy than it might appear. It may be stressful when the researcher is aware that there is limited period of time available for fieldwork, which puts pressure on the researcher to optimise on all forms of contact with participants. Furthermore, it may not always be clear when the 'right moment' to begin conversations with participants has arrived: this requires researchers to observe not only participants' but also their own behaviour within interactions. Nonetheless, such a strategy has advantages in that it reflects 'natural' relationship formation

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Teilnehmende Beobachtung voraus. Man kann solche Gesprächssituationen nicht beliebig initiieren, sondern muss auch güngstige Gelegenheiten warten.' Spittler, p. 8.

[294] William A. Corsaro, *Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years* (Norwood: Ablex Pub. Corp., 1985), p. 28, original emphasis, cited in Debbie Epstein, '"Are you a girl or are you a teacher?" The least adult role in research about gender and sexuality in primary school', in *Doing Research About Education* ed. by Geoffrey Walford. (London: Falmer Press, 1998), pp. 28-41, p. 29. See also Gary Alan Fine's discussion of negotiating various adult roles in *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[295] Epstein, p. 29.

[296] Sara Delamont, 'Ethnography and Participant Observation' in *Qualitative Research Practice* ed. by C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, and D. Silverman (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2007), pp. 205-17, p. 213.

with, for example, friends and acquaintances, in which there is a tacit awareness of unspoken rules about which subjects might be suitable for discussion and mutual respect for the other person's privacy. Whilst we must remain aware of power relations between researcher and researched, it could be said this research strategy aims to promote a more equal relationship than that implied between participants-as-subjects and researcher-as-investigator.[297]

In this respect, thick participation's privileging of naturally occurring conversation could be said to reflect Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy's conceptualisation of 'friendship as method', which she posits as a 'mode of qualitative inquiry involves researching with the practices, at the pace, in the natural contexts, and with an ethic of friendship'.[298] This conceptualisation of 'friendship as method' should however not be confused with the development of actual friendships with participants, though both may occur within a given research process. Thus, if '[t]he convenience of gathering any type of systematic interview data is always undertaken at the risk of losing rapport',[299] naturally-occurring conversation within thick participation places a high value on rapport with participants. We might also propose that whereas the context of an interview (whether formal, informal, structured or semi-structured) implies that one party (the interviewer) wishes to obtain specific information about a specific topic or topics from the other (the interviewee); a conversation is based on the premise that both parties interact with the other *as a whole person*. Therefore, in this respect thick participation encourages researchers to interact with participants as fellow human beings rather than to focus solely on the goal of obtaining information. Conversations within thick participation could thus be said to work towards what Unni Wikan has called 'experience-near anthropology'. She argues that, as researchers, 'we have to attend to people's multiple, simultaneous, compelling concerns and to follow them, as they move, bridging scenes and encounters, if we are to grasp what is at stake and how they, people in various positions, feel-think and act':

> Lives are inevitably lived as wholes, of some kind. Rather than compartmentalizing with our dissecting categories I want to try to recapture some of that continuity, […] Or to remain with the Balinese conceptualization: 'hearts carried across.'[300]

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[297] We might consider here the experience of Paul Stoller amongst the Songhay people in Niger, who was lied to by his participants when conducting a survey. He subsequently told, 'Monsieur Paul, you will never learn about us if you go into people's compounds, ask personal questions, and write down the answers. Even if you remain here one year, one two years, and ask us questions in this manner, we would still lie to you […] You must learn to sit with people, Monsieur Paul. You must learn to sit and listen. You must learn the meaning of the Songhay adage: One kills something thin in appearance only to discover that inside it is fat.' Stoller and Olkes, p. 11.

[298] 'Friendship as Method', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9 (2003), 729-49, p. 730.

[299] Wolcott, p. 101.

[300] Unni Wikan, 'Toward an Experience-near Anthropology', *Cultural Anthropology*, 6: 3 (1991), 285-305, p. 291.

The third and final characteristic of thick participation expanded upon by Spittler is the role of lived experience and of the senses within research. Here he distinguishes thick participation from purely physical participation: for him, the former necessarily requires increased social proximity and shared experience, which he argues facilitates a complex overview of social situations:[301]

> All senses are involved in this experience. Not only sight and hearing, but also physical and emotional feelings. [Learning about others through] shared experience is a difficult process. At least one's own experience offers a partial point of access. However, one can also make mistakes. It is not enough to be close [to participants] or to find oneself in the same situations as them to experience the same thing. Here, a very long research period, plus additional research methods are needed to understand others' experiences. However, the fact that one can misunderstand others' feelings within shared experience is no reason to rule out experience as a means of access.[302]

Whereas ethnographic fieldwork is traditionally conceived of as a purely intellectual activity, a renewed interested in the bodily subjectivity of the researcher has led to a reconsideration of the role of the senses within ethnographic research.[303] Referring to Mary Weismantel's argument in *Cholas and Pishtacos* that mainstream anthropology has disavowed sensory knowledge, Liisa Malkki asks, 'if we accept that fieldwork is an embodied, and embodying, form of knowledge production, why should we leave a considered awareness of the senses out of the project of creating ethnographic understanding?'[304] Drawing on Paul Stoller's argument in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*,[305] Spittler advocates a particularly demanding approach to the use of the senses within ethnographic research:

> In these cases, for the ethnographer, thick participation means not only paying more attention to sensual phenomena, but also putting his/her own senses to use. S/he

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[301] 'Unter *dichter* Teilnahme verstehe ich nicht nure die interpretative im Gegensatz zur rein physischen Teilnahme, sondern auch die soziale *Nähe* […] Die Nähe […] ermöglicht ein komplexe Erfassung von Situationen.' p. 19. Emphasis in original. See also Spittler, *Hirtenarbeit. Die Welt der Kamelhirten und Ziegenhirtinnen von Timia* (Köln: Koppe, 1998), p. 56.

[302] 'Zu diesem *Erleben* gehören alle Sinne. Nicht nur das Sehen und Hören, sondern auch das körperliche und seelische Fühlen. Miterleben ist ein schwieriger Prozess. Zumindest partiell bietet die eigene Erfahrung einen Zugang. Aber beim Miterleben kann man sich auch täuschen. Es genügt nicht, nahe zu sein, sich in derselben Situationen zu befinden, um das Gleiche zu erleben. Es bedarf hier einer sehr langen Zeitdauer bzw. weiterer methodischer Zugänge, um das Erleben anderer nachzuvollziehen. Dass man sich beim Miterleben über die Gefühle anderer täuschen kann, ist aber kein Grund, das Erleben als methodischen Zugang auszuschließen'. Spittler, p. 19. Emphasis in original.

[303] See, for example, 'The Embodiment of Fieldwork' regarding the bodily experience of fieldwork in Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999), pp. 59-76.

[304] Liisa H. Malkki, 'Tradition and Improvisation in Ethnographic Field Research', in *Improvising Theory*, pp. 162-86, pp. 176-7, referring to *Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[305] *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

must re-learn to smell and to feel. For [Stoller] it means putting one's whole body, one's mind, one's eyes, one's ears and one's voice to use. The researcher should physically work and dance, and also suffer.[306]

Furthermore, whether the researcher adopts a self-conscious approach to the use of the body and the senses or not, many of the insights gained through ethnographic research may also be registered at the level of the body. Cerwonka therefore suggests that we would do well 'to think more about how the researcher's body is a site for analytical insight about various aspects of fieldwork.'[307]

Whilst it incorporates use of the senses, defining what exactly it might mean to employ lived experience within research is perhaps harder to discern. Spittler suggest that Wikan's concept of resonance may be useful here. Resonance, a term which Wikan draws from a Balinese theory of intercultural translation, can be described as 'applying one's life experience in realization that this can be an asset, a resource, that will help one to grasp certain phenomena better': in this respect, 'resonance fosters empathy and compassion; it enables appreciation; without resonance, ideas and understandings will not spring alive.'[308] Researchers wishing to work towards understanding through resonance must take a more relativist stance towards analysis of (participants') language within ethnography: '[t]he issue is the need to attend to what people say and the intent they are trying to convey, rather than groping for some 'larger' answers within the particulars of their spoken words.[309] In this respect, lacking fluency in the participants' native language might be seen as in fact an advantageous situation research. Whilst I was learning MK, I found that the fact that I often was not able to remember or later note down the exact words used by my participants forced me to focus on the meaning rather than words as text.

Participation in everyday life is also identified as a necessary requirement for resonance in research. Here Wikan refers to Tim Ingold's observations on his fieldwork with reindeer herdsmen, in which he suggests that his participation in everyday practical activities helped to him to 'attend to' their shared social world in the same way as his participants:

> Such communion of experience, the awareness of living in a common world, establishes a foundational level of sociality that exists – in Bourdieu's phrase – 'on the

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[306] 'Dichte Teilnahme heißt in diesen Fällen nicht nur, dass der Ethnologe diesen sinnlichen Phänomenen mehr Beachtung schenkt, sondern dass er auch selbst seine Sinne einsetzt. Er muss wieder riechen und tasten lernen. Ingesamt gilt es für ihn, seinen ganzen Körper, seinen Verstand, sein Auge, sein Ohr und seine Stimme einzusetzen. Er soll körperlich arbeiten und tanzen, aber auch leiden.' p. 20.
[307] p. 34.
[308] 'Beyond the Words: The Power of Resonance', *American Ethnologist*, 19: 3 (1992), 460-82, p. 465. See also her *Resonance: Beyond the Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[309] Wikan, 'Beyond the Words', p. 466.

hither side of words and concepts,' and that constitutes the relational baseline on which all attempts at verbal communication must subsequently build.[310]

Accordingly, the researcher's 'painstaking engagement on a day-to-day basis in events and routines which are "theirs"' can thus help to guard against 'false resonances', which can be created by preconceptions which are drawn from our own cultural background.[311] Finally, Wikan advocates using our own experience as a 'bridge' in the process of understanding research participants.

> We need not have the 'same experience' to be able to attend in the same way. But we must dip into the wellsprings of ourselves for something to use as a bridge to others. […] for resonance to work, we need to shed the stifling preconception that can be a stumbling block along the way: that others are essentially different from us, to be understood only by means of their 'culture'; and that their words bespeak different life worlds. [312]

Wikan thus advocates using our personal and individual experience, seen here as a resource to be put to use rather than as an obstacle within the research process, as a means of guarding against notions of essential or absolute difference. Employment of the concept of resonance within thick participation thus again points towards a reconceptualisation of ethnographic research which above all recognises the research relationship as a human relationship.

Limits of shared experience: Ethical issues in thick participation research

Through the above consideration of three defining elements of Spittler's formulation of thick participation, I have thus argued that as a research strategy, it can be said to promote recognition of both participants' and researchers' shared humanity. Nonetheless, this does not mean that conducting this type of research automatically sidesteps all ethical issues. I would now like to consider some of the potential problems which may arise from participation in everyday life within research. Firstly, it has been suggested that all forms of participant observation (including thick participation) work towards not only gaining an intellectual understanding of participants' viewpoints, but that the ultimate goal is for the researcher to

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[310] Tim Ingold, 'The Art of Translation in a Continuous World' In *Beyond Boundaries: Understanding, Translation, and Anthropological Discourse*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson, (Providence; Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), pp. 210-30, p. 223, referring to Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 2, cited in Wikan, 'Beyond the Words', p. 471.
[311] Wikan, 'Beyond the Words', p. 471.
[312] Wikan, 'Beyond the Words', p. 471.

'feel' what their participants feel.[313] Whilst this is certainly a worthy aim, which could be said to reflect the concept of resonance discussed above, it must be remembered that the process of understanding is always a situated one and thus remains necessarily incomplete. Richard Johnson *et al.* suggest that in conducting participatory research, there is a risk that researchers may be led to falsely believe that they can 'speak for' their participants:

> Authors can imagine that they know what it is like for the other. They can believe that bridging alterity is easy. They can believe that underneath it all ('the skin'?) 'we' are all really the same. However, this is to disempower the person the person who is being 'understood'. [314]

Their brief reference to 'skin' here would seem to allude to the powerful meanings attached to racialised signifiers such as skin colour and phenotype, which would arguably suggest that researchers would do well to interrogate their own racialised selves. In my case, this has involved a consideration of whiteness, which is developed further in relation to the Réunionese context in Chapter 5 of this study.

The authors also refer in the quotation above to the work of Hans Gadamer, who argues that the process of understanding is by no means a neutral process, and instead can be seen as an assertion of power:

> By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of legitimacy. [...] The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance.[315]

This may also be compared to Glissant's notion of 'com-prendre', which emphasising the act of taking, or more specifically taking something away from somebody else, within the act of understanding.

> La question posée est la suivante: dans la magnifique perspective des cultures occidentales organisées autour de la notion de transparence, c'est-à-dire de la notion de compréhension, « com-prendre », je prends avec moi, je comprends un être ou une notion, ou une culture, n' y a-t-il pas cette autre notion, celle de prendre, d'accaparer ? Et le génie de l'Occident a été de nous faire accepter cela [...] moi je dis que ce génie est un génie trompeur, parce que dans *comprendre* il y a l'intention de prendre, de soumettre ce que l'on comprend à l'aune de sa propre mesure et de sa propre

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[313] Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt suggest that '[a] part of this process is coming not only to understand, intellectually, the perspective of participants in the context in which the researcher is working, but to "feel" the point of the view of the other'. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), p. 11.

[314] Richard Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell, *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE, 2004), p. 238.

[315] *Truth and Method* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 354 [1975]. Cited in Johnson *et al.*, p. 238.

> transparence. La prétention à l'universel est une des créations de L'occident pour faire passer la pilule de la réduction à un modèle transparent [...]. On dit qu'un peuple accède à la culture, à l'éducation, à la civilisation quand il a atteint tel ou tel palier, et qu'il gravit ainsi vers ce modèles transparents.[316]

For Glissant, the act of understanding or 'com-prendre' is interlinked with the West's false claim to 'universal' knowledge, and to the supposed transparency of knowledge. He favours instead an awareness of what he terms opacity, specifically, recognition of the opacity of the other within human relationships. Opacity may thus be defined as the right to not be understood (in the sense of com-prendre): 'ce que j'appelle l'opacité de l'étant – c'est-à-dire, non pas le refus de l'autre, mais le refus de considérer l'autre comme une transparence, et par conséquent la volonté d'accepter l'opacité de l'autre comme une donnée positive et non pas comme un obstacle – devient une nécessité pour tout le monde à l'heure actuelle.'[317] He also uses this concept to demonstrate how global elites use their ability to 'com-prendre' contemporary economic and other systems to maintain the status quo:

> Dans les bidonvilles et les ghettos de plus petites cités, les mêmes embrayages sont à l'œuvre : la violence de la misère et de la boue, mais aussi la rage inconsciente et désespérée de ne pas « comprendre » le chaos du monde. Les dominants profitent du chaos, les opprimés s'en exaspèrent.[318]

In summary, therefore it can be concluded that researchers must remain aware of power structures which are invoked both within their relationship to participants and within the process of understanding itself.

Furthermore, it could be suggested that thick participation research actually presents more ethical problems than the more removed stance of researcher-as-observer, as it may involve the unintentional deception of participants. Frequent participation in shared activities could arguably obscure the fact that all interactions between researcher and researched was initially premised on the aim to obtain 'data' which benefits the researcher's project. Reflecting on her doctoral fieldwork, Carolyn Ellis recognises her participation in everyday life may have given a false impression to participants, though this was never intended to be the case:

> After many visits, community members seemed to forget I was doing 'research' and did not respond as though that were a salient part of my identity. After all, I was

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[316] Édouard Glissant, 'Le chaos-monde, l'oral et l'écrit', in *Écrire la parole de nuit. La nouvelle littérature antillaise*, ed. by Ralph Ludwig (Paris, Gallimard: 1994), pp.111-29, p. 126.

[317] 'Le chaos-monde', p. 127.

[318] *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 155.

> involved in their lives, and there were more important things to think about [...]
> Writing a research paper hardly measured up to the trials of everyday life.[319]

There is also a risk that high levels of participation could lead to self-deception for the researcher. Developing meaningful relationships with participants, which is arguably what thick participation works towards, can lead researchers to believe that we have really become part of the group we are studying. This could negatively affect the research project, but could also cause up (inter)personal problems for the researcher. Though Ellis admits that she was concerned 'that taking on the salient role of researcher might cut off research possibilities because my participants might not talk freely', she also recognises that doing so not only risked making participants feel 'used' and 'hurt', but that she herself would have felt hurt if relationships with participants changed.[320] She acknowledged a certain ambivalence in her own conceptualisation of her role in the community which constituted the subject of her research:

> I felt uncertain about when and who I should remind because the boundaries of this peninsular community, and who was included in it, were ambiguous. Likewise, my role was unclear even to me. Although I was a researcher, I also saw myself as a friend to many people there, and sometimes I felt and acted like family. [321]

The risk of deceiving participants and of self-deception through participation must therefore be taken seriously within thick participation research. However, that this type of research brings up issues of ethics and morality could also be interpreted as something which is ultimately beneficial to the research process. At best, thick participation could be said to constitute an attempt to live out the moral tale of 'not judging others until you have walked in their shoes'. Yet the process of walking in our participants' shoes is necessarily limited, because the research period will always have temporal boundaries, even if conducted over a long period of time, and because it is impossible to participate in all aspects of the participants' lives. Moreover, even the most intense forms of participation do not change the fact that researcher and researched may have lived very different lives prior to the beginning of the research process. In Mauritius, I saw and experienced first-hand how being a member of Abaim could at times constitute an important source of self-esteem for young people, given that being a member of Abaim also became part of my own, situated, identity. However, I could in no way claim to understand what growing up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood

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[319] Carolyn Ellis, 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13: 1 (2007), 3-29, pp. 6-7.
[320] Ellis, p. 7.
[321] Ellis, p. 8.

entailed, or what it was like to have gone through the Mauritian education system with the fiercely competitive CPE exams at the end of the primary school cycle, or indeed many other challenges which my participants faced in the short period of time which I spent with Abaim.

Instead, I would suggest that it is the act of attempting to walk in participants' shoes which is ultimately more important than the question of how successfully you walk the walk; that is, how successful you are in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in everyday life and shared activities.[322] This should be simultaneously combined with an attempt to withhold judgement, and perhaps even to withhold academic analysis in favour of an attempt to understand through resonance as outlined by Wikan. In a similar vein, in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paul Ricoeur develops the concept of analogy, which posits that we recognise the reality of others by means of analogy with our own experiences.[323] As Johnson *et al.* remark of Ricoeur's argument, '[a]nalogy is not the same as comparison and it does not posit sameness or difference'.[324] Drawing on the works of Husserl, Ricoeur posits that analogy can be characterised as

> une opération authentiquement productive, dans la mesure où elle transgresse le programme même de la phénoménologie, en transgressant l'expérience de la chair propre. Si elle ne crée pas l'altérité, toujours présupposée, elle lui confère une signification spécifique, à savoir l'admission que l'autre n'est pas condamné à rester un étranger, mais peut devenir *mon semblable*, à savoir quelqu'un qui, *comme* moi, dit « je ». La ressemblance fondée sur l'appariement de chair à chair vient réduire une distance, combler un écart, là même où il crée une dissymétrie. Ce que signifie l'adverbe *comme* : comme moi, l'autre pense, veut, jouit, souffre.[325]

Thick participation arguably serves to encourage this process of understanding through analogy.

Finally, participation can also serve as a means of showing respect for the communities, groups, associations and individuals we work with. It may also provide us with an opportunity to show our appreciation for their involvement in our research. This may be especially important when working with young people and across asymmetrical power relationships. To use Glissantian terminology, participation might be said to better respect the opacity of groups and communities, in that it does not rely upon participants' translations of their cultural practice into transparent models. For example, my participation in Abaim's music

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[322] '(D'ordinaire, l'amateur est défini comme une immaturation de l'artiste : quelqu'un qui ne peut – ou ne veut – se hausser à la maîtrise d'une profession. Mais dans le champ de la pratique photographique, c'est l'amateur, au contraire, qui est l'assomption du professionnel : car c'est lui qui se tient au plus près du noème de la Photographie.)' Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 154.

[323] (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

[324] Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram and Tincknell, *The Practice of Cultural Studies*, p. 207.

[325] *Soi-même comme un autre*, pp. 386-7. Emphasis in original.

rehearsals, which may be compared to a form of informal apprenticeship, could have served to temporarily problematise or mitigate the position which might usually be accorded to a white Western (over)educated adult. Furthermore, shared participation also problematises the presumed boundary between the active, knowing researcher and the passive research 'subjects'. Moreover, thick participation may offer researchers a concrete means of showing participants that they would like to establish a relationship between equals, even if existing power structures would appear to make this impossible. Participating in the same activities and everyday tasks as participants could be said to convey the idea that researchers do not consider themselves superior to participants, even and especially when researchers are marked by difference and come from more privileged backgrounds.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of Gerd Spittler's concept of thick participation, and has shown how this concept has allowed me to theorise and further reflect upon my research experiences with Abaim in Mauritius. Building upon Spittler's observations, the chapter has suggested that thick participation research can be considered as a means to recognise the human nature of research relationships, and may be employed in order to respect the humanity of both those being researcher and of the researcher. Finally, I have also considered some of the problematic ethical issues involved in participation in everyday life, which forms a necessary requirement of thick participation research.

In terms of research methodology and epistemology, I have argued for the importance of shared experience and participation, whilst recognising that the differential status of the researcher may always impose limits. However, it is arguably the attempt to participate which is ultimately more important than the result, because this attempt can be read as a political act, in that in refuses to accept the incommensurability of researcher and researched. This refusal of notions of absolute and incommensurable difference will also be applied to my analysis of representations of cultural difference within popular culture in the chapters which follow. This is of particular relevance to the next chapter, which will consider the musical output of Abaim in greater detail, and will aim to situate this in relation to the wider Mauritian context as concerns the politics of language and of ancestrality.

Part II: Pop Music, Youth Cultures, and Kreol Language Politics

2. 'Zot tou konn pik sega':[326] Abaim's Musical Engagement with the Politics of Language and Ancestrality in Mauritius

Does it Have to be 'Cool' to be Youth Culture?

Shortly after arriving in Mauritius, in November 2011, I met with a university lecturer to discuss potential avenues for fieldwork research on youth culture. When I mentioned that I had made contact with Abaim and had started attending their music rehearsals, his first response was to make sure that I was aware that, from the perspective of young people in Mauritius, Abaim are not 'cool'. This, as I understood it, was not intended as a criticism of my research choices, but was rather an expression of surprise that a group best known for their collections of songs by and for children might be included within a study exploring the politics of Mauritian youth culture. The central position accorded in their music to the Mauritian Kreol language (hereafter MK), and to traditional musical and cultural elements linked to a history of subordination, such as the ravann drum, may also be said to raise the issue of whether young Mauritians would be interested in popular music which takes a specific interest in the question of Mauritian cultural specificity, over readily accessible globalised popular culture, of both the Hollywood/Western and Bollywood/South Asian varieties.[327]

Given that their recent musical production privileges acoustic instrumental accompaniment and the unusual quality of children's voices, it is perhaps unsurprising that Abaim is neither readily associated with Mauritian youth culture, nor generally thought of as 'cool'. But their music has proved popular. Some songs in particular have proved surprisingly popular in some unexpected contexts: the group's signature hit 'Ti Marmit' from the 2002 album *16 ti morso nu lanfans* ('16 songs of our childhood') not only enjoyed significant levels of radio play, but was also played in nightclubs at the time of its release. Songs from *Enn Nwel larkansiel* ('A Rainbow Christmas')[328] such as 'Alime tegn', an adapted version of 'Jingle Bells' in MK, can be heard on national radio and television in the period leading up to Christmas. Part

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[326] 'You all know how to dance sega', lyrics from the final verse of 'Ti Marmit', *16 morso nou lanfans* (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Abaim, 2002).

[327] As concerns young Mauritian's engagement with globalised popular culture, writing in the 1990s, Thomas Hylland Eriksen presented a rather polarised vision of the preferences of Mauritians of Indian origin and others: '[t]he Creole preference for black pop artists and actors, and the popularity of Indian feature films among people of Indian origin exemplify the idiosyncratic reinterpretations, and to some degree reinventions, of the metropolitan messages that are so important in the constitution of modern identities'. *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-Building, and Compromise in Mauritius* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1998), pp. 130-1. It may be that processes of diversification and hybridisation within global popular culture itself have since resulted in a more varied engagement with global pop culture in Mauritius.

[328] (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Abaim, 2010).

of their appeal undoubtedly lies in the cute factor associated with giving children centre stage in performances and music videos, and in public awareness of the group's community and social activism, which means that buying Abaim's music can be considered a charitable act. However, situating their musical production within the wider context of contemporary Mauritian cultural politics would appear to point towards a more nuanced explanation of Abaim's success in the field of Mauritian popular music. In this chapter, I will suggest that this unexpected popularity may in part be due to how Abaim's music relates to wider debates within the field of Mauritian cultural politics, in particular as concerns the politics of language and ancestrality. The term ancestrality politics will be used here to evoke the cultural politics associated with the promotion of ancestral cultures and languages in the Mauritian context, that is, the diasporic cultures and language of origin of different sectors of the population. These are often contrasted with cultural elements seen to be indigenous to Mauritius, including the MK language.[329] In his study of ethnolinguistic belonging in Mauritius, Patrick Eisenlohr asserts that 'state institutions explicitly encourage the cultivation and public celebration of diasporic links, expending significantly more resources and effort on supporting ethnicized ancestral cultural traditions and ancestral languages than on the promotion of a national public culture transcending ethnic boundaries', including 'the building of cultural centers that are presented as the property of a particular ethnic community.'[330] This dominant approach is captured in the metaphor of a 'mosaic of cultures', yet '[t]he image of the mosaic is biased, as the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz points out, because a mosaic consists of fixed, discrete pieces whereas human experience, claims and postures notwithstanding, is fluid and open-ended.'[331] The mosaic metaphor suggests that cultures 'are all of one kind, all largely homogeneous in their internal characteristics, and all hard-edged.'[332]Abaim's music, it is argued here, calls into question this dominant approach, and begins to outline an alternative cultural politics which might offer more a more inclusive, and less 'hard-edged', way to envision Mauritian culture(s).

The subsequent analysis of Abaim's musical production will thus aim to reveal a skilful engagement with Mauritian language politics, which is articulated through a concern with children and childhood. This, it will be argued, allows for a reformulation of the emotional attachment to culture and 'cultural values', which in turn challenges the idea that these

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[329] Many academic and other commentators have talked of the confusion of culture and religion in the Mauritian context: see, amongst others, Shawkat M. Toorawa, 'Religion in Mauritius: I Have a Vision…' in *Consolidating the Rainbow: Independent Mauritius, 1968-1998*, ed. by Marina Carter (Port Louis: Centre for Research on Indian Ocean Societies, 1998), pp. 113-20.

[330] Eisenlohr, *Little India*, p. 28.

[331] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 49.

[332] Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, p. 73.

emotive concepts are primarily associated with ancestral cultures, as is propagated within official and government discourses.[333] The chapter will thus attempt to explore some of the political implications which might in part explain Abaim's unexpected popularity, and why they appear to have garnered emotive appeal amongst the Mauritian public. It will be suggested that Abaim's musical production, although it cannot qualify as 'mainstream' popular culture despite having achieved a certain level commercial success in Mauritius, is significant in three respects. Firstly, it encourages more inclusive approaches to culture and cultural heritage in Mauritius; secondly, in doing so, it challenges dominant approaches to Mauritian culture as being a 'mosaic' of different cultures, as is conveyed by the state model of 'unity in diversity'; and thirdly, this then compels listeners and audiences to consider new ways of imagining the Mauritian nation, in which the previously marginalised, such as the MK language and the young people involved in the music group, might be given centre stage, and in which the nation might be imagined as comprised of individuals rather than of corporate ethnic groups.

I will first give a brief history of the association, before considering the pertinence of ethnic categories within contemporary Mauritian society, with particular reference to the Creole group. I will then outline dominant understandings of culture and cultural ownership in relation to politics of language and ancestrality, and examine how these have shaped strategies used to gain official recognition. The following analysis will then attempt to demonstrate how dominant cultural and language are challenged in Abaim's musical production, and though their representation of childhood.

Abaim and their Engagement with Post-Independence Mauritian Society: A History

Abaim is an NGO working with children and young people through music and community-based social activism in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Beau-Bassin, a town in central Mauritius. The association was founded in 1982, with its immediate aim being to act as a support front for the strike taking place at the Lois Lagesse Centre for the blind in Beau-Bassin, central Mauritius. The name 'Abaim' itself was originally an acronym for 'Association pour le bien-être des aveugles de l'île Maurice', but by happy coincidence it is also a common interjection used in sega music, a medium soon taken up by the group in their fight for political recognition of both people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. They started regular rehearsals in 1988, and produced their first album, *Enn lot sezon*, in 1992.[334] Traditional

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[333] See Eisenlohr, *Little India*, p. 47, and Armoogum Parsuraman, *From Ancestral Cultures to National Culture: Mauritius* (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute Press, 1988).
[334] Recorded under the name 'Grup Abaïm', (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Abaim).

instruments and musical elements were accorded a central place, and many songs expressed social and political critique. For example, the song '400 kanon pu kolon' ('400 canons for the colonisers') gives a critical appraisal of Mauritian history, and its concluding statement, 'nouvo met mem fwet' ('new masters, same whip'), attracted controversy at the time of release.[335]

During this period, members of the group noticed that a young boy from the local neighbourhood began to regularly appear outside the window at the centre where they conducted their rehearsals. In response to this and other expressions of interest from the local community, the group began the Saturday Care project in 1995. This was created for children and young people from the local neighbourhood, a socioeconomically disadvantaged area with a low Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) pass rate at the local primary school.[336] The program included the *atelie ravann*, a workshop in which children are taught to play the Mauritian handheld drum which is considered as the principal instrument in sega music: Abaim were in fact the first public institution to teach the instrument. Terming their approach 'music for development', Abaim has continued with the Saturday Care programme to the present day, and currently welcomes upwards of 60 children and young people every week. In addition, the association runs a community music group which involves over 40 young singers and musicians who attend twice weekly rehearsals. Some of the children's parents and other local adults also act as volunteers: the association can thus be seen as fully integrated within the community.

In addition to their community activism, Abaim have also risen to prominence as a cultural actor at the national level through the dissemination of their musical production. Since 2000, the association has produced several albums with and for children, including *16 morso nou lanfans* (2002), a collection of Mauritian children's songs and games, *Tizan ek so 8 frer* (2003), traditional stories set to music, and *Rekreasyon* (2009), an attempt to revalorise Mauritian musical heritage. More recently, Abaim have also undertaken projects of what we might call 'musical translation', resulting in the Christmas album *Enn Nwel larkansiel* (2010), and most recently *Zoli letan pou zanfan* (2013), featuring songs developed and used with children involved in the Saturday Care project.[337] We can thus see that Abaim's concern with providing a voice for the marginalised is intricately linked with both specific concerns regarding the welfare of Mauritian children, and with contesting what is perceived as the devalorisation of the MK language.

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[335] *Enn Syek de syek* (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Abaim, 1999).

[336] This exam determines which secondary school students will attend, and only students who have passed are guaranteed a place. Barkly government school pass rate of under 30% compared to national average of around 60%. See 'CPE 2013 – Pass Rate by School', Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, <http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/mesweb/cpestats/stat2013/cpe2013_passrate_byschool_alpha.pdf> [Accessed 9th August 2014].

[337] All albums are produced by Abaim, (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius).

Contemporary Mauritian Cultural Politics: Cultural Recognition and Auto-Ethnicisation

Official representations of Mauritian nation highlight the harmonious co-existence of diverse groups, as is implied by the slogan 'unity in diversity'. Within this system, 'la légitimité de chaque groupe ethnique à accéder aux ressources nationales (le « gâteau national ») est mesurée à l'aune de sa contribution à la démographie, à l'économie, voire même à l'histoire du pays'. As a result, 'les groupes en présence agissant comme si les ressources étatiques disponibles l'étaient en quantité limitée et qu'en conséquence, toute ressource obtenue par une communauté le serait au détriment d'une autre'.[338] According to this logic, in order to make legitimate claims on state resources, it is first necessary to self-identify as a member of an ethnoreligious group. We might then describe the strategies frequently used to gain recognition within the Mauritian state cultural apparatus as involving a process of auto-ethnicisation. This process is a direct result of the mosaic conceptualisation of Mauritian society, which presumes the existence of separate ethnoreligious groups with distinct, and separate, cultures. The mosaic metaphor thus represents a perspective which excludes the possibility of a global pan-Mauritian culture and/or of intercultural exchange.[339] An example of this can be seen in the institutional endorsement of ancestral languages, which 'are considered the exclusive ethnic property of the particular groups claiming them.'[340] In parallel, Julie Peghini's analysis of government cultural policy concludes that artistic and cultural expression is 'd'abord valorisée en tant qu'investissement concédé pour la promotion de la diversité religieuse, linguistique et culturelle, et non pas en tant qu'investissement économique, social et humain.'[341]

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[338] Catherine Boudet and Julie Peghini, 'Les enjeux politiques de la mémoire du passé colonial à l'île Maurice', *Transcontinentales* 6 (2008), 13-36, pp. 16-7.

[339] This has also been observed by other cultural anthropologists: 'Julie Peghini s'interroge sur la multiplication d'instances telles les centres culturels marathes, télougous, tamouls visant à renforcer un quadrillage de communautés séparées, et soulève la question d'une nation multiculturelle dans laquelle « le métissage semble si difficile à penser »'. Catherine Servan-Schreiber, *Histoire d'une musique métisse à l'île Maurice: Chutney indien et séga Bollywood* (Paris: Riveneuve Editions, 2010), p. 25, citing Peghini, 'Les impasses du multiculturalisme. Politiques, industries et tourisme culturels à l'île Maurice', Unpublished PhD thesis, (Paris VIII, 2009).

[340] Eisenlohr, *Little India,* p. 31.

[341] Peghini, 'Politique culturelle, télévision nationale et cinéma à l'Île Maurice', *Études Océan indien*, 44 (2010), 243-63, p. 256. She adds that 'Les formes contemporaines d'art à Maurice — en particulier les plus novatrices comme le film *Bénarès*, en rupture avec l'idéologie de la cohésion nationale et du multiculturalisme harmonieux — ont du mal à être visibles et à trouver place dans l'espace public. L'activité artistique reste souvent considérée comme une activité secondaire d'embellissement ou de divertissement, quand elle n'est pas perçue comme trop subversive pour l'ordre politique établi et, dans ce cas, victime indirectement ou directement de censure.'

I borrow and adapt the term auto-ethnicisation from Sandra Carmignani's analysis of the movement for both national and UNESCO world heritage site recognition of Le Morne, a mountain in the south-west of Mauritius associated with runaway slave communities. Carmignani asserts that '[a]n analysis of this mountain as an object of memory enables us to distinguish a process of what I call the "ethnicization" of the category of actors involved, a process which mirrors Mauritian political and social structure'. Here, 'ethnicization' refers to 'the process of essentializing the meaning of identity in which Creoles had to Africanize their "community" to legitimize their citizenship'.[342] We can thus see that the process of auto-ethnicisation is reliant upon an understanding of ancestral cultures as central to Mauritian citizenship.[343] Carmignani argues that when groups fight for cultural recognition at the level of the Mauritian state, '[c]onflicting discourses further reveal the politics of differentiation deeply embedded in a game of national alignment in which the Indo-Mauritian model always becomes the point of reference'. This, she maintains, results in attempts to 'see[k] and construc[t] Creole social and political legitimacy according to the Indo-Mauritian model'.[344]

What Carmignani refers to here as the Indo-Mauritian model denotes the dominant mode of Mauritian cultural politics, according to which culture is presumed to be associated with legitimised ancestral cultures, which is turn are understood to be the exclusive property of the respective ethnoreligious groups. As regards the Mauritian Arts and Cultures ministry, Peghini argues that '[s]on soutien aux arts et à la culture revient en pratique à des actions pour préserver les traditions et langues dites ancestrales, à travers des subventions accordées aux associations dites « socioculturelles » (religieuses), qui organisent principalement les fêtes religieuses des différentes communautés et s'occupent des lieux de culte, car ceux qui contrôlent les politiques culturelles à Maurice essaient d'imposer des standards d'authenticité, à travers la notion de « cultures ancestrales » et leurs valorisations, ce qui limite les destinataires de ces politiques culturelles et donne une place essentielle aux associations socioculturelles'.[345] Indeed, the politics of ancestrality have proved so pervasive within Mauritian claims for cultural recognition that it is now being adopted and adapted by the very group who were considered to be unable to have recourse to essentialised conceptualisations

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[342] Sandra Carmignani, 'Competition over "Sites of Memory": Le Morne Brabant and Creole Identity in Mauritius' in *Crossing Memories Slavery and African Diaspora*, ed. by Ana Lucia Araujo, Mariana P. Candido, Paul E. Lovejoy (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), pp. 59-78, p. 60.

[343] This can be compared to Boswell's discussion of the 'homeland requirement': The homeland 'requirement' forms a part of dominant group's discussions on identity and also as part of the process necessary to identify subaltern groups.' p. 11. Eisenlohr also argues that 'what are regarded as Indian ancestral cultures and ancestral languages have emerged as central to being Mauritian, indeed, to claiming membership in a Mauritian nation.' *Little India,* p. 5.

[344] Carmignani, p. 68.

[345] Peghini, 'Politique culturelle', p. 246.

of ancestral culture: the mixed population termed 'Creole'.[346] As Carminagni explains regarding the movement for recognition of Le Morne,

> In this power struggle, supporters of the Creole heritage were 'restrained' and compelled to play according to the rules imposed by the State system and to engage in a process of ethnicization of their African origins, often resulting in the reductionist formula: 'Creole means African.'[347]

The particular dynamics involved in the demarcation of the Creole group are perhaps worthy of further investigation. The problematic nature of the signifier Creole will be expanded upon below in relation to both the individual children and young people involved in Abaim's community projects, and in relation to language politics.

The Creole Population of Mauritius: Issues of Terminology, Race, and Social Class

Before beginning my analysis of Abaim's musical production, I would first like to draw attention to the problematic nature of the language used in academic literature to represent the poorest members of Mauritian society, which sometimes fails to give a sufficiently nuanced depiction of the intersectional positions of those who experience both racial and class prejudice.[348] One ethnic group, the Creoles, are considered to be disproportionally represented amongst the socioeconomically disadvantaged. However, it would seem that academic analyses which start from this observation also risk evoking essentialised justifications for the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities in post-independence Mauritius. The first difficulty arises when attempts are made to define the Creoles and the Creole community. Though the Creoles are often defined in academic literature as Catholics of African, Malagasy and mixed descent, in reality the term Creole is a residual ethnic category which is applied to those who cannot be recognised as Hindu, Muslim, Sino- or Franco-Mauritian. The historian Jocelyn Chan Low stresses 'l'ambigüité extrême du concept de « communauté créole » à l'île Maurice', which in contrast to the Muslim, Hindu and Sino-

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[346] Although there are significant reasons to doubt the validity of the term Creole as an ethnic category, in the remainder of this chapter it will not be referred to in quotation marks so as not to clutter the text.
[347] Carmignani, p. 69.
[348] The term intersectionality is generally traced back the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, and in particular her article on 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140 (1989), 139-67. For a consideration of the application of intersectionality to the study of social inequality in Réunion and Mauritius, see Natalia Bremner, 'Diversities at the Intersection in the Indian Ocean: Rethinking Social Class and Ethnicity in Mauritius and Réunion Island', paper presented at *Diversities @ the Intersection* (London South Bank University, 10-11th July 2014).

Mauritian 'communities', is not officially recognised by the Mauritian constitution.[349] Thomas Hylland Eriksen also argues that, '[a]s an "ethnic", the Creoles are different from the others in that they do not in any meaningful sense constitute an ethnic group'; and that 'the term "Creole" inevitably denotes a *residual category*, whose members have language and religion in common, but who do not usually perceive themselves as a group.'[350] Yet this shared language and religion are by no means unique to the Creole group: Christianity is practised by Franco-Mauritians, Sino-Mauritians and Tamils, and MK is spoken by the majority of Mauritians of all ethnic backgrounds and thus can hardly be considered as a relevant marker of ethnic identity. Even Boswell, author of the first anthropological monograph on the Mauritian Creole population, acknowledges that it is 'extremely difficult to set clear boundaries in identifying Creoles in Mauritius [as] Creoles are both a socially and physically diverse population.'[351]

During the course of my fieldwork, my experiences and observations also led me to question the validity of Creole as an ethnic category. I noticed that it was sometimes used in an essentialising sense, and that prejudiced conceptualisations of a typical Creole type were used to affirm a notion of self as non-Creole and to firmly establish Creoles as ethnic and social others. This would appear to support Boswell's argument that in Mauritian society, Creole functions as 'a sort of anti-category, useful for other groups to define themselves and as a means to establish hegemony.'[352] I am also grateful to a friend who, in a frank and open conversation about the pertinence of ethnic categories, helped me to recognise the utter meaningless of Creole as a residual marker of ethnicity, pointing out that many who might be classed as Creoles by others would never self-identify in this way. This would appear to be the case for the majority of young people I worked with at Abaim. During my initial seven months of participatory research with Abaim and three subsequent visits, only once did a young person explicitly self-identify to me as '*enn kreol*', ('a Creole'). My interlocutor's statement must however be understood in context: she said this in response to not being able to pronounce song lyrics in Bhojpuri during rehearsals, hesitantly whispering to me between verses of 'Pani nayba', '*mo pa konn Bhojpuri mwa! Mo… enn kreol*' ('I don't know how to speak Bhojpuri… I'm a… Creole').[353] Her statement thus appeared to invoke a linguistic signification of Creole, denoting 'one who speaks a Creole language', rather than conveying an expression of her ethnic, religious, or cultural identity.

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[349] Jocelyn Chan Low, 'De l'Afrique rejetée à l'Afrique retrouvée ? Les Créoles de l'île Maurice et l'Africanité', *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 3 (2003), 39-50, p. 39. The Creoles are grouped with Franco-Mauritians and other anomalous cases under the residual term 'General Population.'
[350] *Communicating Cultural Difference and Identity: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius* (Oslo: Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology, 1988), p. 109, p. 110.
[351] p. 44.
[352] Boswell, p. 11.
[353] From the album *16 ti morso nou lanfans*.

A second difficulty arises when academic analyses which consider Creole as an ethnic 'type' or as one of several ethnic groups of 'communities' within Mauritius fail to recognise the socioeconomic connotations of the term, which attest to the legacy of racial hierarchy in Mauritius. As Eriksen explains, '"Creole" the way it is used in Mauritius refers not only to slave ancestry and cultural impurity, but to low class; it belongs to the proletariat of the *milieu populaire*.'[354] An intersectional approach to the Creole population thus would seem to be more appropriate in light of Mauritian society's long colonial history. We also need to be aware of how Creole identities are presented to young people: drawing on her ethnographic research at an underprivileged school, Elsa Wiehe suggests that '[c]lass and ethnicity are intertwined categories of identity, and when teachers speak to students, notions of culture, race and class cannot be separated.'[355] The term Creole is thus perhaps better understood as representing a position at the intersection of race and class, rather than an ethnic type, whilst also remaining a residual category. This is further supported by Eriksen's observation that '[w]hen individuals who are mixed and 'creolised' in academic terms, are not classified as Creoles as used in lay terms in Mauritius, it is due to the endurance of colonial social classification, which related to an economic system — the colonial plantation economy — which was different, and which offered less flexibility and fewer opportunities for social mobility — than the present.'[356] Eriksen suggests that we are thus left with a 'fuzzy category of Mauritian Creoles' which 'includes both the traditional Creoles, that is darkskinned working-class people most of whose ancestors were slaves, and a residual category of modern or postmodern Creoles, who are Creoles because for various reasons they do not fit in elsewhere.'[357]

Of course, this is not to say that it is impossible to be both middle-class and Creole in the Mauritian context. As was briefly outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the island's history of slavery led to a substantial mixed population of both European and slave heritage. The illegitimate *métis* sons of white slave owners sometimes received an education in recompense for not receiving official recognition from their fathers, leading to the development of what many scholars consider as a new ethnic category, sometimes referred to as the *gens de couleur* or Coloured. Eriksen explains that '[e]ducated Coloureds aspiring to membership in Franco-Mauritian society were – and still are – generally rejected', 'although they are socially and culturally closer to the Franco-Mauritians than to any other group.'[358]

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[354] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, '*Tu dimunn pu vini kreol*: The Mauritian creole and the concept of creolization', Paper presented at the Creolization Seminar, Transnational Communities programme, University of Oxford, Michaelmas Term (1999), p. 10.

[355] Elsa Wiehe, 'Representations of Creole socio-economic identities in public school in Mauritius', *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 9 (2009), 40-50, p. 48.

[356] Eriksen, '*Tu dimunn pu vini kreol*', p. 10.

[357] Eriksen, '*Tu dimunn pu vini kreol*', p. 11.

[358] Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 9.

Though the Coloured's descendants tend to be of lighter skin colour, it must nonetheless be emphasised that as social categories, there is no finite distinction between groups, as is demonstrated by the fact that Creoles who achieve social mobility may no longer be recognised as such, regardless of their skin tone. Marie-Thérèse Humbert's novel *A l'autre bout de moi* gives a particularly powerful account of consequences of one mixed family's attempt to negotiate Mauritian socio-racial dynamics through 'social whitening'.[359] Written in the aftermath of independence, it would however seem that many elements of the narrative remain pertinent to the contemporary social context.

To summarise, in contrast to the Réunionese context, where individuals might self-identify as Creole as a positive source of identity, notably to assert their legitimacy in relation to more recent arrivals such as the *zorey* (metropolitan French), Mahorais and Comorian populations,[360] in Mauritius, Creole identity is not usually claimed in an assertive and positive manner, with the exception of burgeoning Creole interest groups which will be considered briefly below. We might deduce that this relates to different definitions of Creole on the two islands: in Mauritius, it primarily refers to dark skin colour, African phenotype and low socioeconomic status; whereas usage in Réunion is perhaps closer to the linguistic definition of 'one who speaks Creole', or indeed one of the original significations of the term, namely 'one who is born in the colonies', who is thereby distinguished from either Europeans born in the metropole, or slaves who were brought to the colonies but born elsewhere.[361] I am thus reluctant to label either individuals or cultural practices as Creole in the Mauritian context, with the exception of those movements which make a conscious claim to Creole ethnic identity. However, I recognise that most academic literature on Mauritian society and culture recognises the pertinence of ethnic or ethnoreligious groups or 'communities'. So, for those scholars who wish to analyse Mauritian society as an ethnic grid or as composed of discrete communities, I will state that a majority – but not all – of the children and young people who take part in Abaim's activities (both the music group and the Saturday program) would be classified as Creoles. At the same time, I am also deeply hesitant over the usefulness of the term Creole within academic analysis, which furthermore would appear in some cases to reinforce prejudicial views already circulating within Mauritian popular discourse.[362] The same can be said of labelling members of the group as '*defavorize*', disadvantaged. When I visited the association in March 2013, founding member Marousia Bouvery openly showed her dismay and disappointment that a radio announcement for a concert which the group were

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[359] (Paris: Stock, 1979).

[360] The *zorey* population of Réunion is discussed in further detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

[361] For a discussion of early usages of Creole see Carpooran, 'Créole, créolité, créolisation', pp. 1-2.

[362] For a discussion of Creole stereotypes, see Alain Romaine and Serge Ng Tat Chung, *Les Créoles des idées reçues* (Beau-Bassin, Mauritius: Marye-Pike Editions, 2010).

due to perform that afternoon described Abaim members as '*zanfan defavorize*', or disadvantaged children, when it would be more accurate to describe the area in which they live as 'disadvantaged'. This labelling process can serve to homogenise individuals and imply a primordial, almost biological explanation for a lack of social mobility amongst some members of Mauritian society. It essentialises and naturalises the association between Creole as an ascribed ethnic category and material poverty.[363] In turn, this would appear to reflect wider social discourses which are expressed in the assumption amongst some teachers, as documented by Wiehe and Sheila Bunwaree, that lower-class Creole children are naturally less able and less disciplined, as is encapsulated in the expression '*pa kas latet ar zot*', 'don't bother making an effort for them'.[364]

(Re)Claiming Creole Ethnicity: The *Malaise créole* and Creole Interest Groups

Nevertheless, despite, on the one hand, a partial acknowledgment of the meaningless of Creole as an ethnic or social category in Mauritian society, and, on the other, the stubborn persistence of the term's prejudicial connotations as concerns low social status, the term Creole is currently undergoing a process of recuperation and reappropriation. Various associations are mobilising as Creole interest groups in order to making claims on state resources on behalf of the Creole community, such as the movement for recognition of Le Morne as a heritage site explored by Carminagni. This mobilisation can be said to form part of a longer history: the *Organisation Fraternelle/Les Verts* was founded after ethnic violence between Creoles and Muslims in Port-Louis in the period leading up to independence, gained in 1968.[365] The concept of the 'Afro-Mauritians' as an ethnic group was also outlined in a 1985 publication, which aims to present the Creoles as a separate population with equal ancestral capital[366] to other ethnoreligious groups:

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[363] There is an obvious parallel here with Finch-Boyer's account of the French government's overtly racist approach towards the supposedly 'natural' poverty experienced by non-white citizens in Réunion and the DOM.

[364] See Wiehe and Sheila Bunwaree-Ramharai, 'Elusive Multiculturalism in Post-Gatt Mauritius' in *Towards the Making of a Multi-Cultural Society: Conference Papers*, ed. by S Nirsimloo-Gayan, Conference 'Towards the Making of a Multicultural Society' 18-21 November 1996, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute Press, 2000), pp. 238-52, p. 247.

[365] For an account of the interethnic relations and conflict in the period leading up to and following independence, see Jocelyn Chan Low, 'Affrontements inter-ethniques, démocratisation et décolonisation dans l'île Maurice de l'après-guerre', in *La Réunion et l'océan Indien: De la décolonisation au XXIe siècle. Actes du colloque de Saint-Denis de la Réunion, 23-25 octobre 2006*, ed. by Yvan Combeau and Didier Galibert (Paris: Indes savantes, 2007), pp. 49-64.

[366] Ancestral capital refers to the context in which, as Eisenlohr has thoroughly explored in his analysis of ethnolinguistic belonging, 'a politics of ancestral cultures in which the cultivation of ancestral language is central is one of the most important features of postcolonial Mauritian politics; it places those Mauritians with recognized claims in such ancestral cultures and languages in an advantageous position

> If the Indo-Mauritians, Tamilo-Mauritians and Islamo-Mauritians are capable of tracing out and maintaining their link with the great peninsula, the Sino-Mauritians with China, the Franco-Mauritians with France or England, the Creolo-Mauritians with nowhere, the Afro-Mauritians should at least be bold enough to undergo the process of Africanization.[367]

This tendency appears to have been further accelerated by the arrival of the concept of the 'malaise créole' in public discourse in 1993, and the death of seggae singer Kaya in police custody and subsequent riots in February 1999. Roger Cerveaux, the priest who first used the term 'le malaise creole', argued that the Catholic Church should play a greater role in helping the poorest members of Mauritian society, who for Cerveaux are for the most part Creole Catholics:

> Je crois que parmi les cultures qui existent à Maurice […] le mal-vivre se trouve parmi les créoles qui sont le plus dans *difé* (c'est-à-dire 'dans le feu, dans les difficultés'). Je ne veux pas dire qu'il n'y a pas de démunis ailleurs. Mais il y a une grosse concentration chez les créoles.[368]

We can thus see that, since the 1990s, a concern with marginalisation and social deprivation in Mauritian society has been conceptualised in ethnic terms, and that some Creoles are now choosing to organise as a corporate ethnic group in order to gain cultural recognition. The recent snowballing of Creole movements thus appears to echo in some respects the development of Hindu organisations' influence in matters usually thought to be the domain of the state, such as education policy, in the period following independence. This has been analysed by Eisenlohr who notes that, in this context, 'the building of a separate group identity and the struggle for political goals go hand in hand.'[369]

The Politics of Language and Ancestrality in Post-Independence Mauritius

Ancestral cultures, and especially ancestral languages, have therefore emerged in post-independence Mauritius as the locus for cultural decolonisation, and are thus closely

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vis-à-vis those who lack such claims. The Mauritian politics of ancestral language produce a sense of nationhood in which diasporic identities; rather than themes of local origin or indigenousness, becomes primary.' *Little India*, p. 19.

[367] Gaëtan Benoît, *The Afro-Mauritians: An Essay* (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 1985), p. 62.

[368] Interview in *Week-End*, 7th February 1993. Cited in Hubert Gerbeau, 'Religion et identité créole à l'île Maurice', *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses*, 12 (2009), 53-71, p. 64.

[369] *Little India*, p. 46.

associated with what we might term the process of (re)establishing postcolonial dignity. However, reformulating this process as a question of obtaining official recognition for ancestral cultures and languages effectively sidesteps the issue of granting recognition to the subaltern culture of the formerly colonised, including their vernaculars, MK and Bhojpuri.[370] Doing so transforms a postcolonial quest for social and cultural justice into a metaphorical battle between one supposedly ancient civilisation and another. Whilst it might prove an effective strategy in the eyes of the former colonisers, evoking ancient civilisations in order to express a sense of postcolonial dignity, that is, to assert the formerly colonised's status as human and as equal to the former colonisers, arguably does nothing to address the problems of the formerly colonised in the new postcolonial nation. As Eisenlohr observes, the Mauritian concern with ancestral languages 'is not about the national language or the language of administration but about the "preservation" of Hindu as an ancestral language, sometimes dubbed "mother tongue," and about the infrastructure the state should provide for the cultivation of ancestral Hindi'.[371] By substituting the legitimate question of the status given to the *de facto* national language, MK, the movement to promote ancestral languages such as Hindi thus does nothing to challenge the linguistic hegemony of the former colonial languages, English and French. As was briefly discussed in the introduction, this has resulted in an emotive formulation of ancestral cultures as the 'bearers of cultural values':

> Mauritian state institutions have found the ideology of cultural purity focused on ancestral language useful as a counterbalance to the ongoing project of economic development. […] the Mauritian government attempts to combat the negative consequences of economic modernization by the introduction of 'human values' and 'cultural values' into the school curriculum, which in turn are to be promoted through the study of ancestral languages.[372]

The preference for the ancestral language-based route to postcolonial dignity may also be partly explained by the complex emotions evoked by the language of everyday communication, MK. A. Gauvin has discussed the complex set of feelings Kreol speakers in Réunion have towards both the native language and imposed colonial one:

> Le problème des sentiments linguistiques est en fait beaucoup plus compliqué que la simple aliénation. Nombre des Réunionnais sont partagés entre deux sentiments :
> - d'une part, l'attirance vers la langue noble, et la honte de leur langue maternelle ;

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[370] Bhojpuri was once widely spoken in rural Mauritius, but the 2011 census now shows that 84% of Mauritians now speak only Kreol at home. 2011 Population Census, <http://statsmauritius.gov.mu/English/CensusandSurveys/Documents/ESI/pop2011.pdf> [Accessed 25th April 2014].

[371] *Little India*, p. 51

[372] Eisenlohr, *Little India*, p. 47

- d'autre part, un sentiment d'amour pour cette dernière et de répulsion vis-à-vis du français.
Ces deux sentiments sont étroitement mélangés : ils aiment leur langue maternelle et ils la détestent (parce qu'ils en ont honte) ; c'est tout le problème de l'amour-haine. En même temps, ils sont attirés et repoussés par le français.[373]

As further evidence of the profound affection felt towards Réunionese Kreol, A. Gauvin recounts a variant of a common joke, in which those who leave the island for the métropole and then claim to have forgotten how to speak their native language when they return are the subject of humorous derision. In Mauritius, a similar attitude is taken towards Mauritians who have lived abroad and subsequently claim to have forgotten MK. It would thus seem that any attempt to forge an alternative means of obtaining postcolonial dignity by including rather than dismissing MK must first address the complex psychological effects of a love-hate relationship with the native language. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will consider how Abaim, through both their musical production and work in the community, are arguably working to change mentalities towards MK, so that it may ultimately be repositioned as central to representations of the Mauritian nation. This also involves rethinking the relationship between MK and English or French from one of competition to compatibility, and considering the perspective of children, who are confronted with the privileging of the languages of the former colonisers within the Mauritian education system. I will suggest that Abaim addresses the complex emotions discussed above by encouraging existing feelings of affection towards the native language. This is achieved in their musical translations, which represent MK as the language of childhood in Mauritius, whilst combating the shame attached to MK by presenting it as equal to and compatible with the languages of the former colonisers, and as part of an autonomous Mauritian culture.

Abaim's Representations of Mauritian Childhood and the Mauritian 'Mother Tongue'

Children and childhood have played a central role within the musical production of Abaim from 2002 onwards, not simply as a target audience, but as actors involved in various stages of the music-making process, from composition to performance. Daniella Bastien, an anthropologist and previous member of Abaim's youth music group, characterises this phase of musical production as 'un retour à l'enfance [qui] revaloris[e] cette période d'innocence par

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[373] A. Gauvin, p. 76.

laquelle est passé chaque être humain.'[374] The concern with children and childhood is of course inextricably linked to the group's work in the community, which in turn is structured in such a way that children are encouraged to express themselves and thus contribute to the process of writing lyrics. During the time I spent with the association, the first hour of the group's Saturday programme, known as 'lakonpagnman skoler' or *l'accompagnement scolaire*, was often spent looking at phonetics and rhyme in MK at the same time that the children were taught to write using the new standardised orthography. In addition to these preparatory exercises, in other sessions song lyrics were discussed, and children were invited to present ideas and write additional verses. For example, while I was still learning MK myself, I worked with a group who wrote a verse which was to be included in the song 'Vakans'.[375]

We can thus see that questions of language, and in particular the position of MK as the mother tongue of the young people involved in the group, is central to Abaim's representation of childhood. Furthermore, Abaim's representation of MK as the language of an imagined Mauritian childhood may arguably have a secondary consequence: their musical production could be said to provide middle-class Mauritians, who still speak their mother tongue, MK, on a daily basis, but whose socioeconomic position has usually been achieved through their mastery of English and/or French, with an alternative way to identify with the language. Though their social status is dependent upon fluency in 'international' languages, MK remains the language of childhood even for upwardly socially mobile Mauritians. The association of the language with childhood experience, through the medium of what we might call Mauritian nursery rhymes, is highly emotive, and reflects the perhaps unrecognised emotive value that speakers in diglossic contexts invest in the basolect, which they simply do not have in the acrolect, whether this be French of English in this case.[376] Thus, Abaim's production can be said to evoke or even reawaken the affection involved in the 'love-hate' relationship with Kreol languages discussed by A. Gauvin above.

We might think that this valorisation of childhood as a period of innocence is not necessarily indicative of a progressive cultural politics. However, when taken into account along with a consideration of language politics in Mauritius, this valorisation of childhood could also be understood as a demand on behalf of all children for the right to their native

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[374] Daniella Bastien 'L'expression de la créolité dans la production musicale à Maurice: le cas du Grup ABAIM', *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 7 (2007), 48-57, p. 55.

[375] Field notes, 19th November 2011. The song is featured on *Zoli letan pou zanfan* (2013).

[376] The presence of two colonial languages, which are commonly used for more formal (and especially written) forms of communication, arguably renders the linguistic situation in Mauritius more complex than the classic model of diglossia as outlined by Charles Ferguson in 'Diglossia', *Word*, 15 (1959), 325-40. For a detailed discussion of multilingualism and language use in Mauritius, see Daniel Baggioni and Didier de Robillard, *Ile Maurice: Une francophonie paradoxale* (Paris; Université de la Réunion, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines: L'Harmattan, 1990).

language. Within the current education system, Mauritian children are encouraged to outgrow the language of their childhood as soon as possible after starting primary school. Though MK has been included in the primary school curriculum as an optional subject since January 2012, English remains the medium of education in all subjects except French, and thus fluency in English is a prerequisite for academic success. In turn, doing well at school is understood to provide crucial possibilities for social mobility: 'même parmi les milieux les plus démunis de la population mauricienne, l'importance de l'éducation pour briser le carcan de la pauvreté et accéder à une vie meilleure est perçue par pratiquement tout le monde.'[377] The resultant pressure on children to master a foreign language at a relatively young age is perhaps the reason why MK is ultimately conceived as competing in a zero-sum game with other languages such as English and French. According to this logic, the admission of MK into the curriculum takes away scarce resources from the learning of English or French. This viewpoint was expressed by a majority of those interviewed by Aaliya Rajah-Carrim in a survey on the introduction of MK in schools, for whom 'it seems futile to allocate limited resources for the teaching of this language at school'.[378]However, as Rajah-Carrim rightly concludes, her respondents' comments

> sho[w] that Kreol is constantly set in opposition to other languages. Its position or status is defined with respect to that of other varieties. This way of defining the creole variety underlines the negativity attached to the language.[379]

Therefore, in order to convince the public that MK deserves both official recognition from the government (which may have been partially granted through its inclusion within the curriculum from 2012) and popular recognition from Mauritians, adults and children alike, Abaim's musical representations of childhood must also combat the stigma attached to MK. Again, this objective parallels that of the NGO's work in the community: at every rehearsal and every Saturday assembly, chairs are positioned in a circle so as to encourage participation from all present, with the medium of communication being that of the children's mother tongue, MK. These occasions, and in particular that of the Saturday assembly, where members present news items and volunteer to preside over the proceedings, provide children with a concrete demonstration of how MK can and should be used in more formal contexts. This experience can thus be said to counteract the 'attirance vers la langue noble' (or in the Mauritius, '*les*

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[377] Patricia Day-Hookoomsing, 'Aspects institutionnels et sociaux de l'éducation à l'île Maurice', in *Maurice: De l'île sucrière à l'île des savoirs*, ed. by Emmanuel Grégoire, Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, Gérard Lemoine (Vacoas, Mauritius: Editions Le Printemps, 2011), pp. 252-78, p. 268.

[378] 'Mauritian Creole and Language Attitudes in the Education System of Multiethnic and Multilingual Mauritius', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 28: 1 (2007), 51-71, p. 68.

[379] Rajah-Carrim, p. 68.

langues nobles') encouraged by the education system. In terms of their musical production, the stigma attached to MK is challenged through translations and adaptations of songs. This process of translation is interpreted here as a political act which advocates the equality of the different languages within the Mauritian sphere whilst simultaneously asserting the existence of an autonomous Mauritian culture.

Musical Translations: Demonstrating Equality of MK and English and Autonomy of Mauritian Culture

I will now consider some of Abaim's more recent albums which make use of translations and adaptations of songs into MK. These will be analysed here as musical translations, given that their production involves more than the translation of text. The first album to make extensive use of these was *Enn Nwel Larkansiel* (2010), ('A Rainbow Christmas'). Commenting on the inspiration behind the album, Alain Muneean explains that 'nwel enn tematik ki santral dan lavi zanfan' ('Christmas is something central to children's lives'), and that, given the climactic differences between Christmas as experienced in Mauritius compared with Europe and North America, the rainbow emerged as the most appropriate symbol to express magic of Christmas for Mauritian children.[380] The album thus aims to convey the idea of a Mauritian Christmas, which requires a reconsideration of the discrepancies between the representation of Christmas in globalised popular culture, such as in songs and films, and the reality as experienced by children in Mauritius. However, this must also involve an acceptance of enjoyment in globalised forms of popular culture which does not necessarily indicative of cultural alienation. As Alain Muneeam explains,

> Maleresman nou'nn import nwel avek so lanez, ek so lasemine, avek so monto blan tou sa la. E, selman, bann melodi ki ena dan sa bann sante-la, zot bann melodi ki, an fet, inn resiste a letan. Sa vedir ki zot inn bien anrasine dan nou mem, zot nou melodi osi sa. Se pou sa rezon-la ki nou'nn trouv li importan met nou an pe avek nou mem. Seki pa ti bon ladan, se sa bann referans a lanez, a tou bann zafer ki pa dan nou kontext.

> Unfortunately we have imported Christmas with [images of] snow, the chimney, white coats etc. Yet the melodies of those [popular Christmas] songs, those melodies have resisted time passing. This means that they have become a part of ourselves, that they are our melodies too. It's for this reason that we thought it was important to put ourselves at peace with ourselves. What wasn't good/appropriate was all those references to snow, to all those things which don't exist in our context.[381]

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[380] Interview on DVD, *Enn Nwel Larkansiel* (Beau-Bassin: Abaim, 2010).
[381] Interview, *Enn Nwel Larkansiel.*

He goes on to explain that, during the preparation of the album, he considered it Abaim's mission to replace Western-centric references with ones which Mauritian children would be able to relate to. He discusses the example of 'Jingle Bells', which was translated as 'Alime tegn' (literally 'on off', in reference to twinkling lights used to decorate houses) because in the Mauritian calendar, the Hindu festival Divali comes shortly before Christmas. From the perspective of Mauritian children, then, the magic and excitement of Christmas is prefigured by the twinkling lights of Divali. The adaptation of the now infamous 'Jingle Bells' as 'Alime tegn' thus provides alternative images of Christmas which are directly drawn from the lived experience of Mauritian children.

It thus becomes apparent that different forms of translation and adaptation are used in *Enn Nwel Larkansiel*. 'Alime tegn' differs dramatically from the source text, offering instead an image of Christmas Day from a child's perspective which is firmly placed in the Mauritian context: 'Soulie an bas sapin / finn bien verni' shows us that it is not stockings, but well-polished shoes which have been left under the Christmas tree. The second verse's list of presents ends with 'iniform pou nou al lekol', ('uniform to wear to school'), which connotes both the beginning of the school year in Mauritius, which starts in January, and the importance placed on education by both parents and children. Along with the musical arrangement, which abandons the bells traditionally heard in 'Jingle Bells' in favour of the Mauritian *ravann* drum and a mandolin which can be said to evoke the twinkling of fairy lights, 'Alime tegn' can be considered to successfully combine the melody and structure of a now globally popular Christmas song with a lyrical and musical exploration of Mauritian children's experience of Christmas. It is this which then can be said to open up a space for the articulation of an autonomous Mauritian social and cultural experience. This is arguably further developed in the song's music video, which contains short frames of various individuals miming along to the song when the chorus is played, linked by the visual aid of a red frame decorated with beads and presents.[382] The viewer is thus presented with snapshot images of individuals in different locations, including a market place, a busy traffic clogged road, a farm and other places of work, none of which reflect exoticised, postcard-like representations of Mauritius and its multiethnic harmonious society. The video can therefore be said to provide the viewer with an alternative community of experience to that promoted in official representations used in the tourist industry.

In contrast, other musical translations on the album, such as 'Ridolf', Abaim's MK translation of 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer', and 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town/Vomie to tchek sa' provide close lyrical translations of the source text. They can thus be compared to

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[382] Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VwzSuznqWM>, [Accessed 25th April 2014].

adaptations of Anglophone children's songs like 'This Old Man' and 'Heads Shoulder Knees and Toes' on Abaim's most recent album *Zoli letan pou zanfan* (2013), where both English and Kreol versions are given equal weight in the songs. This arguably demonstrates to children that both languages are of equal value, and that both languages can co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. In this respect, such translations can be said to present an egalitarian relationship between the source and target languages (here, English and MK), which could encourage a re-evaluation of the relationship between the two languages as one of complementarity rather than competition. The album was also created with ostensibly practical purposes in mind, notably in relation to the dearth of material available to primary teachers at the time of the official introduction of MK in the school curriculum as an optional subject in January 2012. When I returned to Mauritius for the official launch of the album, hosted by Abaim at their centre in March 2013, I saw that the association had invited a number of primary school teachers who were positively inclined towards the teaching of MK and presented them with copies of the album in order to underline its potential as a teaching resource.

Interestingly, however, even within these two songs we can find examples of adaptations which diverge from the source text. In 'Ridolf', the reindeers' names listed at the beginning of the song in the source version are translated as the names of Tizan and his brothers, characters in Mauritian folklore who also feature on one of Abaim's previous albums, *Tizan ek so 8 frer*.[383] This acts as a *clin d'œil* to Mauritian listeners who realise that Abaim have chosen not to stick to the script. The incongruity between the English and MK versions is heightened by the call-and-response structure, where the solo voice first sings in English and the chorus responds in MK. The listener arguably experiences a similar form of temporary disorientation in the bilingual 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town/Vomie to tchek sa'. Here, the transition between English and the MK translation is facilitated by a musical interlude in which the rhythm changes from binary to the tertiary rhythm of séga, where the only musical accompaniment is provided by the *ravann* drum. *Tchoule*, half-shouted half-sung short vocal expressions, can then be heard over the percussion, including 'met sapin mama!' (literally, 'put up the Christmas tree mum!'). This short vocal exclamation can be said to bring together both Western images of Christmas, the family surrounding the Christmas tree, and the act of 'tchoule' in séga music, where 'mama' is used as an ambivalent term of address which could evoke either family-like relationships or heterosexual desire, such as in 'roule mama!', which invites female listeners to dance.[384]

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[383] The character Tizan is also found elsewhere in folklore in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.
[384] Sega music itself could be said to encapsulate an ambivalence between the family and romantic love and heterosexual desire: dance is considered sexual, yet séga music is often played and danced to in family settings. See Servan-Schreiber, pp.

We can thus see that Abaim's musical translations can be interpreted as providing both children and adults with important messages regarding the status of the MK language, and of Mauritian sociocultural experience. These translations can also be said to invite discussion of and even to question the idea of cultural ownership. As was discussed above, the concept of cultural ownership is normally understood in ethnicised or ethnoreligious terms in Mauritius, whereby ethnoreligious groups are understood to have exclusive ownership of 'their' ancestral cultures. Yet such a concise definition of cultural ownership is troubled by Abaim's musical translation. If we take the musical arrangements into account, which make use of traditional/folk instruments like the ravanne and the jerrycan, the songs in translation presented in both *Enn Nwel Larkansiel* and *Zoli letan pou zanfan* could arguably encourage a process of re-appropriation of Anglophone nursery rhymes and Christmas songs, which perhaps facilitates identification with the 'foreign' songs and ultimately allows children to claim that 'this is (also) mine', 'this is (also) Mauritian'. Indeed, in relation to the latter album, the idea of cultural ownership is broadened to such an extent that 'This Old Man' and 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' are referred to by one review article in national newspaper as 'des "world folk songs"', which suggests that through their popularity and 'exportation' these songs have transcended both linguistic (Anglophone) and national (UK or US) contexts.[385]

Abaim: Reconfiguring Understandings of Culture

In an email discussion regarding opinions relating to ethnoreligious communities and how these might be presented in academic analysis, Alain Muneean gave me the following summary of his own position on the matter:

> Lor sa kestion kominote la, nou pozision sorti depi enn kestionnman klasifikasion dimounn lor baz ras ou kominote enn kote e lot kote, nou konsidere ki apre trwa siek listwar an komin, pa kapav pena kiksoz ki finn inifie seki finn vinn lepep moris. E bann eleman kiltirel kouma langaz e lamizik sega , zot bann prev pou tousala.

> About the issue of 'communities', our position comes from a questioning of the classification of people on a racial or communitarian basis, and in addition, we think that after three centuries of a common [Mauritian] history, it is not possible that no unifying elements have developed which bring together those who have become the Mauritian people. And cultural elements like the Kreol language and sega music are the proof of this.[386]

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[385] 'ALBUM PÉDAGOGIQUE: Abaim sort "Zoli letan pou zanfan"', *Le Mauricien*, 20th February 2013 <http://www.lemauricien.com/article/album-pedagogique-abaim-sort-%E2%80%9Czoli-letan-pou-zanfan%E2%80%9D>, [Accessed 28th March 2014].
[386] Alain Muneean, founding member of Abaim. Personal communication, 20th February 2014.

Abaim's position on culture and cultural ownership in Mauritius thus hardly sounds like a radical one. The account given above might appear rational and measured to anyone unfamiliar with the particular dynamics of Mauritian cultural politics. However, it is also fundamentally at odds with the official line on culture, encapsulated in the national slogan 'unity in diversity', which considers the unity of the Mauritian nation as posited on state recognition of corporate ethnic groups. Abaim's musical production and correlated social action discussed in this chapter can be said to undermine this dominant perspective in three respects: firstly, by engaging with the complex emotions evoked by the MK language in representing the latter as the language of childhood in Mauritius; secondly, by producing musical translations which reduce the negative stigma associated with MK by demonstrating its equality with English; and thirdly, by diverging from the source text in translations to demonstrate the existence of an autonomous Mauritian sociocultural experience, even when globalised popular culture is present. It may thus be concluded that Abaim's approach to culture could be said to call in question and subvert dominant approaches to cultural and linguistic ownership in Mauritius.

In the following chapter, a rather different means of valorising Kreol languages within popular music will be explored. We will proceed from the context of Mauritius to Réunion, and from music which is not considered as 'cool' due to its association with childhood and conscious engagement with language politics as a means of promoting greater inclusivity and equality in Mauritian society, to Réunionese dancehall music, which is criticised for being too 'cool', or in other words, overly commercialised and therefore unable to express political critique. Although its engagement with language politics is perhaps subconscious, I will try to suggest that this is no less important. Though the evidence for the arguments presented in the next chapter is somewhat tentative, these ideas are presented in order to encourage a wider debate on young people, popular culture, Kreol languages and social inequality in Réunion and Mauritius. This might then encourage a more open-minded approach to what might appear as mindless or banal globalised pop culture, but may in fact be seen to engage with crucial social issues in the local context.

3. Youth Culture, Globalised Blackness, and Kreol Musical Identities: The Cultural and Language Politics of Réunionese Dancehall Music

New Black Popular Musics: Rupture with a Soulful Past?

For Paul Gilroy, perhaps the most prolific cultural studies critic of black popular music, the types of music which have been facilitated by new technology since the 1980s are understood to constitute a complete break from previous forms of black musical expression.[387] This break is conceptualised not simply in technological or aesthetic terms: instead, it is thought to reflect a radically different set of cultural politics characterised by an alternative conceptualisation of identification and solidarity, which fatally compromises the musics' potential to articulate a critique of neoliberalism and global capitalism. In contrast to previous forms of musical expression, which expounded a utopian critique of the racialised violence of slavery and the capitalist system of which it was a part,[388] according to Gilroy the new digitally- and technologically-enhanced musical forms can be characterised as soulless. He asserts that the soulful nature of black music prior to the 1990s represented 'the site of a kind of ambivalence about the memory of slavery and the desirability and the obligation to forget things which are difficult'.[389] In contrast, the music of contemporary black artists 'may be part of the soul tradition, [but] its yearning is defined by the immediate needs of the body', as Nabeel Zuberi has remarked of Gilroy's assessment of African-American R 'n' B artists R. Kelly and Mary J. Blige.[390] Gilroy situates this musical and political development within the context of cultural globalisation, which has facilitated the dissemination of African-American popular music and culture on a global scale, but which he argues has ultimately resulted in the 'decay' of the black public sphere.[391] He thus expresses his scepticism regarding the greater visibility that cultural globalisation has conferred upon black popular music:

> The specific traditions of public interaction that were originally products of the agency of slaves are being surpassed. They are [...] declining now that postslave cultures are being recomposed around new priorities and opportunities associated with digital media, de-industrialization, and the growth of consumerism. The cultural achievement provoked by slave life provided more than the contested core of American identity:

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[387] Richard C. Green and Monique Guillory, 'Questions of a "Soulful Style": Interview with Paul Gilroy' in *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure*, ed. by Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green (New York; London: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 250-65, p. 253.

[388] See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), especially '"Jewels Brought Back from Bondage": Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity', pp. 72-110.

[389] Cited in Green and Guillory, p. 259.

[390] *Sounds English: Transnational Popular Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 145.

[391] See '"After the Love Has Gone": Bio-politics and the Decay of the Black Public Sphere' in *Between Camps*, pp. 177-206.

they supplied a platform for youth cultures, popular culture, and style of dissent far from their places of origin. Today they are fractured by the obvious divisions between north and south, by overdeveloped and underdeveloped regions of the planet that are being enforced by the globalization of commerce and power. They remain powerful but the breadth of their appeal has created new difficulties. Are they local or global forms? To whom, if anyone, do they belong?[392]

The common tropes of sex and violence in new black musical forms such as hip-hop and dancehall are often regarded as indicative of the musics' apolitical nature, and as symbolising a return to primitive, pre-political desires. However, Gilroy further accuses these new musical forms of 'revolutionary conservatism', demonstrated in their promotion of consumerism, their objectification of women, and above all in their having abandoned the radical political possibilities encapsulated in previous forms of black Atlantic musical expression.[393] In addition, Gilroy deplores the use of technology where it reveals a lack of musical skill in comparison to previous genres. Thus, hip-hop and rap are conceptualised in terms of a regression from soul and funk, because in these forms, 'liberation and justice are still demanded but have taken a back seat in recent years to revolutionary conservatism, misogyny, and stylized tales of sexual excess.'[394] Similarly, the development of the genre known as ragga or dancehall in Jamaica was highly criticised by foreign music critics and fans in the West for its deviation from what they saw as the simultaneously more political and more spiritual nature of reggae. As Norman C. Stolzhoff explains, from the perspective of the 'reggae romanticists',

> Dancehall music was seen as a decadent and nihilistic movement, a response to Marley's death and Seaga's prime ministership, and slackness became a threat to everything that roots reggae had stood for.[395]

However, both genres, which are both already the result of various 'border crossings' between and beyond the US and Jamaica, have enjoyed unprecedented, and, for some, unexpected global success.[396] This success was arguably facilitated, but by no means guaranteed by

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[392] *Between Camps*, p. 178. See also his *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

[393] See Gilroy's discussion of the 'revolutionary conservatism' of hip hop in '"After the love has gone": Bio-politics and ethno-poetics in the black public sphere' in *Back to reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Angela McRobbie (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 83-115, p. 110.

[394] *Between Camps*, p. 178.

[395] *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xxi. Stolzhoff himself critiques this simplistic opposition between reggae and dancehall, noting that 'ironically, roots reggae had become something of an orthodoxy to these primarily white fans, and it blinded them to the larger musical culture'. p. xxi.

[396] See Gilroy, 'Bio-politics'.

technological advances such as the mp3 format and the internet. This has since led to the development of dancehall and hip hop cultures in a variety of social and cultural contexts associated with young people and youth culture all over the world.[397]

This chapter takes as its subject matter the impact and consequences of the global dissemination of black popular music in one particular context, that of the south-west Indian Ocean. More specifically, it aims to explore the cultural practices and symbolic meaning attached to these cultural products and practices amongst young people in Réunion, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may experience both racial and class-related discrimination and stigmatisation. In doing so, it aims to heed Gilroy's call to attend to the political and ethical ramifications of academic engagement with vernacular forms, and his pertinent reminder that even politically engaged criticism 'irrespective of [its] noblest motives – is revealed to be inadequate where it moves too swiftly and too simplistically to either condemn or celebrate'.[398] Though I offer a more optimistic interpretation than Gilroy's generally negative assessment of 'new' black musics, the following chapter aims to avoid uncritical celebration.[399] Its central argument is that the cultural and language politics of Réunionese dancehall music can be said to undermine two hypotheses put forward by Gilroy and others concerning the cultural politics of 'new' black musics: firstly, that they represent a total rupture with previous musical forms, and secondly, that this signals what Gilroy refers to as the 'decay' of the black public sphere, brought about by the musics' inability to articulate a critique of global capitalism. On the contrary, it will be suggested here that dancehall can be said to engage with pertinent issues regarding language politics in Réunion, and that it offers crucial alternative representational strategies for marginalised young people in Réunion. These arguably allow young people to assert their Creoleness/authenticity as Réunionnais at the same time as their participation in global modernity. Given that some young Mauritians would appear to engage with dancehall and other popular culture which consciously draws on global blackness in similar ways, a brief comparison will be made with the Mauritian context at the end of the chapter, though it must be remembered that socioeconomic, socio-political and linguistic specificities result in the prioritisation of different political issues.

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[397] See, amongst others, the collection of articles in *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, ed. by H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook (New York: Routledge 2009); Marvin Sterling, *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae, and Rastafari in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

[398] 'Bio-politics', p. 84.

[399] It should however be recognised that '"After the Love Has Gone"' and '"All About the Benjamins": Multicultural Blackness – Corporate, Commercial, and Oppositional' both offer a somewhat revised version of earlier arguments, in which Gilroy recognises the subversive potential of some elements of the 'new' musical expression. See *Between Camps*, pp. 177-206, and pp. 241-78.

Dancehall in Réunion

Despite having originated over 15,000km away in Jamaica, dancehall music has become a popular medium of cultural expression in the Indian Ocean French overseas department of Réunion. Young people especially appear to identify with dancehall songs written in the local vernacular, Réunionese Kreol (hereafter RK), in spite of the genre's foreign origins. It will be suggested here that this musical expression can be interpreted as a space in which the Kreol language's place within global modernity is rearticulated and reaffirmed. I will attempt to show that the language politics of Réunionese dancehall serve to combat the common consensus that RK is (temporally) backward- and (geographically) inward-looking. This is achieved in part through the juxtaposition of RK with English and Jamaican Creole English within popular dancehall songs. Therefore, though dancehall is generally considered as apolitical, the following analysis will seek to show that the music articulates a critique of dominant discourses in Réunion regarding language, prestige, and global modernity.

This chapter will attempt to delineate some aspects of the language politics of Réunionese dancehall as a popular music genre. In particular, I will explore acts of linguistic borrowing,[400] notably from Jamaican Creole English, and their possible signification. It will be suggested here that the inclusion of English in songs otherwise in RK could be interpreted as a means of challenging dominant discourses regarding the Kreol language. Dancehall music may be understood as a field within which social actors with limited symbolic capital attempt to articulate a sense of self and of community in and on their own terms, and thereby call into question harmonious images of racial *métissage* propagated within official discourses which can serve to obscure entrenched social inequalities. Though the fragments of English included in dancehall songs may be dismissed as insignificant, or as simply indicative of the pervasiveness of Anglophone catchphrases within global youth culture, I offer a different reading of these instances of borrowing. Through juxtaposing and combining RK with Jamaican Creole English, artists may attempt to benefit from the prestige of English as an international language and confer this prestige onto their own vernacular. Including fragments of English and Jamaican Creole English within their songs allows artists to assert themselves as cosmopolitan individuals within the global spheres of both youth culture and black culture. In this respect, the juxtaposition of the two languages can be said to function in a similar way to

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[400] I will not discuss here whether this phenomenon can be considered as an example of linguistic appropriation, though in reference to Jane H. Hill's work on the subject, Rudolf P. Gaudio suggests that non-Western centric forms of linguistic appropriation need not serve to delineate a normative field of 'White Public Space'. See Jane H. Hill, 'Language, Race, and White Public Space', *American Anthropologist*, 100: 3 (1998), 680-9, and Rudolf P. Gaudio, 'The Blackness of "Broken English"', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 21: 2 (2011), 230-46, pp. 230-1.

the inclusion of different varieties of English in Nigerian hip hop, in which artists 'draw on hip hop and (to varying degrees) African American English to signal their participation in what we might provisionally call a transnational Black public and/or a global hip hop "nation"'.[401] Additional parallels may be drawn to Mela Sarkar's assessment of Quebec hip hop and to Jennifer Roth-Gordon's analysis of young Brazilians' engagement with both US and Brazilian rap.[402] As Roth-Gordon explains,

> Hip Hop's connections to the racialized U.S. ghetto enable more marginalized youth to transcend national, economic, and linguistic boundaries and to tap into U.S. power and prestige. Conversational sampling and race trafficking thus offer Brazilian youth tangible ways to enhance their symbolic capital, accumulating First World prestige in the face of their increasing marginalization in Brazil.[403]

Dancehall can thus be said to promote an ethos of what we might call cosmopolitan blackness, and to therein offer alternative representational strategies to lower-class RK-speaking youth who experience racial and class-related discrimination and stigmatisation. It could however be argued that, by virtue of their creolised cultural heritage, the marginalised youth who identify with dancehall music are indeed already cosmopolitan, if we understand this to denote 'behaviours, values or dispositions manifesting a capacity to engage cultural multiplicity'.[404] Yet they are not recognised as such. Françoise Lionnet has unpacked the connotations of creolisation and cosmopolitanism, which she argues need not be considered as mutually exclusive and reveal our own prejudices instead, given that 'l'insulaire des régions antillaise ou mascarine, liéés à la notion de « créolité », est aussi forcément un cosmopolite.'[405] The cultural politics of dancehall are thus significant in that they offer an alternative way for Réunionese youth to envisage their participation in global modernity, which allows them to circumnavigate the implied model of Frenchness which is presented as the dominant mode of development and modernity in contemporary post-departmentalisation Réunion.[406]

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[401] Gaudio, p. 241.

[402] See Mela Sarkar, '"Still Reppin' Por Mi Gente": The Transformative Power of Language Mixing in Quebec Hip Hop' in *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, ed. by H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 139-57; and Jennifer Roth-Gordon, 'Conversational Sampling, Race Trafficking, and the Invocation of the *Gueto* in Brazilian Hip Hop' in *Global Linguistic Flows,* pp. 63-77.

[403] pp. 74-5.

[404] Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, 'Introduction' to *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, ed. by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-22, p. 1. Interestingly, in this brief outline of one of the meanings attributed to the term 'cosmopolitan', this is qualified as 'individual' behaviours, values and dispositions. This could be said to imply a Western-centric bias which thus prevents Creole/creolised societies from being recognised as cosmopolitan.

[405] Françoise Lionnet, *Le Su et l'incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien*, coll. *Essais et critiques littéraires* (La Pelouse, Trou d'Eau Douce, Mauritius: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012), p. 14.

[406] Vergès speaks of slippage between Frenchness, development, progress and whiteness in her formulation of the colonial family romance, which for her characterises the relationship between

However, it must also be acknowledged that the rise in popularity of Réunionese dancehall music over the past two decades is also commonly interpreted as signifying a complete break with the island's musical past.[407] This is experienced as a double rupture, because Réunionese dancehall not only breaks with common themes within postslave musics as articulated in black popular musical forms, such as the articulation of racial uplift, and the expression of soul through communion with the audience in live performance,[408] but it also appears to turn its back on Réunion's musical heritage and cultural traditions. In addition to the apparent privileging of technology within the production process, which would appear to rend traditional instruments obsolete, this new music is also marked by its foreignness because it self-identifies as a musical genre which originated in Jamaica. Dancehall music is thus criticised for both its aesthetic and political qualities. Moreover, local audiences may find it particularly controversial that the music appears to privilege the world outside the island, constructed within the Réunionese imaginary as the 'mond' déor', in opposition to the local, the 'mond' péï'.[409] This is particularly problematic when viewed in the context of a complex history of devaluation of local culture and cultural assimilation under French colonial and post-departmental rule. To confront this issue within popular music would seem to add further insult to injury, as popular musical expression has previously provided a space in which this cultural devaluation has been contested and, in some respects, successfully challenged: it should be remembered here that popular music played a significant role in the backlash to French cultural assimilation following departmentalisation.[410] Furthermore, as the

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Réunion and the metropole: 'With this fable, the French state aspired to substitute an ideal model of filiation for the historical colonial filiation. Colonial family romance invented *one* parent, the Mère-Patrie, and consequently sought to impose a process of identification that rejected the reality that each human being has *two* parents. Colonial family romance established a founding myth, the myth of the "unique root" against which Édouard Glissant has argued. The construction of an ideal parent associated with whiteness and Europe denied the dimension of race in the making of colonial identity. The fable gave France the means to console itself when colonized "children" would rebel and to repress the reasons for which they rejected her. It was their ingratitude, rather than her tyrannical "love," that explained their behaviour.' *Monsters,* pp. 4-5.

[407] The genre is sometimes also referred to as ragga or ragga dancehall.

[408] For a more detailed discussion see, for example, Gilroy's discussion in '"Jewels Brought Back from Bondage"' in *Black Atlantic*.

[409] From this perspective, what is significant is that the music originates from somewhere other than Réunion, rather than official national boundaries (which posit that Réunion forms part of France), or that Jamaica also has a colonial history or that it also belongs to the global south. For a discussion of the importance of the 'couple d'opposition « mond' pays/mond' dehors »' as a structuring principle in relation to the island's long and continuing history of immigration, see Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 112.

[410] See, amongst others, Monique Desroches and Guillaume Samson, 'La quête d'authenticité dans les musiques réunionnaises' in *Anthropologies de la Réunion,* ed. by Christian Ghasarian (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2002), pp. 201-18, pp. 211-4; and Carsten Wergin, 'T'shéga, Shéga, Séga…: Music, Identity and Creolisation on Réunion Island' in *Multiple Identities in Action: Mauritius and Some Antillean Parallelisms*, ed. by Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, Ralph Ludwig and Burkhard Schnepel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 255-74, p. 257.

ethnomusicologist Guillaume Samson has pointed out, dancehall would appear to refer to a different symbolic universe when compared with Réunionese genres such as maloya: '[p]orteurs tous deux de revendication et de contestations, le *maloya* et le *ragga dancehall* s'inscrivent de fait dans des univers de référence symbolique différenciés : le monde (rural) de la plantation (et l'ancestralité malgacho-africano-indienne qui y est encore associée dans les représentations collectives) pour l'un, l'identité créole urbaine pour l'autre.'[411]

Nevertheless, I wish to suggest here that we need to adopt a more nuanced approach to the cultural politics at play in these new musical forms, starting with a rejection of the assumption that such 'forms of consciousness are doomed by their unholy locations to remain forever merely pre-political'.[412] I believe that a closer look at dancehall music in Réunion and Mauritius shows us that the rupture framework outlined above is inadequate. Furthermore, it risks establishing a dichotomy between old, traditional, locally-based musical forms which represent progressive cultural politics, and new, technologically-enhanced, globalised and commercialised musical forms with 'bad', or reactionary cultural politics.[413] While binary oppositions are perhaps never suitable tools for analysis of complex cultural phenomena, I will also counter the rupture thesis with what appears to be a particularly contentious proposition: namely, that we can in fact identify forms of continuity with both the musical expressions of the subaltern population of Réunion, referred to here as 'traditional maloya' for practical purposes, and with the once-resistant music of the 1970s and 1980s, commonly termed 'electric maloya', some of which has now been co-opted by the mainstream to a certain extent.

I thus wish to move beyond binary vision in proposing that the rising popularity of dancehall music in Réunion – particularly, it would seem, amongst young people and the working class – can and should be taken seriously in academic analysis. I argue that this can be interpreted as reflecting an alternative cultural politics which is in some respects oppositional to dominant and official discourses on what constitutes 'Réunionness'. Though they may not always be automatically apparent or 'programmatically constituted'[414], dancehall's cultural politics challenges many persistent discourses about lower-class experience in Réunion, which often draw on nostalgic, romanticised, and exoticised representations of the ordinary people

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[411] Guillaume Samson, 'Appropriations, héritages et stratégies de légitimation musicale: *reggae* et *ragga dancehall* dans le champ culturel réunionnais' in *Musiques au monde: la tradition au prisme de la création*, ed. by Emmanuelle Olivier (Paris: Editions Delatour, 2012), pp. 177-200, pp. 177-8.
[412] Gilroy, 'Bio-politics', p. 84.
[413] A similar opposition is also hinted at in Gilroy 'Exer(or)cising Power: Black Bodies in the Black Public Sphere' in *Dance in the City*, ed. by Helen Thomas (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 21-34.
[414] Gilroy, 'Bio-politics', p. 84.

of Réunion, the Creoles.[415] The alternative conceptualisation of Réunionness formulated by dancehall artists challenges safe touristic representations of cultural difference expunged of their historical specificity. They thereby resist tendencies to essentialise this constructed sense of Réunionness as being defined by *Larényon lontan*, a nostalgic vision of Réunion's rural past.[416] In this respect, Réunionese dancehall can be said to begin to deconstruct the romanticisation of rural poverty which brackets the struggles of the urban and rurban unemployed and working poor, including a significant number of young people, whose presence serves as an awkward reminder to the Réunionese middle classes that post-departmentalisation social mobility has not succeeded in wholly upturning the racial hierarchy of the colonial era.[417]

This chapter also aims to explore aspects of engagement with what I will refer to here as globalised black popular culture from the perspective of young people in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Réunion and Mauritius, two island societies in the Western Indian Ocean. It will be suggested that images of blackness circulating in popular culture, and in particular those associated with dancehall, have facilitated the development of alternative representational strategies amongst lower-class youth in Réunion and Mauritius, which offer young people a different means of conceptualising racial difference in the local context. The chapter thus aims to develop a partially positive reading of interaction with 'globalised black culture' within two Indian Ocean contexts, despite the very valid criticisms of many black scholars who draw attention to the hypervisualised nature of these representations of blackness and the fact that black culture is heavily implicated in its own commodification.[418] Through their selective identification with these images, young people are able to draw on an association with First World modernity and cosmopolitanism in order assert their own participation in global modernity, which can in turn can be seen to mitigate experiences of racism and other forms of prejudice experienced in their respective societies. Identifying with

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[415] When used to describe individuals and popular groups, the term Creole has very different meanings in Réunion and Mauritius: here it is used to refer to anyone who is recognised as identifying with the island culturally or linguistically, regardless of ethnicity.

[416] For a critical discussion of the claims to authenticity which are activated with representations of *Larényon lontan*, the island's rural past, in the contexts of, respectively, contemporary village festivals in Réunion's mountainous interior, and contemporary regional tourism policy in Réunion, see Véronique Tréport, 'La fête, la tradition, outils de « réappropriation » du territoire des Hauts', in *Géographes et historiens dans la compréhension et la gouvernance des espaces et sociétés de l'Océan Indien: Actes du Grand séminaire de l'océan Indien, 29-30 octobre 2009, CREGUR-CRESOI, Université de La Réunion*, ed. by Jean-Michel Jauze and Yvan Combeau (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Université de La Réunion, 2010), pp. 21-30. See also David Picard, *Tourism, Magic and Modernity: Cultivating the Human Garden* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

[417] Youth unemployment rates can reach 70% in the worst affected areas of Réunion.

[418] See, amongst others, Gilroy *Between Camps* and *Darker than Blue*.

the prestige associated with US black celebrities and other 'super blacks' also offers young people a means to become 'culturally visible' from their globally peripheral location.[419]

I suggest that, in this respect, the cultural politics of Réunionese dancehall can be likened to Deborah A. Thomas' formulation of 'modern blackness' as an alternative, subaltern articulation of the nation in the Jamaican context.[420] She defines modern blackness as 'a subaltern aesthetic and politics from which to make claims upon the earlier forms of nationalism that gained state power in Jamaica [and as] a bracketed blackness that continually deconstructs the creole nationalist motto by calling attention to the relations of power that are often erased within the creole formulation.'[421] This be can used to theorise the intersectional nature of ethnicity and class, particularly in relation to the experience of blackness as subalternness which cannot however be reduced to class because subaltern status is also constructed in racialised terms.[422] The following analysis seeks to show that the juxtaposition of English with RK can be interpreted as a means of asserting the contemporaneity of RK and of associating it with an ethos of transnational aspiration. Secondly, it aims to outline important elements of the alternative representation strategies offered by Réunionese dancehall, namely; the articulation of an alternative conceptualisation of global modernity, ghetto fabulous eclecticism, and an eschewal of dominant notions of respectability and promotion of other forms of progress premised on an ideal of Frenchness. The latter two aspects can both be characterised as a continuation of the cultural politics of previous subaltern forms of Réunionese musical expression.

However, it must first be acknowledged that such claims are arguably problematised by the medium of expression itself, as dancehall is known to be an imported genre originating from outside Réunion. Therefore, given the importance attached to dancehall's 'foreignness', which would appear to undermine its very legitimacy in the Réunionese cultural sphere, I will begin with a discussion of questions of legitimacy and authenticity in the incorporation of Jamaican musical genres in Réunionese popular music.

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[419] Livio Sansone, 'The new blacks from Bahia: Local and global in Afro-Bahia, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 4 (1997), 457-93, p. 463; Paul Willis, 'Foot Soldiers of Modernity: The Dialectics of Cultural Consumption and the 21st-Century School', *Harvard Educational Review*, 73: 3 (2003), 390-415, pp. 404-5.

[420] *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[421] p. 13. In contrast to my own usage, Thomas' use of 'creole' here represents the culture and political interests of the Jamaican middle and ruling classes, who she distinguishes from the majority working-class black Jamaican population. See Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). For a discussion of the concepts of 'creole society' and creolisation in relation to social class in Jamaica, see O. Nigel Bolland, 'Creolization and Creole Societies' in *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, pp. 106-22.

[422] See Thomas.

From Jamaica to the Indian Ocean: Musical Legitimacy and Authenticity

The development of locally-produced dancehall music, inspired by the Jamaican genre but generally sung in the local language, RK, must arguably be situated in relation to the importation of its parent genre, Jamaican reggae.[423] Propelled by the iconic status of Bob Marley as the first Third World superstar, the international success of reggae may have been secured through the approval of majority white US and European markets, but it did not fail to reach had other postcolonial and/or peripheral spaces, including the islands of the western Indian Ocean.[424] Starting in the late 1970s, the media presence of reggae seems to have solicited an almost instantaneous identification from Réunionese musicians and listeners. As Samson explains, this identification was accompanied by a recognition and assertion that the genre's cultural politics mirrored those of Réunionese maloya, a folk music form created by slaves as a means of expressing their suffering, which was later taken up by the *Parti communiste réunionnais* from the late 1950s as a symbol of Réunionese cultural autonomy.[425] That the two genres were regarded as compatible, even interrelated, can be seen in the song titles of early *orchestres de bals* (recording and live performance groups) who incorporated reggae into their repertoire, such as 'Ça même reggay bourbon', and 'Reggay, ça meme maloya'.[426] For Samson, these titles convey 'la façon dont on était susceptible d'interpréter et de justifier cette adoption du reggae dans le cadre de l'identité musicale réunionnaise';[427] that is, as a foreign musical form which nonetheless made deep and pertinent appeals to the Réunionese social memory and sense of historical justice.

It should also be noted, however, that Réunionese musical identity itself was arguably undergoing significant changes in this period, as demonstrated by the evolution of what was to become maloya électrique, which combined elements of Réunionese folk music with the

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[423] Norman C. Stolzhoff proposes that, despite music critics' tendency to emphasise both political and aesthetic discontinuities, both the dancehall and reggae genres form part of a longer musical continuity reaching back to slavery: 'dancehall has been a space of cultural creation and performance since the slavery era, even though the name given to this constellation of oppositional practices has changed over time.' p. 3.

[424] For a discussion of reggae's white European and Euro-American fan base, see Mike Alleyne, 'White reggae: Cultural dilution in the record industry', *Popular Music and Society*, 24: 1 (2000), 15-30

[425] Carsten Wergin, 'T'shéga, Shéga, Séga', p. 257. For a more detailed discussion of maloya, see Guillaume Samson, Benjamin Lagarde, and Carpanin Marimoutou, *L'univers du maloya: histoire, ethnographie, littérature* (Sainte-Clotilde: Editions de la dynamique de recherche en ethnomusicologie de l'Océan Indien, 2008) ; and Carsten Wergin, *Kréol Blouz. Musikalische Inszenierungen von Identität und Kultur* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2010).

[426] See Les P'tits Piments, *Maloya_Reggay* (Disques Jackman, 1977), 45 record. Song titles cited in Samson, 'Appropriations', p. 181.

[427] 'Appropriations', p. 181.

instruments and techniques of modern global 'pop'. Samson suggests that it was this 'hybridised' form of electric maloya which was especially influenced by reggae and Rastafarian philosophy, which were seen to be congruent with maloya's politics of resistance and protest.[428] Created by groups of cultural militants, including poets and writers as well as musicians, maloya électrique was often self-consciously political in nature: 'leurs chansons avec des themes qui portent sur la langue créole, les rapports dominé-dominant, l'esclavage, les rapports à la France […] ne sont orientés que vers un but celui de "tirer maloy dan' zie Créoles" qui signifie "ouvrir les yeux des Réunionnais"'.[429] That said, its passionate call to the masses to react against the French government's policy of cultural assimilation was sometimes criticised for its paternalistic and jingoistic overtones. Nonetheless, this constituted a significant development in terms of Réunionese musical production: as Samson points out, maloya électrique also served to bring maloya into the mainstream and to the attention of cultural industries and the media at a time when record production was dominated by sega.[430] The incorporation of reggae into Réunionese pop music could thus be viewed as an extension of the experimentation with musical fusions in the electric maloya era, which echoed and perhaps responded to the West's musical markets' growing fascination with world music. This would appear to be supported by the fact that some electric maloya groups, including Bastèr, also produced reggae tracks.[431] It also occurred in dialogue with the popular musics of the region, notably the development of Mauritian seggae, a fusion of sega and reggae, and in particular the success of Kaya, which in turn inspired Réunionese fusion groups producing seggae and malogué, terms used to refer to fusion genres combining, respectively, sega and reggae and maloya and reggae.[432]

The identification with the alternative worldview articulated by reggae music thus appears to have played a significant role in the development of Réunionese popular music at

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[428] 'Appropriations', p. 181.

[429] Lucette Labache, 'La question de l'ethnicité à l'île de la Réunion: vers un melting-pot?' Unpublished PhD thesis, (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1996), p. 114. Labache also reminds us that songs with this type of lyrical content were often censured prior to the commencement of François Mitterrand's presidency in 1981.

[430] 'Appropriations', p. 182, p. 181. For an account how sega was incorporated within mainstream pop music from the 1930s onwards, in contrast to maloya which was seen to be incompatible with modernity, see Desroches and Samson, pp. 203-7.

[431] See, for example, the cover of 'Redemption Song' included on Bastèr, *Raskok* (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Discorama, 2001). For an analysis of Bastèr's music, including Bob Marley covers, see Carsten Wergin, 'World Music: a medium for unity and difference?' Paper presented to the *EASA Media Anthropology e-Seminar*, 22-29 May 2007, <http://media-anthropology.net/>, [Accessed 18th September 2014].

[432] Kaya's albums include *Zistwar Revoltan* (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Discorama, 1996), and *Best of Kaya: Seggae Experience* (Curepipe, Mauritius: Meli Melo Music, 1998). Unfortunately it is difficult to obtain CDs of his albums, despite the continued popularity of his music, although many songs can be found online on video-sharing websites. Naéssayé are the group most often associated with the launch of the malogué genre in the early 1990s, a collection of their most popular songs can be found on the album *Le meilleur de Naéssayé* (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Discorama, 1999).

the end of the twentieth century, and yet, because of its foreignness, the appropriation of reggae risked undermining the very legitimacy and authenticity of artists claiming to represent local popular culture. Choosing reggae or dancehall as a means of musical expression would seem to imply a problematic privileging of the non-local over the local, of the world outside the island, 'déor', over the local 'péï'.[433] Samson identifies an additional problem as regards dancehall's claims to legitimacy: non-Réunionese musical genres are measured against standards set by musicians and performances outside of the local context, which may prompt the assumption that Réunionese dancehall is automatically inferior to Jamaican music.[434] In response, certain strategies may be used to legitimise the position of foreign musical forms within the Réunionese cultural sphere, including the invocation of a shared history of slavery and racial violence which is thought to mitigate the 'foreignness' of Jamaican musical forms: '[l]'objectif poursuivi est ici la justification d'une ressemblance et d'une sorte de fraternité jamaïco-réunionnaise, qui est censée « autoriser » l'appropriation musicale.'[435] Nonetheless, with the emergence of dancehall in the 1990s as the popularity of reggae and reggae fusion appeared to be in decline,[436] Réunionese musicians may have distanced themselves from criteria which automatically positions their musical output as lesser imitations. In addition, dancehall music would appear to promote a less dogmatic approach to Rastafarian philosophy, which could be said to further reduce the pressure on Réunionese musicians to adhere to foreign standards of authenticity. As a locally produced form of music which draws on a foreign genre, Réunionese dancehall would seem to reveal a creative tension produced by conflicting desires. Dancehall appears to express a celebration of Réunionese specificity which aims towards greater visibility, whilst simultaneously situating the latter in relation to a global context. This tension may itself be consciously exploited by some artists. It will be suggested here that this tension may be negotiated through Réunionese dancehall's re-articulation of the relationship between the RK language, and by extension, Réunionness, and notions of global modernity.

It would thus seem that the opposition between tradition and modernity also needs to be problematised within considerations of musical legitimacy in Réunionese popular music.[437] We might consider here the problematic way in which local musical genres, and in particular 'traditional' maloya, can be repositioned as belonging to Réunion's past even within processes of valorisation which aim to promote these previously marginalised forms of cultural

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[433] Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 112.
[434] 'Appropriations', p. 180.
[435] Samson, 'Appropriations', p. 180.
[436] Samson, 'Appropriations', p. 186.
[437] See Desroches and Samson, p. 214.

expression.[438] Maloya's authenticity is thus partially reliant on being associated with a particular, often romanticised vision of Réunion's past. Yet, as was outlined in the introduction, the various changes brought about through departmentalisation and the global economy at the end of the twentieth century have irrevocably changed the Réunionese social landscape. Fixing Réunionese musical authenticity in the past would thus seem to preclude the possibility of representing contemporary experience whilst producing music which can be recognised as legitimately Réunionese. Conversely, it problematically conceptualises modernity as inherently at odds with authentic 'Réunionness.'[439] The presumption of a binary opposition between modernity and Réunionness or Creoleness (inclusive of the RK language) even appears to be implied within Samson's own analysis: he suggests that '[d]epuis les années 1930, le *séga* fait figure de musique à la fois moderne (par son orchestration notamment) et créole (par la langue).'[440] Describing the music as both modern and creole arguably reinforces the opposition established between the two and thereby precludes the possibility of a creole modernity.

I therefore suggest that, because of the powerful challenge they present to the presumed antagonism between modernity and Creoleness, the cultural politics of Réunionese dancehall cannot be dismissed as insignificant, despite the genre's highly fragmentary inclusion of English and Jamaican Creole English terms, and despite its foregrounding of apparently apolitical central themes such as sex and violence.[441] Instead of focusing on legitimacy and authenticity in the terms outlined above, I thus suggest that the different musical fusions and 'adoption' of foreign musical genres can instead be interepreted as a strategy which is selectively employed in order to better represent the post-departmentalisation social landscape. In the following section of this chapter, I will consider the consequences of this specifically in relation to language.

Language Politics in Réunionese Dancehall: Alternative Modernities

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[438] This dynamic could be applied to the process of applying for intangible cultural heritage status to UNESCO, gained in 2009. See Guillaume Samson and Carlos Sandroni, 'The Recognition of Brazilian samba de roda and Reunion maloya as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, 10:1(2013), 530-51.

[439] This can be seen in popular discourses concerning the RK language, which is often evoked as being in the process of losing its defining qualities. When I would discuss my interest in Creole language politics with friends and acquaintances in Réunion, it was often explained to me 'le vrai créole est en traîn de se perdre', rather than being in a process of evolution.

[440] 'Appropriations', p. 179. The séga is another genre of Réunionese folk music, often seen as musically more European and politically less contestational than maloya.

[441] It would seem that aggression is most often evoked by means of onomatopoeia and other lyrical play, sometimes with the addition of sound effects such as gun shots: one obvious example of this can be seen in 'Klak klak klak pow' by Kaf Malbar featuring Delta, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ssRj3cW-Yk>, [Accessed 30th April 2014].

It could be argued that the deployment of RK alone within this urban music genre, often in an informal register which may be influenced by contemporary youth slang, serves to counter the assumption that the language ultimately does not belongs to the present moment, which thus positions the RK language as not only ante-modern but also anti-modern. It can thus be said to counter the injustice of this assumption on behalf of the majority of the Réunionese population, for whom the Kreol language forms very much an important part of the present because it is the medium of everyday interaction. Moreover, the language of dancehall can be seen to contrast with the more poetic variant of RK used by some electric maloya musicians, exemplified in the compositions of Gilbert Pounia of the group Ziskakan and Danyèl Waro.[442] Their experimentation with RK as a means of expression included neologisms presented as alternatives to French loan words, and made a conscious effort to revive terms which had since fallen out of general usage. This reflected a cultural politics which countered the dominant discourse of the time, and sought to prove that the RK language could be considered equal to French, *la langue noble*.[443] In contrast, the language used in dancehall music appears to aim not to change or innovate but to reflect everyday language usage, and that of young people in particular, to emphasise its 'real' belonging to the contemporary era. Hence French may be included alongside RK, and there is no attempt to excavate words from the past if they are no longer relevant to contemporary experience.

Nonetheless, it is proposed here that it is through acts of linguistic borrowing from English (whether standard or Jamaican Creole English) that Réunionese dancehall asserts the compatibility of the RK language with global modernity. This proves a stark exception to the rule that the language used attempts to reflect contemporary usage. Indeed, it would appear a somewhat paradoxical strategy given that lower-class fans of the music are unlikely to have even a working knowledge of English, having been perhaps marginalised within the education system early on for not demonstrating sufficient mastery of the French language. Yet the continued popularity of the genre would appear to suggest that the inclusion of unfamiliar English lexical items has not been detrimental to young people's sense of identification with the music. I therefore suggest that the inclusion of fragments of English can be understood as indicative of the transnational outlook of Réunionese dancehall. This aspect of Réunionese dancehall's language politics can arguably be compared with Thomas's formulation of 'modern blackness' in the contemporary Jamaican context, a term she uses to refer to an alternative and oppositional cultural politics which situates itself in opposition to Creole nationalism in

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[442] See Carpanin Marimoutou's analysis in 'Oralité et Ecriture. Les chansons créoles de Danyel Waro et de Ziskakan' in *Formes-Sens/Identité*, ed. by Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou and Daniel Baggioni (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Université de la Réunion, 1989) pp. 151-64.
[443] See A. Gauvin.

Jamaica. As an alternative cultural politics which Thomas argues proves particularly resonant amongst the Jamaican lower classes, modern blackness is 'unapologetically presentist and decidedly mobile' and it 'challenges the past-tenseness of "folk" blackness'.[444] Moreover, '[t]he modernity of modern blackness, therefore, is […] decidedly self-conscious and transnational, a modernity both constituted by and constitutive of an acute awareness of local-global relationships – politically, economically, socio-culturally, and racially.'[445] Whilst Reunionese dancehall music might not always appear to overtly foreground racial issues, in contrast to modern blackness's conscious engagement with questions of race, the characteristics outlined above may arguably also be applied to the language politics of Réunionese dancehall.

It would also appear significant that, through the inclusion of a perceptibly Jamaican Creole-inflected variant of English, dancehall artists appear to evoke minor transnational connections with the global south, however fleeting this connection may appear, bound as it is within lexical fragments.[446] During my fieldwork in Réunion in 2013, in a conversation about which Réunionese artists were popular with young people with members of Titan Maloyèr, a maloya percussion group, I explained that when I first heard the song 'Ou lé sir gyal' by New Generation I didn't understand the word 'gyal' as being Jamaican Creole English, given that the rest of the song's lyrics are in RK.[447] One of the members of the group then explained to me, 'ici à La Réunion on dit pas "girl", on dit "gyal"'. This would seem to indicate not only the prevalence of certain Jamaican Creole English-inflected lexical items within the sphere of popular culture in Réunion, but also that my interlocutor was both aware of the difference in pronunciation between the two varieties of English, and that it was logical for him that, when faced with a choice between the two, young Réunionese like himself should adopt the Jamaican Creole rather than what is perceived to be a more standard English pronunciation. It would thus appear that the 'fraternité jamaïco-réunionnaise' alluded to by some Réunionese musicians and cultural actors as a legitimating strategy is also being consciously drawn on by young people within their own everyday constructions of social identity.

At this point, it is perhaps worth considering some short extracts of dancehall lyrics in further detail. All of the extracts discussed below contain instances of linguistic borrowing from Jamaican Creole English and/or English, which is juxtaposed with RK, the predominant language of expression. The following extracts are taken from popular songs by established dancehall artists. Kaf Malbar (David Damartin), a dancehall musician from Le Chaudron, a disadvantaged neighbourhood to the east of Saint-Denis, is thought to be one of the pioneers

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[444] Thomas, p. 13.
[445] Thomas, p. 228.
[446] See Lionnet and Shih.
[447] The song's title can be translated as '[if] you are sure, girl'. Released 2012. Music video and song available here, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBe5BTMsrLI> [Accessed 30th April 2014].

of the genre. Previously known as KM David, his stage name refers to his creolised heritage, which includes both *Kaf* (Afro-Malagasy) and *Malbar* (Tamil) elements. In a song entitled 'Kaniar ting', Kaf Malbar chooses to use the Jamaican Creole-inflected 'ting', rather than standard English 'thing', in his representation of the 'kaniar' experience. 'Kaniar' is a derogative term usually applied to urban male youth, roughly equivalent to the French term *racaille*. It would seem that in its focus on this specifically Réunionese lexical item, the song makes a conscious attempt to reappropriate the term 'kaniar', and to cast those labelled as such in a more positive light. The first verse appears to give an account of Kaf Malbar's understanding of the song's principal subject, the 'kaniar' experience:

> Kaniar ting c plis rasta plis golden plis good senorita
> Plis burn dem donc babylone i maille pa
> Si li pass la boom faya basta
> Plis goodness kan i s'agit de conscience-ness
> Kaniar pli burn dem i natty play
> Rasta faya burn dem i natty play
> C'est ça i apel Kaniar ting ![448]

The song thus appears to provide an unusually complex example of code-switching in R dancehall: it is atypical in that English is included in verses and not only in the song's refrain as most often appears to be the case. The seemingly eclectic choice of vocabulary in this extract can be seen to vary between RK, French, Jamaican Creole English, and lexical items specific to Rastafari philosophy, such as 'babylone'. We might also note the use of the RK present tense marker, 'i', within sentences which are otherwise in Jamaican Creole English. It is true that the verse succeeds in conveying some ideas about what it means to be a true 'kaniar': namely, that it involves, firstly, being a 'rasta', better understood here as a 'rude boy' rather than a strict adherent of Rastafarian religious and philosophical principles; secondly, being able to attract 'good senorita' (members of the opposite sex, from a presumed masculine perspective); and thirdly, being prepared to act ('burn dem') in the face of perceived threats from the forces of Babylon because 'babylone i maille pa', ('Babylon doesn't mess about'). However, the lyrical content of the verse can but appear fractured under the weight of the sheer level of linguistic borrowing in this verse. The resultant message to the listener may simply be that, if you are a true 'kaniar', you will understand this particular expression of 'kaniar' experience on an instinctive level. This would also appear to be suggested by the repetition of 'kaniar ting' in the song's refrain, which offers no further explanation as to what constitutes archetypal 'kaniar' experience. In this respect, the song can be seen to relate to a

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[448] A subtitled version of 'Kaniar ting' (which could be translated as '[It's a] Rudeboy Thing') can be found here, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0lQnDM0h_w>, [Accessed 30th April 2014].

simultaneous dynamic of inclusion, signified by the creation of a community of belonging amongst 'kaniar', and distinction/exclusion (of those who are not 'kaniar'). This characteristic is described by Samson as 'très significati[ve] du movement ragga et Réunionese dancehall.'[449]

Samson also identifies a similar dynamic at work in the lyrics of Malkijah (Marie Klore), the only prominent female artist within the dancehall genre in Réunion. As he observes, the inclusion/distinction dynamic can also lead to the articulation of 'une pluralité d'appartenances identitaires',[450] as can be seen in Malkijah's evocation of her Parisian childhood alongside her Réunionese heritage, and the role of Rasta and dancehall culture in her decision to return to Réunion in 'Come Back Again' on the album *Eruption*.[451] The lyrics are mostly in (standard) French, but Malkijah peppers this with vocabulary specific to both the Réunionese and Jamaican/Rastafarian contexts. We might also note the use of English in the song's refrain:

> Come back a back a back a back a back again
> Malkijah arrive avec des lyrics qui dégainent

Here it would seem that the inclusion of English forms part of a form of lyrical play, in which the repeated sound of 'a back' appears to almost simulate machine gun-fire. This could be interpreted as a powerful assertion of Malkijah's presence on the Réunionese dancehall music scene: a message which is targeted towards a predominantly Réunionese audience which, paradoxically, is thus achieved through the inclusion of English vocabulary.

In addition, Malkijah's recent hit 'Partage' also makes significant use of English in its refrain:

> Partage massif put your hands up,
> Toute la communauté put your hands up,
> Ce son lé spécialement pou zot[452]

This song would also appear to address a community of RK-speaking listeners: this is also implied by the fact that its verses are primarily in RK. Nonetheless, the refrain features a mixture of both French and RK, along with the English phrase 'put your hands up', a common expression in globalised commercial pop music. Due to the positioning of this phrase, there is a partial rhyme which links the English 'put your hands up' to the RK 'pou zot', 'for you (pl.)', which directly addresses the community of listeners. This association of the two lyrical

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[449] 'Appropriations', p. 191.
[450] 'Appropriations', p. 191.
[451] (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Discorama, 2008).
[452] Released 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p6T717bAn4>, [Accessed 30th April 2014].

elements through rhyme could indeed be interpreted as encapsulating the language politics of Réunionese dancehall. In linking together the international prestige of English with the RK language and its community of speakers, dancehall lyrics such as the examples discussed above can be said to counter the assumption that RK cannot form part of a global modernity.

The language politics of dancehall discussed here can thus be seen to be specific to the Réunionese context: it would seem that the symbolic inclusion of English phrases and lexical items would not create the same effect in Mauritian 'new' black musics, given that English is the language of education and thus the language is closer to young people's everyday lived experience. However, in the following part of this chapter, we will see that the significance of alternative representational strategies which can be developed through engagement with dancehall arguably also applies to the Mauritian context. Indeed, the appropriation and incorporation of 'new' black musical forms such as dancehall, rap and hip-hop can be said to offer alternative strategies to Mauritian youth in a similar way. Through identifying with this music, rather than, say commercial sega or other forms of music recognised as indigenous Mauritian creations, it would seem that young people can identify with globalised black popular culture in order to differentiate themselves from both the white population and an ethnically diverse middle class population. As Mauritian artist Tony Farla, 'Soul T' has commented as regards choosing behind his anglicised stage name:

> quand tu es jeune, c'est le rêve de tout Black de vouloir vivre le rêve américain. Je sais que les Rastamans parlent, eux, de retourner en Afrique, mais il faut être réaliste. Entre le continent noir, aujourd'hui, et ce que représente l'Amérique, comme technologies et facilités, le choix est évident. Et quand tu vois le train de vie des rappeurs, cela a de quoi fasciner.[453]

The alternative representational strategies offered by 'new' black musics in Mauritius then can be interpreted as particularly significant, as it offers young Mauritians who are ascribed an ethnic identity as 'Creoles' an alternative means of conceptualising African descent without recourse to crude models which reduce Creole to African, as per the auto-ethnicisation tendency encouraged by official discourse and propagated within the Mauritian government's approach to arts and culture discussed in Chapter 2. They can therefore be said to offer a more nuanced formulation of black identity which speaks to the experiences of young Mauritian's life world better than the ancestral model. In order to give a sense of how vital these representational strategies might be for some young people as concerns contesting existing

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[453] Sedley Assonne, 'Tendance musicale. Assistons-nous à une américanisation de notre folklore ?', *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 3 (2003), 87-9, p. 88.

discourses in race and ethnicity, I will now consider two exchanges which appear to hint at new, alternative formulations of blackness and/or subalternity.

'Je vais me faire un peu plus *black*': Young People's Construction of Blackness in Mauritius and Réunion

It would seem that dancehall might offer young people positive alternative conceptualisations of black Creole or Kaf identity, which, it would seem, are developed through interaction with globalised black culture, including popular music and related audio-visual forms such as music video clips which have become increasingly accessible through television and the internet. The rise in popularity of dancehall music in both Réunion and Mauritius would appear to point towards a tendency for young people to identify with these alternative images of blackness which may be especially prominent amongst those who experience social marginalisation. We will now consider in more detail two brief exchanges from my fieldwork which both seem to demonstrate changes in the social meanings associated with blackness, dark skin colour and the history of slavery. These may tell us something about young people's un/changing perceptions of race in relation to social mobility, most notably in relation to positive assertions of blackness which appear to draw inspiration from images circulating within globalised black popular culture. However, we must be wary of uncritical celebration, as the following accounts would also appear to reveal the persistence of racial stereotypes. Furthermore, as the second exchange makes clear, there are also alarmingly persistent notions of stigma attached to blackness and the history of slavery, which nonetheless forms part of the national histories of Mauritius and France.

The first exchange occurred during my first experience of the social life of Mauritian middle-class youth, at a nightclub with a 20-something Mauritian female friend and a mixed group of her friends, in terms of both gender and ethnicity. This provided me with the initial trigger to think critically about whether globalised black popular culture might be said to have an impact on young Mauritians' conceptualisations of race. At the end of the night, some of her friends asked whether we would go out with them again the following evening. When I politely declined, one of them, feigning defensiveness, turned to me and said: 'it's because I'm Chinese isn't it?' He then continued his joke by saying, 'OK, well tomorrow I'll try to get a tan, I'm gonna make myself a bit more black', presumably so as to make the prospect of spending the evening with him more attractive. Although we were speaking in French, he used the English term 'black' rather than 'noir', and most significantly he didn't say 'Creole', the term commonly used to refer to black people in Mauritius. His choice of language would thus

appear to evoke images of blackness in globalised popular culture. Without wanting to read too much into this humorous account of the social meanings attached to ethnicity, the joke here seems to point to the 'cultural capital' of blackness in a certain contexts, most notably those associated with popular culture, youth, and 'being cool'. In this respect, the joke could be seen to indicate a reversal of common assumptions regarding the correlation between race/ethnicity and social status in the Mauritian context, where Sino-Mauritians are associated with high socioeconomic status and business, but black 'Creoles' are assumed to be poor and uneducated. We could therefore ask whether, in this instance, the symbolic capital of blackness 'trumps' actual financial or social capital?

However, we can also identify several problematic aspects within this apparent postmodern valorisation of blackness. Firstly, the idea that an ethnically marked 'Chinese Mauritian' who nonetheless benefits from the positive values attached to lighter skin colour could feasibly 'become black' suggests an extreme level of malleability and hybridity. This could be said to present a 'watered-down' conceptualisation of blackness which privileges the mixed-race individual, thereby disassociating darker-skinned representations of blackness from this positive imagery of 'black cool'. The joke also evokes problematic stereotypes of black masculinity, in that it appears to play on an assumption that a 'black' or mixed-race man would be more attractive to me, as a white woman, than a 'Chinese' Sino-Mauritian. Perhaps most importantly, this revalorisation of black identity within the context of young people's lived experience in Mauritius is not necessarily incompatible with the expression of prejudices towards lower-class black Creole individuals. Ironically, I later discovered that these same 'middle-class' young Mauritians who seemed to want to emulate 'black cool' on some level, also made a point of avoiding the particular nightclub which was known as a hangout for 'real' Black people, that is, working-class Creoles.

The following year, during my fieldwork in Réunion, another chance conversation seemed to confirm the idea that young people's identification with positive and assertive images of 'postmodern' black identity within popular culture are not always accompanied by a change in mentalities in other respects. Whilst catching up on work at the library one Wednesday afternoon, I bumped into Kevin,[454] one of the boys who attended after school sessions at a local social centre where I volunteered. To give his sisters who were looking after him a break, I came to sit with him in the children's section, where he chose a book to read to me. We then flicked through some of the other books, and I noticed a French translation of a book recounting the story of an escaped slave, 'Henry and the freedom box', which immediately caught my attention. On seeing the front cover, Kevin exclaimed 'That boy is as

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[454] Names have been altered to protect the identity of participants.

black as coal!', as if he was purposefully trying to be provocative. The fact that he was speaking in French rather than Kreol also suggests that the comment wasn't a natural reaction. I suggested that we read it together, but Kevin didn't seem as interested as I was in the story of Henry's escape from slavery. But he then surprised me: he interrupted my telling of the story to ask 'what does 'slave' mean?' Before I had time to explain, however, he interrupted me again, saying, 'but in any case', pausing with dramatic flair, and putting on my sunglasses for additional show, 'that doesn't interest me because I'm a star – with your sunglasses I'm a star!'

Needless to say, Kevin's skin colour is in fact quite similar to that of the boy on the front cover. Again, I wouldn't want to read too much into the comments of a nine year-old boy, which it seems were intended to be somewhat theatrical and partially inspired by a lack of interest in the book. But I couldn't help but think that his comments seemed to reflect a desire to differentiate and separate his own subjectivity and identity from what is perceived as the humiliation of the history of slavery. This may be further complicated by his own particular social situation: as a child of Mahorais origin (with family from the French overseas department of Mayotte), he is the victim of discrimination in Réunion, where Mahorais and Comorian populations marked amongst other things by darker than average skin colour experience prejudices similar to those confronted by North African immigrants in France. The Kreol term *Komor*, which doesn't differentiate between legal Mahorais migrants and potentially undocumented immigrants from the Comoros Islands, was used in a disparaging manner by several of the other children at the social centre during my time there. Given his own experiences of life in a working class town in Réunion, therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that for Kevin, 'stardom' – whether real or imagined – is seen as an ideal means to avoid or mitigate racial and other forms of stigmatisation, or at least provide a form of temporary escape. The remainder of this chapter will consider how the popular music genre of dancehall might be said to engage with both the ethos of 'black cool' disseminated through globalised black culture, and the lived reality of lower-class youth in Réunion and Mauritius.

Alternative Representation Strategies: Ghetto Fabulous Eclecticism

Réunionese dancehall can thus be seen to form part of a wider set of popular cultural practices which promulgate which I will term here ghetto fabulous eclectic self-representational strategies. This conceptualisation offers a new perspective on cultural practices and representational strategies apparent amongst young people and music artists in Réunion which might otherwise be dismissed as a lack of real investment in marginal subcultures in favour of a superficial identification with internationally circulated images of

'black cool'. My use of the term 'ghetto fabulous' refers to representation styles which may appear crass and exaggeratedly populist; and 'eclectic' refers to the fact that there seems to be no, or very few, limits to what may be appropriated by Réunionese youth culture within these representational styles. In parallel to the fashions of the early hip hop stars, who took the logos of what were deemed fashionable designer brands by an affluent middle class, and altered the size or appearance so that became grotesque and offensive to middle-class taste; Réunionese ghetto fabulous eclecticism selectively appropriates familiar images of 'black cool' and cultural references to other marginalised 'ethnic' cultures, and combines and juxtaposes the sometime clashing or contradictory signs, creating new meanings in the process.

For example, the fragmented use of Jamaican English discussed above can be identified as an indicative of a ghetto fabulous eclectic aesthetics. This can also be combined with what may seem to be fragmented, token or superficial references to other marginal or subordinated cultures. Yet in spite of its apparent triviality, I posit that ghetto fabulous eclecticism makes an important political point, as it involves a tacit recognition that even within marginal youth cultures, there are always processes of domination and oppression at play, and that contradictions necessarily arise when cultural movements expand from the margins and become commodified by the popular culture industry. A further example of ghetto fabulous eclecticism in Réunionese youth culture can be found in creative appeals to the colour symbolism of red, green, and gold. Over the course of the twentieth century, these colours have come to symbolise African resistance to European colonial domination through their association with the Ethiopian flag and Pan-African movements, and have in turn played a crucial role in the visual codification of Jamaican Rastafari and associated cultural forms such as reggae within global popular culture. However, it would seem that in Réunion, the colour symbolism is now used to express a form of defiance that appears to have been somewhat detached from both Rastafari philosophy and resistance to European colonialism. This defiance may still articulate a form of cultural opposition, but unlike Rastafari philosophy or Pan-Africanism as a political philosophy, it does so by rejecting what might be termed respectability politics, a set of values that have been devised by the dominant system. Thomas gives the following outline of the construction of respectability in the context of postindependence Jamaica:

> By selecting certain cultural practices (those of the postemancipation rural peasantry) and excluding other (those of the rapidly growing urban unemployed), the cultural policy adopted at Jamaica's independence reflected a vision of cultural 'progress' and 'development' that prioritized 'respectability.' Respectability, here, is a value complex emphasizing the cultivation of education, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency via land ownership, moderate Christian living, community uplift, the constitution of family

through legal marriage and related gendered expectations, and leadership by the educated middle classes.[455]

In the Réunionese context, the presence of red, white, and blue (the colours of the French flag) within official contexts may be said to serve as a visual cue for Réunionese respectability politics. Within the sphere of popular culture, then, the combination of red, green, and gold arguably constitutes a marginalised, but nonetheless potentially subversive, alternative tricolor. This can be seen, for example, in local fashion trends such as t-shirts which present RK expressions such as 'ma pa la ek sa' ('I don't give a shit') in extra large, bold print in a combination of red, green, and yellow. Here, the visual referencing of colours symbolising both Pan-African and Rastafarian counter-cultural movements would appear to lend greater legitimacy to the generalised rejection of societal expectations expressed by the slogan itself. At the same time, however, the choice of language (a particularly informal variety of RK) would appear to express a specifically Réunionese form of cultural opposition.

Dancehall's oppositionality to respectability politics in the Réunionese context will now be explored further within a consideration of how the genre might be said to relate to the notion of cultural militantism. Cultural militantism, a concept often associated with reactions to French cultural policy in the post-departmental era, is commonly conceptualised as a fight for the recognition and valorisation of Réunionese cultural specificity – a fight which dancehall is accused of having given up on.[456] It will be proposed here that Réunionese dancehall music may be considered in terms of continuity with previous oppositional subaltern musical forms, a controversial argument which thus counters the notion that dancehall constitutes as break or rupture with previous musical culture.

Continuities with Subaltern Musical Expression: Respectability and Militantism

In its aggressive propagation of a marginal youth culture, dancehall clearly engages with the politics of respectability. I suggest that in this respect it can be seen as an example of what Paul Gilroy has termed (in reference to Leroi Jones) as the 'changing same'. Multiple aspects of dancehall music, such as its some graphic language, its use of onomatopoeia, notably in replicating the sounds of violent aggression, and its flamboyant representations of sexuality, all work together to simultaneously disgust and captivate bourgeois viewers. This could parallel the ways that early maloya performances may have both repulsed and intrigued

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[455] pp. 5-6.
[456] For an brief overview of this period, see pp. 36-7 of this study.

the land-owning classes of colonial Réunion, which allowed them to assert their cultural superiority.

Furthermore, Réunionese dancehall rejects the assumed link between respectability politics and progress by not only situating Kreol languages and cultural elements firmly within modernity, but also by promoting an alternative view of progress. This can be seen in the common evoked notion of 'militer' in dancehall music, meaning to fight or struggle against an oppressive social structure. The notion of 'cultural struggle' as expressed in the term 'militantisme culturel' is firmly established in the Réunionese cultural sphere; however, this established meaning is more likely to associated with the overtly political electric maloya music of the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, the constant pumping rhythm of dancehall, and reoccurring lyrical motifs such as 'baisse pa les bras', 'tienbo, larg pa' ('hold on, don't let go') would appear to betray an 'obstinate and consistent commitment to the idea of a better future'.[457]

Nevertheless, it must also be acknowledged that the notion of 'militer' as a cultural struggle has been reconceptualised within dancehall music: it appears to function on a symbolic level, with artistes recasting themselves 'soldats' who are prepared to fight on behalf of Réunion, although it is rarely clear who or what constitutes their enemy.[458] However, the predominance of violent gestures in dancehall videos would seem to suggest that the concept of a cultural struggle or 'fight' is understood here in a more literal sense. Nonetheless, the depiction of violence occurs on a mainly symbolic level, such as through mimicking gun shooting actions, and through the effects of onomatopoeia in dancehall lyrics.[459] Yet, though artists would appear to be simply mimicking US or Jamaican gun crime, which is not a widespread feature of life in the most disadvantaged areas of Réunion), it could also be said that artists themselves may see this as a legitimate way of representing the violence of everyday life, remembering that the history of La Réunion is to a great extent premised on violence.

Thus, although it does so through problematic and reductive tropes which associate Réunionese lower-class masculine experience with violence, dancehall arguably makes visible a marginalised sector of the population. In this way, it can be considered to continue the fight instigated by the *militants culturels* of the electric maloya era, but through an adapted aesthetic which is adopted to better address the contemporary context.

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[457] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, p. 35.

[458] Performance names often reflect this tendency: such as Soldat Rolian, and Soldat Tatane of the group New Generation. Malkijah has also referenced the more conventional elements of the soldier/army leader trope in several music videos.

[459] Kaf Malbar featuring Delta, 'Klak klak klak pow', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ssRj3cW-Yk>, [Accessed 30th April 2014].

Ethnographic Research: Further Preliminary Signs of Continuity

After having conducted ethnographic research with young people who form part of the 'neo-traditional' music groups, I am led to conclude that for many of the young people I worked with, both 'traditional' and 'modern', acoustic and electric, and 'indigenous' and 'exogenous' musical forms all form part of their musical universe, without this being experienced as contradictory. Young people may switch between one form and another in the same musical performance: a rehearsal of 'maloya' percussion may lead to a jamming session with 'traditional' instruments but vocals in a 'toasting' style similar to that of Jamaican dancehall DJs. Furthermore, it should also be recognised that there have also been attempts to combine elements of dancehall with neo-traditional maloya, such as by the group El Diablo and in the cross-over hit 'Fo nou tienbo' by the maloya group Lindigo featuring New Generation.[460]

Thus, individuals who are involved in groups who perform neo-traditional maloya do not necessarily see any contradiction in the fact that the music they perform in the group and the music they listen to at home 's'inscrivent de fait dans des univers de référence symbolique différenciés : le monde (rural) de la plantation (et l'ancestralité malgacho-africano-indienne qui y est encore associée dans les représentations collectives) pour l'un, l'identité créole urbaine pour l'autre.'[461] This is not to say that they are not aware of stylistic and musical differences: indeed, some of the young people involved in these groups were skilled musicians with a keen awareness of musical and rhythmic difference. However, their propensity to blend 'traditional' with 'new' musical forms would appear to suggest that the common themes of the music are considered ultimately more significant. These, it would seem, include the idea of *défouler*, of dancing, playing, or singing away one's troubles, and of music shared by a community. However, the young person's community may be linked by technology rather than actual physical presence, thus forming a community of listeners through radio, the internet, the nightclub or the party.

This is not to say that dancehall music is musically most similar to traditional maloya or the neo-traditional reincarnation of it which is performed today. What is being suggested here is that dancehall and traditional maloya can be said to have similar social functions in their respective contexts, and it is these functions which may be subconsciously picked up on by young people engaging with popular music in Réunion. The fact that today, traditional maloya is now more likely to be fused with dancehall-like elements perhaps shows that the formerly

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[460] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vN69GBzue-U>, [Accessed 30th April 2014].
[461] Samson, pp. 177-8.

popular electric maloya holds no significant political meaning for young people today, which might suggest that the majority of fans of electric maloya are now middle class as well as middle aged.

Conclusion

As has been established here, the cultural and language politics of Réunionese dancehall warrant our attention in spite of the music's apparently apolitical nature. I have attempted to demonstrate that dancehall artists and fans can be considered to participate in a process of rearticulation of their position, and that of their native language, RK, within global modernity. In this respect, they can be seen to challenge dominant discourses in which a fundamental opposition is presumed between Creoleness and modernity. To disavow the existence of RK and creole culture within the context of global modernity would appear to serve the purposes of the 'créolophobes' who would like Kreol to 'fade away' and 'die out' quietly, without causing much of a fuss. The practice of juxtaposing dancehall lyrics in RK with Jamaican English, English, and even French lexical items can thus be interpreted as a political act, even if the lyrics in themselves have no overt political content: namely, that the RK language, culture, and those people who identify with it are here and firmly part of the global present. It asserts that RK and its speakers are not a part of a romanticised anachronistic rural past, but part of the urban, post-industrial present.

In addition, I have also argued dancehall's engagement with images of blackness circulating in globalised black popular culture can be seen to offer young people in Réunion alternative self-representational strategies, in a way that might be compared to Thomas' formulation of 'modern blackness'.[462] This chapter has sought to demonstrate how the cultural politics of Réunionese dancehall outline alternative conceptualisations of modernity through practices of ghetto fabulous eclecticism, through its eschewal of respectability politics, and its struggle for other alternative forms of progress as defined by the ethos of *militantisme culturel*. Dancehall thus invites Réunionese youth to stand up for themselves and to be proud of their subaltern cultural heritage, which would seem to undermine the idea that authentic Réunionese culture is irrefutably corrupted. It also would appear to encourage young people in both Réunion and Mauritius to take advantage of economic opportunities presented to them. It also provide those who are marginalised within the education system and the employment market with an alternative source of self-esteem; namely, Creole cosmopolitanism and ghetto fabulous eclecticism.

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[462] See pp. 12-3.

To summarise, it is suggested here that interaction with globalised black culture offers crucial resources, whilst persistent forms of stigmatisation linking black skin to slavery remain. Nonetheless, the practice of drawing on contemporary cultural practices of other postslave societies, notably Jamaica in the musical sphere has proved vital in creating new hybrid cultural forms which challenge locally-situated reified notions of race and ethnicity. In the following section of this thesis, I will further examine popular culture's engagement with discourses on race and cultural difference. Chapter 4 will consider the role of popular music in particular of disseminating a form of Mauritian cultural nationalism whose proponents nonetheless wish to characterise the movement itself as inclusive and progressive.

Part III: Pop Music, Young People, and the Politics of Belonging

4. *Morisyen avan tou*? Morisyenism, Cultural Nationalism and the Representation of Community in the Music of Tritonik

In September 2011, a month before I travelled to Mauritius to begin fieldwork, I found out that a social media group called 'Wanted: 15,000 Youngsters to Save Our Future'[463] was generating attention. The group's founders aimed to mobilise Mauritian youth for a large-scale demonstration on September 10th 2011, which called for political and social change.[464] As the movement gained the attention of the press, some journalists drew parallels with the Arab Spring protests which had taken place earlier in the year, implying a form of transnational political continuity made possible by new technology, in particular internet-based social media.[465] However, the ideology espoused by the group, which attracted over 20,000 members, was later summed up by the founders as 'the Mauritianism thematic'.[466] The objectives of the demonstration were outlined in a 20-point manifesto, which included both specific requests, including the establishment of a minimum wage of over Rs8000 per month (approximately €210), and more abstract goals such as putting an end to divisive cultural politics and creating a more just and inclusive economy. [467] The movement thus appeared to combine demands for radical political change in favour of greater social and economic equality with nationalist rhetoric.

This and other pan-nationalist movements in 2011-2012 undoubtedly reflected to some extent the atmosphere of global protest created by international media coverage of the protests movements such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement. Indeed, Time magazine named 2011 as 'Year of the Protester'. Nonetheless, these seemingly new forms of Mauritian nationalism remain grounded within the specificities of Mauritian politics and

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[463] 'WANTED: 15,000 Youngsters to Save OUR Future!', <http://www.facebook.com/groups/azirmaurice/> [Accessed 29th June 2012]. The 'Wanted' movement has since been renamed as 'Azir Moris' ('Act Mauritius').

[464] In relation to Mauritius' total population of 1.2 million, 15,000 is a significant number.

[465] 'La création de ce groupe a été certainement inspirée par les initiateurs du printemps arabe. Un mouvement qui a déjà touché pas moins de cinq pays de l'hémisphère nord. Maurice sera-t-il le premier pays du sud à importer ce mouvement d'agitation qui est en train de transformer le nord de l'Afrique et le Moyen Orient ?' Jean-Yves Chavrimootoo, 'Mobilisation sur Facebook: 15 000 jeunes Mauriciens prêts à descendre dans la rue', *L'Express*, 2nd September 2011, <http://www.lexpress.mu/story/28428-mobilisation-sur-facebook-15-000-jeunes-mauriciens-prets-a-descendre-dans-la-rue.html#comment> [Accessed 29th June 2012]. It should be noted, however, that unlike their Arab Spring counterparts, the movement did not call for a complete overhaul of the current political system.

[466] 'We started as a Facebook Group page which initially rallied a record of 21k members in less than a month around the Mauritianism thematic.' <http://azirmoris.com/azir/who-we-are/> [Accessed 29th June 2012].

[467] Noor A. Essack, 'Seki nou le/What we are calling for/Ce que nous voulons', published in *Le Mauricien*, 30th August 2011, <http://www.lemauricien.com/article/manifeste-%E2%80%98wanted-%E2%80%93-15000%E2%80%A6%E2%80%99> [Accessed 29th June 2012].

society, given that they themselves are constructed in opposition to communalism and dominant conceptualisations of the nation which foreground the separateness of distinct ethnoreligious groups. In the Mauritian context, the term communalism is used to refer to 'les formes de regroupement et d'entraide reposant sur des bases ethniques et religieuses', and is used to denounce what are perceived as unethical practices in the political sphere.[468] However, though all mainstream political parties condemn the practice, it is not theoretically incompatible with dominant discourses which envisage the nation as being essentially composed of ethnoreligious groups, rather than individual citizens.[469] Thomas Hylland Eriksen therefore suggests that political actors tend to adopt a pragmatic, if contradictory approach: '[a]s a rule, symbolic expressions of ethnicity are encouraged by Mauritian politicians, while communalism is overtly discouraged but widely practised.'[470]

This chapter aims to situate recent expressions of Mauritian nationalism in relation to both Mauritian political history since independence and to academic engagement with nationalism as a political, social and cultural phenomenon. Drawing on the concept of cultural nationalism as formulated by John Hutchinson and others, I will analyse the recent first album of the group Tritonik, which I suggest here may be understood as indicative of a cultural nationalist undercurrent which has accompanied the recent renewed interest in political nationalism in Mauritian politics and the wider society. Hutchinson has argued that, despite a growing awareness of the importance of national identity to the modern state, academic analysis has thus far focused on political nationalism,[471] without giving sufficient consideration to 'cultural nationalism as a movement distinct from that of political nationalism concerned with the identity and regeneration of the national community'.[472] The study of expressions of cultural nationalism has therefore been formulated as an attempt 'to widen the scope to include not only socio-political manifestations, but also such factors as the images of the nation in the media, or the myths of the national that exist in the popular imagination', informed by the observation that 'much of the power of nationalism is bound up in activities that lack strict definitions'.[473]

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[468] C. Gabriel, 'Communalisme, structures sociales et dépendance économique à l'île Maurice', *Politique Africaine*, 10 (1983), 97-112, p. 98. Catherine Boudet, 'L'émergence de la démocratie consociative à Maurice (1948-1968)', *Annuaire des Pays de l'Océan Indien* 17 (2003), 325-33, p. 325.

[469] See Patrick Eisenlohr, *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2006), p. 5.

[470] *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-Building, and Compromise in Mauritius* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1998), p. 14.

[471] *Dynamics*, p. 8

[472] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 45: 3 (1999), 392-407, p. 392.

[473] Stuart Murray, 'Introduction' to *Not on any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*, ed. by Stuart Murray (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 1-18, p. 3.

In the following analysis, it will be argued that recent expressions of Mauritian nationalism, which will be referred to here as morisyenism, or 'Mauritianism', cannot be fully understood within the framework of political nationalism, and that, in accordance with Hutchinson's plea, we would do well to consider cultural nationalism as a distinct movement within recent formulations of morisyenism. My point here is not that morisyenism cannot be considered as a political movement. This is clearly evidenced in the articulation of specific demands, central amongst which is the abolition of the requirement for electoral candidates to declare which 'community' they belong to out of the four officially recognised Mauritian communities, as is currently required by the Mauritian Constitution.[474] I am however suggesting that the political movements which characterise themselves as nationalist or *morisyenist* have also been accompanied by what we might describe as a cultural nationalist movement which appeals to a more abstract set of ideals and a politico-cultural mentality. It is perhaps this more abstract expression of morisyenism which has gathered wider support, especially amongst young people in Mauritius. It has also arguably served to open up debate regarding both the question of national belonging, and of social marginalisation and inequality.

As explained above, cultural nationalism assumes the existence of a national community, a concept which sits uneasily with the official recognition of sub-national ethnic and religious communities in the Mauritian context. However, drawing on Partha Chatterjee's analysis of anticolonial nationalism, I will suggest here that tensions created through the interplay of different conceptualisations of the nation must in fact be understood as central to expressions of morisyenism.[475] This will be supported by analysis of the Mauritian popular music artists Tritonik's recent album *Project One*,[476] which I read as an expression of cultural nationalism. This should be understood as complementary to but ultimately distinct from recent political nationalist movements, though it should be recognised that the group has also showed open support for morisyenist social protest.[477] Various songs on the album can be seen to invoke the notion of a national community as the basis for development and improvement, and draw upon the figure of the artist as a cultural renovator. However, it is also significant that their representation of the national community also foregrounds the issue of

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[474] The Constitution, First Schedule Section 31 (2), Article 3 'Communities', <http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=38c54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#first>, [Accessed 23rd May 2014].

[475] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), in particular 'Communities and the Nation', pp. 220-40.

[476] (Rose-Hill, Mauritius: Jorez Box, 2012).

[477] At a concert to mark their album launch a few weeks prior to the protest 'Vers enn nouvo repiblik' ('Towards a New Republic') which took place on 10th March 2012, singer Eric Triton said that he would be present amongst demonstrators and encouraged audience members to participate. He is also included in a list of named participators on the social media page used to organise the protest, <https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/349975511713500/>, [Accessed 27th May 2014].

social class, and is based in and articulated through popular cultural expression: consequently, it does not conform to the objectives of previous cultural nationalist movements which aimed to develop a new national high culture.[478] In this respect, Tritonik's representations of the national community can be said to represent marginalised experience which provides an alternative narrative to that of the Mauritian success story of economic development and political stability which has become dominant since the 1980s.[479]

Morisyenism: A 'New' and Progressive Nationalism?

The prominence of the rhetoric of youth and renewal within recent protest movements, as well as the deployment of social media sites as means of political mobilisation, would appear to suggest that these expressions of morisyenism represent a new form of nationalism. However, it must also be recognised that calls for national unity have previously been deployed within Mauritian politics as a response to what is perceived as the divisive nature of communalism. In this respect, the expressions of morisyenism in the protests of 2011 and 2012 arguably form part of a longer history of opposition to communalism which can be traced back to the establishment of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* political party (MMM), founded in 1969 by Paul Bérenger, Dev Virahsawmy and Suresh Moorba, amongst others.[480] Like the social actors involved in more recent protests, the MMM of the late 1960s and 1970s saw morisyenism as a means to encourage national unity and thereby protect citizens from the negative consequences of communalism, 'qui représente, pour le M.M.M., un obstacle très sérieux au développement de la collectivité, et ceci dans tous les domaines.'[481] Furthermore, they regarded national unity as essential to achieving 'true decolonisation', which was not considered to have been obtained at the time of official independence, granted

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[478] See John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

[479] For an example of this type of academic representations of Mauritius see Larry W. Bowman, *Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean* (San Francisco: Westview Press; London: Dartmouth, 1991).

[480] The political legacy to movements of the period directly following independence, including the early MMM, is consciously acknowledged by the 'Wanted' group: see their 'Reconstruisons le Mauricianisme', (2011), <http://www.fichier-pdf.fr/2011/09/14/reconstruisons-le-mauricianisme/reconstruisons-le-mauricianisme.pdf> [Accessed 13th August 2014], p. 11 of 14. At the time of writing, Paul Bérenger is still active in politics, and is the current leader of the MMM. Dev Virahsawmy is no longer a member of the party, he is now better known as a writer, playwright, and advocate of the Creole language. Pierre Livet and André Oraison argue that the group were strongly influenced by the events of May 1968 in France. 'Le Mouvement Militant Mauricien' in *L'Ile Maurice: sociale, économique et politique (1974-1980). Extraits de l'Annuaire des Pays de l'Océan Indien* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1984), pp. 91-142, pp. 94-5.

[481] Livet and Oraison, p. 97.

in 1968, as only national unity could form the basis of 'une réelle démocratie économique et sociale, correspondante à l'avènement d'un nouveau socialisme typiquement mauricien.'[482]

Thus, contrary to common perceptions of nationalism as being inherently linked to conservative values and regressive social programs, morisyenism was constructed as both anti-imperialist and progressive in diametrical opposition to communalism, which was seen as a threat to national progress and conducive to neo-imperial economic policies. Drawing on interview research with individuals who self-identified as anti-communalist, Jean-Claude Lau Thi Keng explains that from the perspective of the anti-communalists, 'on trouve une association ou identification du capitalisme au communalisme d'un côté, et du socialisme au mauricianisme d'un autre côté.'[483] This stems from the perception that communalism served to divide the working class, whereas morisyenism was seen as a way of uniting the workers to act together in order to bring about socialist reform. This sentiment arguably inspired one of the MMM's campaign slogans, 'Lalit de klas pa lalit de ras', which advocates class war as preferential to conflict between different ethnic communities. Furthermore, in the late 1960s, the MMM were able to associate their nationalist critique of communalism to a critique of the increasingly unpopular political establishment. In the period directly preceding independence, the negotiations which took place between the Parti Travailliste (PT), the party of the Hindu majority, and the Parti Mauricien Social Democrat (PMSD), which represented the interests of the economically dominant Franco-Mauritian minority, appeared to confirm a lack of continuity between the interests of the political elites and those of the communities they were supposed to represent:

> Cette décision d'alliance par le haut sans concertation avec les bases politiques a pour effet d'opérer une rupture entre les élites politiques et le peuple mauricien [...] Dans ce système consociatif émergent, tout se passe comme si les élites avaient plus d'intérêts en commun avec les élites des autres groupes qu'envers les autres membres de leur propre groupe.[484]

Communalism was thus understood as a practice which ultimately could be harnessed to benefit primarily the political elites, who drew their legitimacy from their position as representatives of the island's different communities but in reality were out of touch with 'their' community's views. For the MMM, this embodied the worst consequences of communalism, as a 'pratique politique consistant à accentuer les divisions entre les

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[482] Livet and Oraison, p. 97.
[483] Lau Thi Keng, p.105.
[484] Boudet, p. 333, referring to B. Lehembre, *L'Ile Maurice* (Paris: Karthala, 1984), pp. 166-7.

communautés et à manipuler ces divisions pour en retirer des avantages de classe ou politiques'.[485]

However, despite the enormous popular support for the party during the elections of 1976 and 1982, where in coalition with the *Parti Socialiste Mauricien* (PSM) they obtained all 62 seats in the Legislative Assembly, the MMM encountered numerous difficulties in the realm of practical politics. These included several ideological fractures resulting in the departure of different factions within the party, and their vision of a united Mauritian culture ultimately resulted in political defeat, as was demonstrated in the failure to institute MK as a national language in 1983 and their subsequent electoral defeat.[486] Many, like Eriksen, consider the MMM to have renounced their anti-communalist ideals following their near defeat in the 1976 elections in favour of political pragmatism: 'the MMM Politburo, now interpreting the situation in ethnic terms (admitting the pragmatic validity of a model of society as divided along ethnic lines), realised the need for a wider alliance before the 1982 election', resulting in an alliance 'with a small populist Hindu party with a sound rural base [the PSM]'.[487] However, more recent formulations of morisyenism have also fallen prey to criticisms and accusations of lacking integrity. We might therefore ask to what extent morisyenism is tenable as a political position which associates nationalism with socialism, progressive political policies, anti-imperialism, and which recognises the existence of ethnic diversity within Mauritius but which vehemently rejects any form of social division along ethnic lines.

As concerns recent formulations of morisyenism, it must be first be recognised that these have not proved entirely incompatible with the dominant neoliberal capitalist narrative. For example, communalism may be represented as 'backwards' in such a way that can imply superior social status. This is commonly expressed in the pejorative expression 'ti lespri', ('small-minded'), which is used to describe individuals whose actions are seen to be communalist. The act of calling someone 'ti lespri' may thus also be interpreted as not only a way of asserting the superiority of one political position and ideology over another (morisyenism over communalism), but also as implying a superior social status through implied cultural capital. This would seem to complicate the association with morisyenism with a political stance which is sympathetic to, and claims to be representative of, the working class. Secondly, if expanded to encompass all expressions of patriotic pride, we can see that popular

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[485] Mouvement Militant Mauricien, *Pour une Ile Maurice possible* (Port Louis, Mauritius: Mouvement Militant Mauricien, 1970), p. 34, cited in Livet and Oraison, p. 98.

[486] For a discussion of the politics of language behind the reactions to the singing of the national anthem in MK during Independence Day celebrations in 1983, see Eisenlohr, 'Creole Publics'.

[487] Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 68. For an overview of the development of the MMM's political policies, see Malenn D. Oodiah, *MMM: 20 ans d'histoire* (Rose-Hill, Mauritius: 1989). No publisher stated.

consumerism pervades aspects of morisyenism. For example, in the lead up the Independence Day in March 2012, there was a noticeable trend for buying small Mauritian flags designed to be attached to cars as a way of demonstrating popular nationalist sentiment. It would also seem that Mauritian businesses did not fail to take advantage of the popularity of nationalist sentiment: local supermarkets advertised 'prix mauricien!' and made extensive use of the Mauritian flag in displays in order to promote products as '100% mauricien'.[488]

Finally, despite the apparent popularity of popular expressions of nationalism, it must also be recognised that many local commentators have voiced their concern as regards its supposedly progressive aspects and its ability to challenge the communalist practices within Mauritian politics. These include Catherine Boudet, the leftist political group Lalit, and journalists who point to the dangers of distinguishing between 'true' Mauritians and others: for this reason, they tend to denounce morisyenism as simply 'another form of communalism.'[489]

We might therefore question to what extent morisyenism can be understood as a progressive form of nationalism, given that in some contexts it seems to have been reduced to a marketing strategy which relies on a vague notion of national belonging. I suggest that it is helpful here to operate the distinction between political and cultural nationalism. In contrast to political nationalism, cultural nationalism 'is not always directed to the state [in that its] goal is the defence and activation of the historical community'.[490] Lau Thi Keng maintains those who identify politically as anti-communalists, far from rejecting the existence of separate ethnic communities in Mauritius, consider the ethnic or religious community as the locus of an emotive and 'natural' form of belonging. Communalism is thus understood as the result of a natural tendency to look out for 'one's own'; whereas, in contrast, anti-communalism is conceptualised as a rational form of politics which resists this tendency.[491] According to the anti-communalist logic, therefore, the nation does not in any way constitute a 'natural' community, but is rather 'made up of all those who, whatever their cultural origin or "way of being", collectively decide to assert (or re-assert) the right of self-determination'.[492] Expressions of political nationalism thus appear to tend towards a Jacobin understanding of the nation as comprised of rational individuals for whom there is 'no logical connection

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[488] Paper presented by Yannick Jeanne, summarised in 'Rapor Konferans Lalit Lor Stratezi: Kritik Kont Nasysonalism & Morisyanism', *Revi Lalit deklas*, 104 (2012), p. 5 <http://www.lalitmauritius.org/resources/documents/194-Magazine_revi_lalit_number_104_(creole_version).pdf>, [Accessed 23rd May 2014].

[489] Aanas Ruhomaully, 'Le mauricianisme est un communalisme' L'Express 12th March 2012, <http://www.lexpress.mu/idee/le-mauricianisme-est-un-communalisme>, [Accessed 23rd May 2014].

[490] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', p. 398.

[491] Lau Thi Keng, p. 104.

[492] Hallward, p. 127.

between the body of citizens of a territorial state and the identification of a "nation" on ethnic, linguistic or other grounds'.[493] This approach could be interpreted as a successful negotiation between nationalism as political philosophy and the social reality of ethnic diversity in Mauritius, in that it allows for recognition of different ethnic and religious communities whilst simultaneously asserting that the nation-state operates within 'a zone of pure politics' which cultural, religious, racial and ethnic difference are erased because their presence would 'only pollute and corrupt the rational processes of the state'.[494]

However, the attempt to do away with the notion of community or to prove its irrelevance to the modern nation state arguably comes into difficulty. Chatterjee suggests that this reassertion of universal categories can be problematic in a context of opposition to colonialism and imperialism. He observes that, for example, 'when the secular historian asserts that although medieval rulers may often have acted to inflict damage upon the institutions or followers of a rival religion, there was nothing "religious" about this – it was all "politics" – the claim also empties the domain of politics of that culturally rooted sense of moral solidarity that the same historian would need to uphold when talking, for instance of the struggle of the "nation" against colonial rule'.[495] It would seem that this 'culturally rooted sense of moral solidarity' is inextricably linked to the concept of a national community. An additional consequence of the outright rejection of the national community is that political nationalism arguably does not challenge the dominant narrative of capital which, according to Chatterjee, 'seeks to suppress that other narrative of community and produce in the course of its journey both the normalized individual and the modern regime of disciplinary power.'[496] As a direct result of this, the Jacobin understanding of the nation limits the potential of political nationalism to form a critique of imperialism, given that the 'moment of capital' was central to the universalisation of European history, and its narrative 'turn[ed] the violence of mercantilist trade, war, genocide, conquest and colonialism into a story of universal progress, development, modernization, and freedom.'[497] This would thus appear to problematise the construction of Mauritian political nationalism as both progressive and as anti-imperialist.

In contrast, cultural nationalism posits the existence of a national community, rather than simply a collection of like-minded rational individuals. It is precisely this assertion of a 'natural' national community which has been interpreted as indicative of the conservative and reactionary nature of cultural nationalist movements and yet, as Susanna Rabow-Edling

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[493] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* 2nd ed. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 19.
[494] Chatterjee, p. 226.
[495] Chatterjee, p. 226.
[496] p. 234.
[497] Chatterjee, p. 235.

observes, cultural nationalism's concern with the idea of regeneration of the national community is seen as providing an impetus for social change.[498] In this way, cultural nationalism can be seen to avoid the pitfalls of the Jacobin, purely political conceptualisation of the nation state, which do not resist the narrative of capital which, moreover, was used historically to justify European colonialism. We might therefore draw a parallel here between the concept of cultural nationalism and Chatterjee's analysis of anticolonial nationalism, in that he posits that anticolonial nationalisms 'construct their national identities within a different narrative, that of the community [as t]hey do not have the option of doing this within the domain of bourgeois civil-social institutions'.[499] Before applying the concept of cultural nationalism to the representation of community in the musical production of Mauritian music artists, it is perhaps helpful here to consider Chatterjee's arguments in more detail, particularly as concerns how the concept of anticolonial nationalism, which he discusses in relation to colonial and postcolonial Indian history, might be applied to the Mauritian context.

Senses of Community within Anticolonial Nationalisms and the Postcolonial Nation-State

As has been recognised by Chatterjee and others, nationalism was seen to play an important role in the liberation movements of the twentieth century which called for a definitive end to imperial rule. However, subsequent academic engagement with postcolonial cultures and societies has tended to remain ambivalent or even hostile towards nationalism due to the 'recognition that, despite the pre-colonial existence of the non-Western *natio* based on concepts of ethnic community, a predominantly *European* model of evolution has been employed whenever an ex-colony, often in a context of anti-colonial politics, has wished to assert its own identity.'[500] Indeed, it has been suggested that the postcolonial states which were created from former colonies serve as exemplary cases of Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as 'imagined community', given the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious make-up of many of such states.[501] As a multiethnic former colony with no aboriginal population, Mauritius appears as a case in point. Building upon this observation, the social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen advocates recognition of the 'extremely modern' nature of the Mauritian nation: he suggests that 'the idea that the nation is a human invention

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[498] *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 102, p. 101. See also Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism,* p. 8, p. 16.
[499] p. 237.
[500] Murray, p. 7.
[501] See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of* Nationalism, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

[…] is a trivial fact to virtually all the citizens of [this] society, [who] know that their nationhood must be defined, created and recreated by themselves.'[502] Such an understanding of the nation would thus appear thoroughly at odds with the presumption of a natural, prior-existing national community advocated by cultural nationalists.[503]

However, Chatterjee's formulation of anticolonial nationalism has challenged the application of Anderson's thesis of the modularity of the nation to colonial and postcolonial contexts, arguing that the situation in which anti-colonial nationalism developed renders them irreducible to the Andersonian model. Chatterjee highlights one particular point of tension specific to anticolonial nationalisms, which he argues were already beginning to be formulated during the period of colonial rule. This was made possible by a theoretical separation of 'inner' and 'outer' realms, whereby anticolonial nationalism could assert legitimacy in the inner realm of spirituality and culture even when the colonial administration exerted total control over the 'outer' material realm.[504] However, after gaining independence, '[i]ronically, it became the historical task of nationalism, which insisted on its own marks and cultural difference with the West, to demand that there be no rule of difference in the domain of the state.' The postcolonial nation-state drew heavily on liberal-democratic state ideology, operating around the division between public and private realms.[505] Chatterjee argues that is here that the postcolonial leadership encounters an underlying contradiction within the project of postcolonial nation building:

> the moral-intellectual leadership of the nationalist elite operated in a field constituted by a very different set of distinctions – those between the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, the essential and the inessential. That contested field over which nationalism had proclaimed its sovereignty and where it had imagined its true community was neither coextensive with nor coincidental to the field constituted by the public/private distinction. In the former field, the hegemonic project of nationalism could hardly make the distinctions of language, religion, caste, or class a matter of indifference to itself. The project was that of cultural "normalization," like, as Anderson suggests, bourgeois hegemonic projects everywhere, but with the all-important difference that it had to choose its site of autonomy from a position of subordination to a colonial regime that had on its side the most universalist justificatory resources produced by post-Enlightenment social thought. [506]

Thus, according to Chatterjee, the postcolonial state is met with not only the inadequacies of the public/private distinction as a means of structuring political life, but also with the problem

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[502] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Formal and Informal Nationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16: 1 (1993), 1-25, p. 3.
[503] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', p. 398, note 23.
[504] Chatterjee, p. 6.
[505] Chatterjee, p. 10.
[506] Chatterjee, pp. 10-1.

of asserting its independence from the colonial regime. As a result, the progression from anticolonial nationalist movement within the colonial state to independent postcolonial state requires a rhetorical and conceptual switch, from emphasising difference from the colonisers to asserting of theoretical equality and a certain level of cultural homogeneity amongst all members of the new state. At this point, the relevance of his arguments to the Mauritian context may not appear immediately obvious. As a pluriethnic postcolonial state, the Mauritian state formerly recognises the legitimacy of separate ethnoreligious communities in its Constitution. In this respect, then, 'essential' difference amongst members of the new postcolonial state thus also forms part of the new imagined national community. Furthermore, in stark contrast to contemporary Indian history, in Mauritius independence was negotiated and ultimately decided upon by means of a democratic vote, and was preceded by neither violent uprising nor a concerted popular movement for independence.[507]

Nevertheless, the Mauritian state can also be seen to have encountered the same contradiction as outlined above, in that the process of official nation building has drawn upon the same Western liberal and democratic ideology which Chatterjee refers to when he suggests that processes of the modern state have become embedded in contemporary Indian history.[508] This is generally expressed in the form of a tension between a desire for proportional representation of different communities, and the assumption of the rational individual in political decision-making processes. One example of this can be recognised in the 'best-loser' system, conceptualised as a correction to improve proportional representation under the Westminster system which Mauritius inherited from Britain at independence. The system allocates eight additional seats in the National Assembly to the most successful unelected candidates after elections have taken place in order to ensure a fairer representation of each officially recognised 'community'.[509] Indeed, the concern with proportional representation for the island's communities and minorities can be traced back to the period prior to independence: '[w]hen Mauritius was divided into forty single-member constituencies by the Electoral Boundaries Commission of 1958, one of the main considerations was to "provide an adequate opportunity for all the main sections of opinion in Mauritius to elect their representatives to the Legislative Council in numbers broadly corresponding to their own weight in the community."'[510] Nonetheless, in language evoking

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[507] 44% of those voting in the 1967 independence referendum voted against independence. For further discussion see, for example, Lau Thi Keng, p. 19.

[508] Chatterjee, p. 227.

[509] See *The Constitution – Revised Laws 1981*, vol. 1, pp. 55-7, reproduced in Lau Thi Keng, pp. 152-9.

[510] *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1958* (Port Louis, Mauritius: The Government Printer, 1958), p. 4. Cited in Burton Benedict, *Mauritius: The Problems of a Plural Society* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1965), p. 62.

the liberal notion of the rational individual acting in self-interest, the same Commission was also concerned 'that the system of voting should be such as to facilitate the development of voting on grounds of political principle and party rather than on race and religion'.[511] The tension between recognition of internal difference and liberal and democratic ideology continues to shape contemporary Mauritian politics. This is indicated by the contradiction that voting on an ethnic basis is not overtly encouraged by any political party, and yet the practice can be seen to inform all major parties' policies and campaigns: 'tous les grands partis politiques mauriciens se proclament désormais – à partir de 1965 environ – nationaux et anti-communalistes, bien que, d'une part, leurs pratiques soient souvent déterminées par des considérations communales et que, d'autre part, il existe une espèce de reconnaissance officieuse de chaque communauté dans un parti politique précis.'[512]

We can thus see that an attempt to balance and negotiate between two different conceptualisations of the nation, one based on Western liberal democratic ideology, and another based on the colonial categories of community, has shaped the development of Mauritian politics since the period prior to independence. It is perhaps helpful at this point to consider in further detail Chatterjee's analysis of the consequences of colonial rule, and of the role of the postcolonial nation-state in relation to changing formulations of the notion of community. Drawing on the work of Sudipta Kaviraj, Chatterjee proposes that colonisation led to a significant transformation of the understanding of community in the Indian context, which involved 'the impoverishment of the earlier "fuzzy" sense of community and an insistence upon the identification of community in the "enumerable" sense':

> Earlier, communities were fuzzy, in the sense that, first, a community did not claim to represent or exhaust all the layers of selfhood of its members, and second, the community, though definable with precision for all practical purposes of social interaction, did not require its members to how ask many of them there were in the world. The colonial regime […] sought to fashion the conceptual instruments of its control over an alien population precisely by enumerating the diverse communities that, in the colonial imagination, constituted the society over which it had been destined by History to rule.[513]

Again, this would not seem to apply to the Mauritian context, where we cannot speak of a pre-colonial 'fuzzy' sense of community because permanent settlement on the island did not predate colonisation. However, what would appear significant here is that there have been important changes and discrepancies between what were decided upon by colonial

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[511] *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1958*, p. 4. Cited in Benedict, p. 63.
[512] Lau Thi Keng, p. 58.
[513] Chatterjee, p. 223, referring to 'The Imaginary Institution of India' in *Subaltern Studies VII*, ed. by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 1-39.

administrators as relevant ethnic categories over the course of Mauritian colonial history.[514] As Lau Thi Keng maintains, 'on est contraint de considérer la structuration actuelle comme un point précis dans l'évolution générale des systèmes classificatoires n'impliquant aucune transhistoricité des groups eux-mêmes.'[515] Daniella Police-Michel has also demonstrated that the term 'Creole', used today to refer to Mauritians of African and mixed descent, has been applied to almost all ethnic and racial groups in Mauritius over its colonial history.[516] Therefore, even 'enumerated' communities are shown to be unstable over the *longue durée* of Mauritian colonial history. We might also question whether the 'community' divisions which were deemed significant by colonial administrators were accepted as such by those so categorised: Eriksen suggests that, even today, for the poorest in Mauritian society poverty is more pertinent as a social marker than ethnic or religious group, resulting in less concern for endogamy and the maintenance of group boundaries.[517]

It thus seems plausible that 'fuzzier' conceptualisations of community have existed in Mauritius alongside the 'enumerated' communities which the colonial state used to legitimise its control and which arguably continue to perform a similar function within the postcolonial state and its institutions. We might consider here the various meanings attached to the word 'nasyon' as used within in MK, which might refer to ethnicity, race, or caste dependent on the context in which the term is used. Much more rarely, the term is used as its English or French equivalents to signify nationality or nation, as in the MMM campaign slogan 'enn sel lepep, enn sel nasyon' ('One people, one nation'): Eriksen suggests that 'the word is used normatively within political rhetoric'.[518] The use of 'nasyon' within everyday language in Mauritius might therefore be compared to the various meanings attached to 'jāti' in the Indian context to which Chatterjee attributes particular significance.[519] He posits that it is precisely because of these semantic slippages that one can

> belong to several jāti, not simultaneously but contextually, invoking in each context a collectivity in which *membership is not a matter of self-interested individual choice or contractual agreement but an immediate inclusion, originary, as it is by birth*. We

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[514] See for example the table produced in Lau Thi Keng, p. 60, which outlines changes in ethnic categories used in Mauritius over the period 1735 to 1962, which saw for the first time the separation of Muslims and Hindus within the Indo-Mauritian category, and which established the communities now recognised in the Constitution.

[515] Lau Thi Keng, p. 61.

[516] 'L'Evolution de l'identité créole en contexte mauricien', *Revi Kiltir Kreol*, 5 (2005), 8-18.

[517] 'Among the very poorest people in Mauritius, ethnic differences seem to have little importance in everyday life. Intermarriage is frequent, and the quest for daily survival encourages cooperation rather than competition.' *Common Denominators*, p. 111.

[518] Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 141. See Eriksen's discussion of the term in 'Nationalism, Mauritian Style: Cultural Unity and Ethnic Diversity', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36: 3 (1994), 549-74, pp. 553-4, and *Common Denominators*, pp. 140-1.

[519] p. 221.

should not be surprised therefore when political discourse permits the imagining of collective solidarities to slide from one particular form to another, each activated contextually but proclaiming each time a bond of kinship, a natural bond that unites all who share the same origin and who therefore must share the same destiny.[520]

It is this fuzzy conceptualisation of community which, I suggest, would seem to best correspond with the idea of a national community propagated within expressions of Mauritian cultural nationalism, as will be expanded upon in the analysis below. Here we must remember that, contrary to political nationalists, '[c]ultural nationalists fear a statist project imposing a legal uniformity on its members will lead to a loss of distinctiveness and internal diversity on which national vitality depends'.[521] Hutchinson further explains that the cultural nationalist understanding of community is flexible enough so as to 'permi[t] the imagining of collective solidarities to slide from one particular form to another' in the same way as the fuzzy communities discussed by Chatterjee above:

> A community is a "spontaneous" or organic order, historically prior to individuals. But though holistic this conception is not totalitarian. For a cultural nationalist an authentic individualism develops through a participation in a dense network of overlapping and intermediate sites of identity — gendered, occupational, religious, and regional, which must be preserved, for the impulse to diversity is the dynamo of national creativity.[522]

However, we must also recognise that the fluidity implied in such multiple forms of belonging and solidarity within the national community is, as Chatterjee observes, threatened by the very structure of the postcolonial nation state itself: 'the fuzziness which enabled a wide variety of solidarities ranging from subcaste to gender to nation to be encompassed under the single rubric of jāti has come under great strain when those solidarities have been forcibly inserted into the grid of the modern regime of power'.[523] This, he argues, has resulted in 'an unresolved tension through which the twin constituents of political discourse within the modern domain – one, the categories of the liberal-democratic state produced theoretically in the West, and the other, the categories that made up the Orientalist construction of India – are continuously being re-created in ever more unrecognizable forms.'[524] The same unresolved tension can arguably be identified in popular expressions of morisyenism. For example, the popular expression 'morisyen avan tou' ('Mauritian above all else') is used by individuals not simply to affirm their national identity but also to undermine the idea that ethnic identity,

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[520] p. 222. My emphasis.
[521] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', pp. 400-1.
[522] 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', note 23, p. 398.
[523] p. 224.
[524] Chatterjee, p. 224.

because of its supposedly primordial nature, will always be more fundamental to the construction of identity. This prioritisation of identities can thus be seen to draw on 'political discourse of the "modern" kind which insists that these collectivities have a fixed, determinate, form, and, if there are several to which an individual can belong, that there be a priority among them'.[525] Yet at the same time, the expression would seem to stem primarily from a frustration with the Mauritian status quo as regards national identity, that is, the necessity of having a sub-national ethnic or religious identity which results in the impossibility of being 'just' Mauritian. Indeed, in this respect, the act of asserting that one is 'morisyen avan tou' can be interpreted as a critique of the fixity of ethnic and religious identity in the Mauritian context. However, in prioritising national identity, the expression also paradoxically foregrounds other forms of belonging: if one is Mauritian above all else, then one must also be identified in some other way. The implied significance of ethnic identity could therefore be said to naturalise and justify colonial/'Oriental' categories at the same time that the expression appears to try to question their validity.

We are thus presented with a complex interplay between both Oriental/colonial and Western categories which are both invoked in conceptualisations of the nation resulting in a tension which appears to form a necessary and central part of any expression of nationalism within the contemporary Mauritian context. In the remainder of this chapter, we will explore how such tensions are negotiated within the representation of national community in popular music. In the following analysis, I will suggest that what is significant about the representation of community in Tritonik is that it can be seen to activate a 'fuzzy' understanding of community at the same time as it engages with the idea of a national Mauritian community and the politics of morisyenism. Their representations of community sometimes delineate 'us' from 'them' within the national community, but it is significant that this distinction is never coterminous with ethnic or religious ones. The division between the 'us' group and others is perhaps better understood as one which is ideological, based on the values of cultural nationalism and the national community as providing the basis for a fairer society. The group's concern with values within their representations of the national community thus appear to invoke the concept of cultural nationalism as a project of moral uplift and rejuvenation of the community in the face of modernisation which is seen as a threat to the community. Despite being situated in very different contexts, Tritonik may thus be considered to reflect a similar position to that of the German romantics in eighteenth-century Europe, concerned with finding a middle way between tradition and progress, and between 'the extremes of individual

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[525] pp. 222-3.

liberalism, which the Romantics believed destroyed all social bonds, and the extremes of communalism, which they felt suppressed individual liberty.'[526]

It should be clarified that Tritonik, the group discussed here, can be said to represent an alternative popular music scene which is differentiated from that of, for example, commercial séga through its willingness to engage with political issues. This differentiation can be seen in the views of one commenter, expressed in response to a youtube video of their song 'Pa pou mor kouyon' ('Not going to die an idiot'):

> Sa group la ek surtou sa boug eric triton la en mari fort. lamizik ek ban paroles ena bku sense, vo bku plis ki sa ban sanT local ki p fer hit la.
>
> This group and especially that guy Eric Triton are really good. There is a lot of sense in their music and lyrics, it is worth a lot more than all those local songs which are commercially successful.[527]

However, the group remain clearly situated within the realm of popular culture. The analysis below will seek to demonstrate that Tritonik can be considered to advocate a position of cultural nationalism, in that their music depicts a national community, rather than simply an abstract national body. This community is presented as being in need of moral regeneration, which is to be made possible through the figure of the artist and artistic practice. Tritonik's music might thus be said to activate 'fuzzy' modes of belonging and solidarity which would appear more appropriate to conceptualisations of the national community which invoke tensions between Western and colonial Oriental categorisations. It could be suggested that the invocation of 'fuzzy' modes of community, including the national community, provides a more effective platform for mobilisation and social change than referring to 'universal' conceptualisations of the nation as made up of individual citizens who make rational choices in their own self-interest.

Tritonik: The National Community and the Artist as Cultural Nationalist

The group Tritonik takes its name from their lead singer, Eric Triton, an established blues singer and musician. The group is also formed by Norbert Planel (percussion) and Shakti Ramchurn (tabla). They released their first album, *Project One*, in March 2012, shortly before

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[526] Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 114.
[527] TheBunun, 'Tritonik - Pou Pas Mort Kouyon', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivnLfNYYv1Q>, [Accessed 10th May 2014].

the 10th March demonstration event 'Lamars pou enn nouvo repiblik'. The album is generally upbeat in character, yet on first appearances it does not appear overtly (Mauritian) nationalist in character. Indeed, the prominence of the tabla throughout the album might be said to indicate the group's desire to characterise themselves as 'world music' or 'fusion music'.[528] Yet it would also seem that the album aims to address a specifically Mauritian audience: not only are all songs sung in MK, but also the use of pronouns, and in particular the first person plural 'nou', serves to demarcate a Mauritian community of listeners and audience members. In the following analysis, I will consider both the album's representation of this Mauritian community, and the role of the artist within this. In this respect, I will argue that the album can be read as an expression of cultural nationalism which would appear to share characteristics of the cultural nationalist movement in Ireland, and of Romanticist conceptualisation of national community.

On the whole, the album *Project One* seems to reflect a cultural nationalist view of the artist's role within the formation of the 'new' national community as a leader of reform. According to Hutchinson, within cultural nationalism,

> What triggers [the artist] into collective action is evidence of social demoralisation and conflict which they believe results from a loss of continuity with the national heritage and a subsequent adoption of foreign values. [...] This vision when renovated in contemporary idioms to speak to the present will restore a sense of common pride and energy and sense of direction. Cultural nationalism then is an educational movement directed to inner or moral reform'.[529]

Indeed, Tritonik's articulation of cultural nationalist themes within popular music might be said to constitute one such example of renovation in 'contemporary idioms'. The role of the artist in working towards regeneration would appear to be represented in the musical message of Tritonik through the use of imperatives. There are highlighted in bold below in the lyrics of 'Ca va, ca va pas':

Pou ki nou kilitir evolye	So that our culture evolves
Ki nou lamisik avanse	So that our music progresses
Ki nou mesaz traverse	So that we get our message across
Napa ezite melanze	**Don't hesitate to mix** (*mélanger*)
Pou ki nou pa res dan lerer	So that we don't stay misinformed
Pou nou ava bizin koz maler	So we will need to speak about unhappiness

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[528] In discussions with Mauritian musicians during my fieldwork, I discovered that it was not uncommon for them to aspire to produce music which would be considered as 'world music', because this was considered a viable and perhaps necessary means to achieving success beyond Mauritius.

[529] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', pp. 399-400.

Pou nou kapav sort dan galer
Napa ezite kominike

So we can get past our problems
Don't hesitate to communicate

[Refrin:] Parfwa laba 'ça va', isi 'ça va pas'

[Chorus:] Sometimes over there things are going well, and here not so well,

Parfwa isi 'ça va', laba 'ça va pas' (x2)

Sometimes here things are going well, but there not so well,
It's ok, it's not ok, but it's ok

'ça va, ça va pas', me 'ça va'

Aret bwar pike fime pou nanye

Stop drinking, injecting, smoking for no reason
Mixed culture is the future of our country

Lavenir nou pei, kiltir melanze

Pou ki napena divizion
Nou tou nou ena mem rezon
Ansam nou enn sel nasyon
Napa ezite melanze (x2)

So that there are no divisions
We all have the same reason
Together we are one nation
Don't hesitate to mix (*mélanger*)

[Refrin]

[Chorus]

Pou ki napena division [etc.]

So that there are no divisions [etc.]

We can thus see that 'mixing' and 'communicating' are presented here as solutions or possible courses of actions in order to improve and develop 'lavenir nou pei', the country's future. Within expressions of morisyenism, these two concepts are considered as ideologically opposed to communalism, which privileges supposedly 'pure' ancestral cultures and devalorises cultural mixing. Yet the fact that these more abstract imperatives are combined with concrete advice, such as 'stop drinking, injecting, smoking for no reason', would seem to link personal improvement to a wider, more abstract notion of nation-wide regeneration, understood here as a cultural project. Whilst the song contains no direct references to anti-communalist logic, the foregrounding of the ideas of mixing and communicating clearly opposes the conceptualisation of Mauritian society as a 'mosaic' of distinct cultures and ethnoreligious groups.

Hutchinson's reference to the artists' 'vision' may also be used to point towards cultural nationalism in 'Vinn gete' ('Come see'). The song arguably provides the most obvious example of the artist figure as regenerator of the national community: it is sung in the first person, and each verse begins with the repeated phrase 'mo'nn fer enn vizyon' ('I had a vision'). However, other lyrical elements would appear to call into question the song's nationalist critique of communalism. For example, 'Vinn gete' begins with a list of places of worship relating to different religions etc in Mauritius, which could make the song appear compatible with dominant discourses of the 'mosaic of cultures' composite Mauritius.

Furthermore, the presence of tourists is again implied in the idea of 'the world taking the plane to come and see' ('lemond pe pran avyon vinn gete'). The preceding 'list' could thus be interpreted as a check-list for cultural tourists wishing to see the harmonious Mauritian multiethnic society.[530]

However, this interpretation is arguably complicated by the foregrounding of the MK-speaking subject in the repeated phrase 'mo'nn fer enn visyon': the song portrays the speaker's personal vision, which clearly invokes the trope of the artist as innovator within cultural nationalism. Secondly, the notion of 'enn sel batiman', also repeated after each list of religious or racial difference, would appear to confirm the song's focus on (national) unity, and could indeed be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the Mauritian nation. Furthermore, the unity created by difference being housed together in 'one building' appears to be facilitated by self-expression and communication: 'artist ti pe exprime / lepep ti pe kominike' ('Artists were expressing themselves / The people were communicating'). Again, the artist is portrayed as playing a central role in creating unity and facilitating communication and expression of 'the people'. The song's verses evoke a hypothetical and quasi-religious or spiritual 'vision', which then sharply contrasts with the chorus which emphasises reality and immediacy: 'come see, come have a look', 'vinn gete'. This could be said to imply that the artist's role also encompasses acting as a mediator, namely being able to translate political messages for the people, and move between different levels of conceptualisation of the national community.

'Vinn gete'

Mo'nn fer enn vision	I had a vision:
Legliz tamp moske	Church, temple, mosque,
Pagod synagog	Pagoda, synagogue
Dan enn sel batiman	In one building
Finn monte…	Which was built
Mo'nn fer enn visyon	I had a vision:
Jesu ar Shiva	Jesus and Shiva,
Allah ar Bouddha	Allah and Buddha
Dan enn sel batiman	In one building
Pe exprime…	Expressing themselves
[Refrin:] Lemond finn soke	[Chorus:] The world is shocked
Lemond finn alisinne	The world thinks it's hallucinating
Lemond pe pran avyon	The world is taking the plane
Vinn gete	[To] come see

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[530] The song's music video can be seen to make further references to 'touristic' images of harmonious Mauritius – notably the rainbow, smiling older ladies in saris, the beach and sea at sunset, where groups of young people gather. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Na3GvTbaJN0>, [Accessed 10th May 2014].

Mo'nn fer enn visyon	I had a vision:
Metis, nwar, blan, rouz	métis, black, white, red
Ble, zonn, ver	Blue, yellow, green,
Dan enn sel batiman	In one building
Pe vibre…	Vibrating
Mo'nn fer enn visyon	I had a vision:
Artist ti pe exprime	Artists were expressing themselves,
Lepep ti pe kominike	The people were communicating
Dan enn sel batiman	In one building,
Pe sant linite	Singing unity

The song thus clearly sets out a cultural rather than political nationalist perspective, in that cultural difference and multiculturalism are highlighted rather than obscured in representation of the supposedly neutral citizen. Cultural and religious difference is thus presented as belonging *within* the national community, rather than as a corruptive force which is both incompatible with and damaging to national unity.

Perhaps the clearest vindication of the role of art as a means of social reform and development is expressed in 'L'art vaincra'. This song also reflects the cultural nationalist belief that artists should play an important role in implementing social change for 'the moral regeneration of the historic community and its way of life'.[531] At the same time, however, Tritonik can be said to advocate a democratic approach to artistic expression: there is a clear invitation to the listener or audience to 'pran to pinso', ('take your paintbrush'), to take up a form of artistic expression so as to ensure a peaceful society, 'koumsa mo sir pa pou ena lager'. The pronoun 'nou' perhaps does not create an palpable sense of national community in the same way that it does in other songs, but the underlying threat of 'lager' (literally 'war' or conflict) would appear to imply potential social divisions within the Mauritian social context. The concept of cultural difference is also expressed in the idea that art must be used to 'reunir tou kilitir', to reunite all culture(s). However, at the same time the universal reach of the chorus would appear to suggest that the songs message may not be limited in relevance to the Mauritian social context:

'L'art vaincra'

L'art vaincra	*L'art vaincra*
Tou mo lavi mo pou kriye	All my life I will sing/cry out
L'art vaincra	*L'art vaincra*
Mem kan mo mor li pou kontinie	Even when I'm dead it will continue
L'art vaincra	*L'art vaincra*
Se enn langaz iniversel	It's a universal language

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[531] Rabow-Edling, p. 102, see also Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p. 16.

Nou bizin servi li	We need to use it
Koum' enn fil kondukter	As a common thread
Pou reunir tou kiltir	To reunite all cultures
Nou bizin servi li	We need to use it
Donn li so valer	Appreciate its true value
Pou met lalimyer dan leker	To shine light into our hearts
Pran to pinso met kouler	Take your paintbrush and colour
Pran kreyon, rakont tou maler	Take a pencil, share your worries
Pran to zoutiy, donn boner	Take your tools, give joy
Koumsa mo sir pa pou ena lager	That way I'm sure there'll be no conflict

This message notwithstanding, the song's use of French within the refrain might be seen as problematic when viewed in terms of the song's universalist outlook: it could be taken to imply that the French language is more suitable for the expression of philosophical concepts and 'higher' art. But it should however be noted that MK predominates with the lyrics. The code-switching in the song's refrain could therefore be seen as an attempt to represent Mauritian sociolinguistic reality, thereby highlighting the everyday cosmopolitanism of Mauritius as a multilingual society.

The multilingual nature of Mauritius is also invoked in album's first track, entitled 'Madam sere', which makes reference to a coded form of MK often used by or with children, in which every syllable of each word is repeated directly preceded by 'g', so that 'madam sere' become 'magadamgam segerege'. By apparent coincidence, the song's title thus makes a reference to, and perhaps pays a form of homage to the music genres of seggae and reggae, which played a central role within developments in Mauritian popular music in the 1980s and 90s (as was briefly discussed in Chapter 3).[532] The song opens with a catchy guitar riff, in 4/4 time rather than the 6/8 or 3/4 of séga, and the impression of a fast pace is sustained throughout, notably by the tabla. In this sense, the music seems to encompass both 'generic international pop' and the idea of fusion with the tabla serving as musical motif, whereas the national frame of reference is implied through language (MK). Yet here it must be acknowledged that, even within this linguistic community, a distinction is implied between those who appreciate the laughter provoked by Madam Sere, which is associated here with nostalgia and remembrance of the past, and those who see Madam Sere as inappropriate. This perhaps is stated most clearly in the final verse, which is the only part of the song to be sung in standard MK, which sets up a distinction between the first person 'mo' and third person plural 'zot': 'This language that I'm speaking [...] Always made me laugh […] They told me "don't speak like that"("You're rude!")'

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[532] See pp. 102-5 of this thesis.

'Madam Sere'

[Refrin:] Magadamgam sege rege Langangazgaz nougou tigi kozgozsege	[Chorus:] Madam sere The language we used to speak
Longantangan nougou tigi kozgoz sa langaz-la Mege wigi tigi rigigogologo Mege agazorgordigi ligi pe disparet Mo'nngon anganvigi ragapelgel ligi	A long time ago we spoke this language Yes, it was funny But today it is disappearing I wanted to remember it
[Refrin]	[Chorus]
Agazorgordigi mo'anganvigi sangantege Mege wigi mogo rigigogologo Agavangan kigi li disparet Mo'nngon anganvigi ragapelgel ligi	Today I want to sing Yes I am funny Before it disappears I wanted to remember it
[Refrin]	[Chorus]
Ki sa langaz ki mo pe koze (Mil nef san lontan) Ti fer mwa touzour gagn riye (he he he he!) Zot ti dir mwa napa koz koumsa (To malelve!) Parksi enn bann la pa ti kompran nanye	This language that I'm speaking (1900 a long time [ago]) Always made me laugh (hey hey hey hey!) They told me 'don't speak like that' ('You're rude!') Because a group of people over there couldn't understand a thing
[Refrin]	[Chorus]

Thus, through its emphasis on humour and shared laughter, 'Madam Sere' could be interpreted as not creating an 'inside' community brought together in their shared laughter and shared understanding of the code. At the same time, however, it also marks an 'outside' community of those who don't understand and could in this way be interpreted as creative camouflage on the part of the 'colonised'.[533] However, the final two lines of the last verse would seem to evoke a different kind of community again, who see the language as a threat to their values of 'respectability'.[534] We can thus see that the representation of community here, first invoked through the use of the third person plural pronoun 'nou' in the opening chorus, is in fact smaller than the national community. This directs our attention to the distinction between the 'nou' in-group brought together through shared use of the Madam Sere code

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[533] See Glissant, *Le Discours antillais,* pp. 32-3.
[534] For a discussion of respectability politics in the Jamaican context, see Thomas, pp. 5-6.

language, and a disapproving group referred to as 'zot', 'they' who frown upon usage of the coded language. The burden of being understood is therefore presented as always being placed on the Mauritian MK-speaking subject, or maybe even more specifically the MK-speaking child, given that Madam Sere is generally associated with children. Indeed, the repeated use of Madam Sere in the song could be said to constitute a form of opposition to the respectability politics evoked in the final verse. This could in turn be seen to reflect children's experience of language learning at school, where they are expected to learn English, the official medium of teaching, as native speakers, and therefore their access to knowledge and the curriculum is dependent on their acceptance of this burden of understanding.

Beneath the upbeat tempo, expressions of humour and light-hearted tone, 'Madam Sere' could thus be said to imply a concern with youth and young people which parallels the target audience for the protest movements organised in 2011 and 2012 such as the September 'Wanted' protest. Additionally, its concern with both young people and the revival of cultural practices associated with the past reflect two central issues within cultural nationalism. Hutchinson understands cultural nationalism therefore not as a conservative cultural movement, but rather as a response to social breakdown incurred by modernisation articulated by and on behalf of the youth population:

> The peculiar nationalist vision is a utopian response to large-scale social breakdown generated by modernisation when the stable social landmarks of family, neighbourhood, and religion have been swept away. This breakdown is felt most intensely by the young, unhoused by the erosion of tradition by secular doctrines of improvement. Nationalist movements are children's crusades motivated by a desperate need to belong and by a revulsion against established institutions.[535]

Hutchinson also argues that the 'young urban intelligentsia [constitute] the cadres of cultural nationalism, who, driven by a desire to liberate their kinsmen from backwardness, return to the traditional ethnic culture in order to make it the basis of a vigorous modern community'.[536] Given the nonexistence of a precolonial, indigenous culture, 'traditional culture' is perhaps best understood here as the cultural practices associated with the historically subordinated population of Mauritius, rather than the practices of any one ethnic group. This again would seem to parallel the protest movements which associated themselves with morisyenism. Eriksen also argues that 'supra-ethnic national identity' as a 'form of identification is most evidently present in parts of the growing urban middle class, among intellectuals, academics and the like', although he also maintains that 'there have been historical situations where very

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[535] John Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 45: 3 (1999), 392-407, pp. 393-4, see also Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), pp. 94-7.
[536] Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', p. 404.

large numbers of Mauritians have visibly associated themselves with the multi-ethnic nation rather than with their ethnic group.'[537]

The representation of youth is further developed in Tritonik's 'Zenn' ('Young'). Here, however, the nation of Mauritius itself is characterised as 'young', a characteristic which is then extended to all members of the national community in the song's chorus: 'Young, our country is young / Our history is young / Our culture is young / Together we grow (up) with respect'. The song thereby appears to evoke the need for development and regeneration through unification of the national community. Furthermore, the last verse would seem to highlight the importance of artists and cultural actors in the process of developing the young country and becoming a 'real' paradise. In this respect, Tritonik can be seen to advocate a form of cultural nationalism which would appear conceptually close to that advocated by the German Romantics, for whom

> art was not only the central organ of *Bildung*, it was also the means of achieve social and political reform. Providing the people with a model of virtue, art alone had the power to bring them together and motivate them to act.[538]

This can be compared with the representation of the artist's unifying role in 'Vinn gete'. Furthermore, the song appears to suggest a revalorisation of the past which would appear to parallel the Romantics' desire to find a middle way between tradition and progress. In doing so, the song arguably develops a counter narrative to dominant discourses concerning Mauritian 'modernisation', a process thought to have begun relatively recently through diversification of the economy following independence, in which the development of the luxury tourism industry is thought to have played a considerable role. In contrast, Tritonik assert here that, if Mauritius is considered today as a paradise, whether primarily in a touristic sense or otherwise, it is because of the efforts of 'dimounn mizer', those at the bottom of the social structure, rather than the colonial or postcolonial ruling elites and those who hold political and economic power.[539]

The repeated phrase at the end of each verse would appear to give a central position within the song to 'dimounn mizer', literally translated as 'poor people' but perhaps better

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[537] 'A Non-ethnic State for Africa? A Life-world Approach to the Imagining of Communities' in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Africa: Constructivist Reflections and Contemporary Politics*, ed. by Paris Yeros (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 45-64, p. 52.

[538] Rabow-Edling, p. 103, in reference to arguments developed by Herder and Schlegel.

[539] In his analysis of the tourism industry, Emmanuel Gregoire tells us that '[l]es principaux groupes mauriciens présents dans la filière touristique sont directement liés aux grandes propriétés sucrières franco-mauriciennes, notamment les quatre principales familles (Dalais, Espitalier-Noël, Lagesse et de Spéville) qui contrôlent une partie de l'économie du pays'. 'Développement touristique et reproduction sociale à l'île Maurice', *Civilisations*, 57 (2008), 91-106, <http://civilisations.revues.org/1141?lang=en#ftn9>, [Accessed 23rd May 2014].

understood here as the historically disenfranchised, those without the necessary power or cultural capital to write their own histories. A significant distinction from previous expressions of cultural nationalism thus becomes apparent here: whereas previous movements 'sought to construct a secular, activist high culture evoking historic and 'authentic' national models of heroism in order to stir the young to action',[540] Tritonik's promotion of art and the artist in the development of the national community is formulated on behalf of 'dimounn mizer', which would thus appear to privilege popular forms of cultural expression over the establishment of a national 'high culture.'

'Zenn'

Mo finn ne apre lesklavaz	I was born after slavery
Dan enn milye sovaz	In a savage place
Karo kann, dan bwa, lor la plaz	Sugar cane fields, in the forest, on the beach,
An bann lipie montay	In the mountain foothills
Mo'nn grandi dan enn paradi	I grew up in a paradise
Konstrir kouma dan lanfer	Which was built as if in hell,
Avek lafors dimounn mizer (x2)	With the strength of poor people
Mo finn tomb dan enn relizion	I fell into a religion
Rod fer mwa vinn mouton	That wanted to make me a zombie
Desendan desan-z-an zistwar	Descendant of 200 years of history
Zot dir mwa 2000 an	They tell me 2000 years
Mo zanset konstrir paradi	My ancestors built paradise
Travay kouma dan lanfer	[But] worked as if they were in hell
Avek lafwa dimounn mizer (x2)	With the faith of poor people
[Refrin:] Zenn nou pei zenn	[Chorus:] Young, our country is young
Zenn nou zistwar zenn	Our history is young
Zenn nou kiltir zenn	Our culture is young
Ansam nou grandi dan respe (x2)	Together we grow (up) with respect
Azordi mo nepli zanfan	Today I'm no longer a child
Konn koz ar gran dimounn	[I] know how to speak with respected elders
Fer rapor dir seki pa bon	Make connections and say what is not right
Pou trouv enn solisyon	To find a solution
Lil Moris pou enn vre paradi	Mauritius will be a real paradise
Si krwar dan lar dan nou kiltir	If [we] believe in art and in our culture
Pou donn lazwa dimounn mizer	To make poor people happy

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[540] John Hutchinson and David Aberbach, 'The Artist as Nation-builder: William Butler Yeats and Chaim Nachman Bialik', *Nations and Nationalism*, 5: 4 (1999), 501-21, p. 510.

Similarly, 'Ki pe fer pou nou?' ('What is being down for us?') is firmly grounded in the Mauritian context, in ecological as well as sociological terms. It is therefore perhaps the song which most clearly evokes a sense of national community. This community is defined relationally, firstly as a human community presented in opposition to the animal community of the Mauritian ecosystem, and secondly in relation to a community of tourists, who are presented as having a negative and restrictive effect on both the animal and human communities of the island.

Bann zanimo dan lafore
Pa giny problem pou nanye
Se nou bann zom ki pe sanz tou

Ki pe pran zot lafore
Nou pe kontign
Konstrir lotel
Pou fer touris amize
Ki pe fer pou nou ?

[Refrin:] Tang nepli trouve
Liev napli trouve
Zako pe oblize sot sime
Kann pou nepli pouse,
Zwazo pou nepli sante
Zot pou bizin kriye…

Bann morisyen kontan zot lil
Zot bien kontan amize
Al lor la plaz enn ti dife
Nou tou sante nou danse
Zot vinn dir
Nou pa fer tapaz
Bizin les touris repoze
Ki pe fer pou nou ?

[Refrin]

Animals in the forest
Don't get into any problems
It's us humans who are changing everything
Who are taking their forest
We are continually
Building hotels
So that tourists can enjoy themselves
What is being done for us? What is this doing for us?

[Chorus:] You no longer find tanrecs
You no longer find hares
Monkeys have to cross the road
Sugar cane won't grow
Birds won't sing
They will have to shout out…

Mauritians love and care about their island
They like to enjoy themselves
Go to the beach, [start] a little fire
We all sing and dance
They come tell
Us not to make noise
[That we] need to let the tourists rest
What is being done for us? What is this doing for us?
[Chorus]

Again, Tritonik can be seen here to contest the dominant impulse to speak well of Western tourists because of the importance of tourism to the island's economy. In this respect, the repeated questioning of 'ki pe fer pou nou?', 'what is this doing for us?' could be interpreted as a direct critique of government policies which are seen as putting the needs of tourists before those of Mauritian citizens. The implication of a national 'personality' in the second verse might appear problematic in that it would seem to evoke reductive stereotypes

of fun-loving islanders;[541] however the opposition to tourists serves to build a strong sense of national community, which might be seen to override any internal divisions. Furthermore, the relationship to the ecosystem would appear to confirm the 'naturalness' of the national community, who 'kontan zot lil', 'love their island', whereas the construction of hotels for tourists is presented as damaging to animal habitats.

To summarise, therefore, the representation of community within Tritonik's album *Project One* would seem to be compatible with a cultural nationalist vision of national community, which is presented as the impetus for social change in order to progress and develop a more just society, whilst drawing on cultural practices identified as traditional, and a subaltern reading of Mauritian history as cultural resources. Of particular significance here is the representation of the artist as leader and instigator of moral regeneration; however, it is important to recognise that Tritonik would appear to also promulgate the democratisation of culture, in which listeners and audience members are invited to participate in artistic expression as a means of avoiding social conflict.

Conclusion

We have thus explored various facets of popular nationalist expression within the context of both contemporary protest movements and popular culture. It has been suggested here that the claims of morisyenism as a political movement which asserts its progressive and anti-imperialist nature have been problematised through its adoption of Western liberal democratic categories. As a result, all expressions of Mauritian nationalism may be seen to be marked by a tension between conflicting conceptualisations of the national community. It was suggested that the music of Tritonik can be interpreted as indicative of a wider sentiment of cultural nationalism. Despite several significant parallels with previous forms of cultural nationalism, however, their conceptualisation differs in that it privileges popular cultural expression rather than the development of a new national high culture, and advocates instead the democratisation of culture.

At the time of writing, a process of political reform as regards the proportional representation of Mauritian communities seems inevitable, and it would seem that this

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[541] Eriksen suggests that, in the Mauritian context, this stereotype is most often associated with the Creole population. 'Formal and Informal Nationalism', p. 15. This could be considered as an additional complication, in that this expression of a national personality could be seen to centralise one ethnic group; however, changing lifestyles would appear to suggest that a positive valorisation of 'knowing how to enjoy oneself' would be better associated not with an ethnic group but with the youth population of Mauritius in general.

possibility is already being seriously entertained by the current government.[542] We can thus be said to be entering a new era as regards the official political representations of 'communities' within Mauritius, which might result in the privileging of a new conceptualisation of the individual citizen, based perhaps on Republican conceptualisations, which focus on the individual citizen within the national body and suppress the narrative of community. However, as we have seen here, a simultaneous cultural nationalist movement has supported the political movement whilst asserting the existence of a natural national community. In the case of Tritonik, this has been achieved by activating 'fuzzy' conceptualisations of community which allow for a series of different contextual solidarities and modes of belonging. We have yet to see how these might be affected by political reform, and indeed whether cultural nationalism will periodically surface in the Mauritian context as Hutchinson claims it does in Europe, as 'a recurring movement, periodically crystallising even in the advanced metropolitan centres at times of deep-seated social crisis, when a statist nationalism seems to have failed, in order to offer new pathways for individual and collective action.'[543]

In the following and final chapter, what appears as a rather different engagement with the politics of belonging will be explored in the Réunionese context. This will take the form of a critical examination of the *zorey* population, residents of Réunion from metropolitan France, a group within which I was often assimilated during my fieldwork. The naming of the *zorey* is interpreted here as a political act which is understood to have resulted in the creation of a social identity which both draws on and shapes the representation of the *zorey* in popular discourses. As will be seen, an examination of these representations can also serve to open up discussion of fundamental questions of cultural difference and social inequality in contemporary Réunion, although due to socio-political specificities, this is evidently framed rather differently when compared to Mauritian debates. Whereas this chapter has shown how Mauritian cultural nationalism has been employed within popular music in order to counter the presumed primordialism of ethnoreligious belonging in Mauritius, the subsequent discussion will outline how the naming of the *zorey* can be seen to challenge the invisibility and normativity of whiteness within constructions of French national identity. The following critical analysis of *zorey* identity can therefore be seen to continue this chapter's examination of popular culture's engagement with competing discourses on the nation and community, and the differing conceptualisations of race and ethnicity these discourses produce.

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[542] See 'Consultation Paper - Electoral Reform', which outlines possible alternatives for the 'best loser' system. Published online in *Le Mauricien*, 25th March 2014, <http://www.lemauricien.com/article/consultation-paper-electoral-reform>, [Accessed 27th May 2014].
[543] 'Re-interpreting cultural nationalism', p. 393.

5. Becoming *Zorey* in Réunion: Privilege, Whiteness, and (In)visibility in the French Overseas Department

Zorey,[544] the Réunionese Kreol word for 'ear', is the term popularly used in Réunion to designate people of metropolitan French origin. It may seem like an odd choice for a study which aims to apply a cultural studies approach to the Réunionese sociocultural context to devote a chapter to analysis of the *zorey*, a small but well-represented and relatively privileged sector of the Réunion population. When I set out to begin fieldwork, I had no intention of studying the *zorey* as a recognisable social group, nor to attempt to provide an account of *zorey* culture or identity in the Réunionese social context, if such a thing can be said to exist, given that they are generally perceived as a transitory population.[545] Yet the presence of *zorey* stereotypes within popular culture and discourses would suggest that they now arguably form part of the Réunionese social landscape, with a recognisable social identity associated with youth, development, and modernisation, educational qualifications, and a higher than average socioeconomic status.[546] Neither had I planned to attend to the issue of whiteness, or indeed to my own whiteness, with further critical consideration; that is, above and beyond the recognition that Réunionese society, like that of many other postcolonial countries and regions, has long been structured by means of a racial hierarchy, in which white people hold the most privileged positions at the top of the social structure.[547] However, doing research in La Réunion as a young white European means that, whether I like it or not, I am often identified as *zorey*, though whether or not I could truly be considered as a *zorey* provoked much debate amongst some of my *zorey* and Réunionese friends.

It thus appears impossible for me to avoid giving at least a cursory introduction to the *zorey* population in La Réunion, a group with which I could not completely identify (being

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[544] The term has various alternative spellings: zoreil, zoreille, z'oreille, which reflect the term's etymology.

[545] A series of articles on the *zorey* in the French newspaper *L'Express* state that INSEE figures suggest that 30% of the population leave every 5 years. Laurent Decloître, 'Les "*Zorey*s," une communauté à part,' *L'Express*, 26th May 2010, <http://www.lexpress.fr/region//les-*zorey*s-une-communaute-a-part_903045.html>, [Accessed 11th October 2013]. Andoche *et al.* claim that such an identity may indeed be increasingly recognised, differentiated from both other réunionnais and metropolitan French living in France. One of the respondents gives the following evaluation of her social identity in Réunion: 'Ca m'a mise mal à l'aise pendant longtemps, mais maintenant je me sens vraiment métropolitaine de la Réunion, avec mes différences d'avec les gens de France, avec mes différences aussi d'avec les créoles de la Réunion.' *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 93.

[546] These perceptions are reflected in statistics which show that the metropolitan-born population have a higher level of both qualifications and employment compared with Réunionese born on the island. INSEE, 'Des differences de qualification et d'intégration économique selon l'origine' Revue économie de La Réunion N° 136, (May 2010) <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=24&ref_id=16104>, [Accessed 24th February 2015].

[547] Yet this is not to deny the existence of poor white populations in Reunion, such as the *Ti Blan*.

marked by my accented French and, in some cases, by my knowledge of Réunionese history and cultural specificity), but to which I was often ascribed membership by virtue of my white European appearance and inability to speak Réunionese Kreol fluently. However, over the course of both my field research and my engagement with the literature of the expanding field of critical whiteness studies, I became convinced that a more thorough analysis into the power dynamics and politics of the *zorey* population in Réunion is warranted. Given that the *zorey* population are associated with youth and the pursuit of leisure in particular ways, it would seem fair to suggest that the group and its representations should be addressed within the study of Réunionese youth cultures. In addition, as has been acknowledged within my evaluation of researcher positioning in this study, my own interactions with youth cultural practices were structured by my ascribed *zorey* identity in Réunion, and by my status as a white foreigner in Mauritius. It thus seems appropriate that the analysis of representations of race and social class within popular musics and cultures in previous chapters, which was approached from an intersectional perspective, should be followed by a critical discussion of whiteness within contemporary popular cultural phenomena which again attends to the ways in which categories of race and social class intersect within representations.

In this chapter, it will be argued that the act of naming the *zorey*, and the identification and sense of cultural belonging and cultural specificity that it evokes, is perhaps more significant than is implied by casual and sometimes humorous tones in which the term itself is used. Examining the issues brought up by the naming and 'bringing into existence' of the *zorey* group as a social, socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic and even racial entity can help to illuminate various contradictions as concerns how we conceptualise racial and cultural difference in relation to material social inequality. This is arguably relevant to all social contexts, but of particular importance in postcolonial settings like Réunion where the legacy of racial hierarchy continues to have a significant impact on life chances and social mobility. Examining *zorey* identity involves at least two interacting elements: the act of naming, that is, the act of identifying people from mainland France as *zorey* as soon as a relation with La Réunion is established, such as upon their arrival on the island as either permanent or temporary residents, and secondly, considering how those identified as *zorey* then themselves relate to this attributed, seemingly 'additional' identity. Doing so is worthwhile not only because it is rarely given serious consideration, and has not yet been the subject of extensive academic analysis,[548] but also because it brings up important questions concerning attitudes to

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[548] When asked in an interview why there have been so few studies of the zorey population, Andoche responded that 'le sujet reste tabou et politiquement incorrect', in contrast to studies of Tamil or African cultural specificities in Réunion. Interview conducted by Decloître in 'Le zorey, c'est le pouvoir', *L'Express*, 26th May 2010, <http://www.lexpress.fr/region//le-zorey-c-est-le-pouvoir_903047.html>, [Accessed 11th October 2013].

(im)migration within Réunionese society. It also raises critical questions regarding issues of invisibility and visibility in relation to race and racial difference. Considering the position of *zorey* individuals in La Réunion can thus be said to bring together issues of identity politics and cultural and racial difference *with* those of social inequality and oppression, whereas identity politics has sometimes been seen as a means of obscuring questions of social inequality. Yet both these concepts also need to be clarified in light of the fact that any engagement with questions of social justice has arguably been further complicated by Réunion's political integration into the French nation. As will be seen here, this is further exacerbated by the dominance of the Republican 'colour-blind' discourse within debates concerning questions of race and ethnicity.

Becoming *Zorey*: Identity, Relation, Performativity

My analysis starts from the recognition that, although both *zorey* and Réunionese are French citizens and thus the *zorey* are not 'foreign' in an official sense, this may be contrary to their lived experience of moving to and living in Réunion. As Jacqueline Andoche *et al.* point out,

> En effet, l'accueil fait aux Métropolitains ainsi que leurs conditions d'intégration font qu'ils forment une communauté différente de celles des locaux installés durablement dans l'île. Et ceci tant du point de vue de leurs statuts, de leurs modes de vie, de l'image qu'ils ont et donnent d'eux-mêmes, que des représentations que les autres se font d'eux.[549]

This experience, as the authors rightly observe, results in a 'décalage entre constat sociologique et catégorisation statistique'.[550] Being considered as cultural foreigners in Réunion may be the first of several disorienting experiences for metropolitan French who might have previously considered Réunion, with its department code 974, as a French department 'like any other'.[551] Hence, because Réunion is, after all, supposedly an integral part of the French nation, any serious consideration of the metropolitan population in La Réunion and their relations with their 'host' society risks exposing the contradictions and discrepancies

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[549] Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 10.
[550] Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 10.
[551] According to Nicolas Roinsard, in the parlance of the French government of the time, the process of departmentalisation was intended to 'rompre avec l'ère coloniale et de « faire des DOM des départements comme les autres » en s'assurant que leurs indices économiques et sociaux se rapprochent progressivement de la moyenne nationale'.

between the political status of the French overseas department and lived reality in Réunion in social, economic and cultural terms.

My approach is also informed by the assumption that a symbolic transformation takes place when a person from mainland France moves to La Réunion and thus becomes *zorey*. A parallel can be drawn here with Abigail Adam's and Diane M. Nelson's conceptualisation of becoming *gringo*/*gringa*: in the same way that 'the term gringo necessitates a relationship with Latin America – a North American is not a gringo until she crosses a border',[552] a metropolitan French individual is not a *zorey* until s/he arrives in La Réunion, even if, officially, this does not entail the crossing of national borders. In turn, Réunionese society has been and continues to be shaped by the presence of the *zorey* population. Therefore, as Nelson and Adams suggest, the process of construction within relational identities must be understood as operating in both directions:

> Gringo is a category produced through interactions, and as such, it works on a variety of borders including but not limited to national frontiers, stereotypes of phenotypic difference, sartorial codes, and – as 'gringa' (marked by the Spanish feminine) – gender boundaries. In turn, the gringa changes the places she goes.[553]

For Adams, the term *gringa* therefore emerges 'not as a label for a North American (mis)placed in Latin America, but as a person shaped by her relation to Latin America, a relationship that shifts'.[554] Given that the concept of relationality has now become somewhat overused within academic engagement with identity, belonging and social interaction, it may appear all too obvious to state that my approach, like Nelson's, is one which understands identity to be relational. Yet what is perhaps interesting about analysing *zorey* as a social identity, either self-claimed or ascribed by others, is that it clearly shows that the context precedes any development of 'meaning' attached to the identity: *zorey*, as a concept, an identity, does not exist prior to contact between the metropolitan French individual and the Réunionese social context. This can be compared with Judith Butler's approach to gender identity, as outlined in *Gender Trouble* and further clarified in various later works:

> Sociological discussions have conventionally sought to understand the notion of the person in terms of an agency that claims ontological priority to the various roles and functions through which it assumes social visibility and meaning. Within philosophical discourse itself, the notion of 'the person' has received analytic elaboration on the

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[552] Diane M. Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 41, referring to Abigail Adams, 'Gringas, Ghouls and Guatemala: The 1994 Attacks on North American Women Accused of Body Organ Trafficking', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 4: 1 (1999), 112-33.
[553] Nelson, *Finger in the Wound*, p. 41.
[554] 'Gringas, Ghouls and Guatemala', p. 129.

assumption that whatever social context the person is 'in' remains somehow externally related to the definitional structure of personhood, be that consciousness, the capacity for language, or moral deliberation.[555]

In contrast, Butler's conceptualisation of gender as performative aims to work against both sociological and philosophical analyses of identity which posit the subject, the 'self', as ontologically prior to the context in which s/he is situated. As she explains,

> In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence [...] gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender ... gender is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' which are said to be its results.[556]

Can we thus posit that the process of becoming *zorey* is a performative one? Can indeed the same be said of all forms of racial identification? Can race, like gender, be understood as 'the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being'?[557] The constructed, situated, and performative nature of racial identities is perhaps easier to for us accept than understanding gender to be as such, if only because racial identities are not always structured around a (male/female) binary like gender identities are – although the language of racial identification, perhaps most obviously in the association of certain skin tones with the colours 'black' and 'white', would suggest that binaries have also played an important role in the construction of racial identities. Whereas *zorey* may be perceived as a noun, a fixed category which a metropolitan French subject may try to resist, redefine, subvert, or reject altogether, it is arguably better understood as a verb, in the same way that Butler reconceptualises gender. However, as Butler clarifies, to argue that gender is constructed does not signify that subjects have complete freedom to 'choose' within this process:

> There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. The 'performative' dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to

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[555] *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 22-3.
[556] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 34.
[557] *Gender Trouble*, p. 45.

performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity.[558]

That this could be a productive way of thinking about race becomes apparent when this is read in tandem with Gilroy's formulation of anti-anti-essentialism. For Gilroy, anti-anti-essentialism is a position which avoids both the pitfall of essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to black identity, which 'sees racialised subjectivity as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it'.[559] He suggests that black musical practices may be particularly instructive in this regard:

> Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers. Black identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimises it is persuasive or institutionally powerful. Whatever the radical constructionists may say, it is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: languages, gesture, bodily significations, desires.[560]

To clarify, I am not saying that the process of becoming *zorey* is any more performative or relational than any other form of racial identification. It is simply that becoming *zorey* is a particular example of racial and racialised identification where it would be impossible to claim that the *zorey* subject is ontologically prior to the social context. However, the fact that *zorey* identity cannot escape its relationality, its situatedness, does not necessarily make it less 'meaningful', neither as concerns how it is ascribed by others, nor when it is claimed in self-identification by *zorey* themselves. Furthermore, this process is shown to be by no means straight forward but in fact conflictual, and it relates to a field of contestation in which individuals negotiate meanings in their attempt to find an 'appropriate' social identity in the 'new' Réunionese, rather than metropolitan French, social context. These identities must be 'appropriate' in the sense of being acceptable to the subject her-/himself, and in relation to the expectations of others.

In the following analysis, *zorey* is understood as loaded signifier which connotes not only place of birth – in the metropole, mainland France, rather than on the island – but also racial and socioeconomic privilege. The term functions as a powerful evocation of both

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[558] Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 94-5.
[559] *The Black Atlantic*, p. 102
[560] *The Black Atlantic*, p. 102

whiteness and a relatively high socioeconomic status in conjunction with middle-class values. Yet it should also be remembered here that whiteness has not always been automatically associated with wealth in Réunionese society, as is affirmed by the history of the *Ti Blan* or *petits blancs*, the poor whites of the colonial era and their descendents, victims of an irreversible process of 'prolétarisation' during the era of slavery whose lack of wealth and fertile lands differentiated them from the *Gro Blan*, the wealthy land-owning class.[561] However, the popular association between high socio-economic status and the *zorey* population persists.[562] At times, these connotations may not accurately reflect the socioeconomic position of some *zorey* individuals. Nonetheless, having arrived in Réunion 'from the metropole', *zorey* individuals are considered direct representatives of (middle-class) Frenchness and a set of cultural values which were foreign to the majority of the Réunionese population prior to departmentalisation, but have since been adopted by the Réunionese middle class.[563] To understand how the significations and connotations attached to the term *zorey* have developed within the social context, it is first necessary to consider the historical context in which the first wave of *zorey* migration to Réunion took place. I will then examine contemporary representations of the *zorey* within popular discourses and the contested etymology, or etymologies, of the term, before expanding upon the significance of the *zorey* social identity in relation to visibility, racialisation, and whiteness in the Réunionese and French national context.

Contextualising the *Zorey*: Departmentalisation and Immigration

The *zorey* population of La Réunion, as distinct from the descendents of prior immigration from France and Europe, commonly referred to today as the *Ti Blan* and *Gro Blan*, is directly related to departmentalisation and the French government's vision of development and progress for the island:

> Dès 1946, puis tout au long des décennies suivantes, la départementalisation est présentée par l'État comme *une politique de développement, de rattrapage et d'égalité avec la métropole*. Il s'agit, pour reprendre les mots de l'époque, de rompre avec l'ère coloniale et de « faire des DOM des départements comme les autres » en s'assurant que leurs indices économiques et sociaux se rapprochent progressivement de la moyenne nationale.[564]

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[561] See Alexandre Bourquin, *Histoire des Petits-Blancs de la Réunion: XIXe - début XXe siècles* (Paris: Karthala, 2005).
[562] This would not appear to be unfounded: in 1996, Labache noted that *zoreys* formed 10% of population, but take up 16% of the jobs. 35% of high-status civil servant jobs are taken by *zoreys*. p. 187.
[563] See Wolff and Watin.
[564] Roinsard. My emphasis.

With the enactment of the 1946 law, Réunion became a *département d'outre-mer* (DOM), and thus acquired the same official status as all other metropolitan French departments. However, unlike mainland France, Réunion was still essentially a plantation society, with a mono-crop economy,[565] high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, and, for the vast majority of the population, limited access to education and non-existent social mobility. Sociologists Wolff and Watin describe the transformations instigated by the French government as part of the process of 'catching-up' with the metropole as a 'processus de techno-modernisation' accompanied by 'une forte acculturation'.[566] This process of techno-modernisation required a skilled workforce, yet at the time, the majority of the Réunionese population was illiterate. Skilled and semi-skilled personnel from mainland France were thus imported in order to fill a gap in the labour market, notably in the public and health sectors.[567] As Andoche *et al.* discuss in relation to government documents of the period, '[l]e rapport publié en 1956 à la Documentation Française sur « L'action sociale dans les territoires d'outre-mer » illustre bien les préoccupations du « service des affaires sociales » de ce ministère et sur *la nécessité d'organiser la venue massive de personnels qualifiés de la métropole*.'[568] In addition, projects to improve Réunion's limited infrastructure required technicians and engineers. A guide written for French citizens looking to move to the overseas territories in 1954 suggests that these posts could be taken up by non-qualified workers who, by moving to the DOM, could hope to benefit from an accelerated career path:

> Nous ne saurions trop répéter que c'est dans cette direction que doivent s'engager les jeunes français, même s'ils ne possèdent aucun diplôme officiel. En effet, s'ils ont fait des études primaires ou secondaires suffisantes, leur valeur propre, alliée à une préparation de courte durée, peut leur permettre d'accéder au grade d'adjoint technique dans le cadre des Travaux publics d'outre-mer. Après ce ne sera qu'une question de travail et d'intelligence pour franchir tous les échelons [...] Et ceci s'adresse aussi aux jeunes gens qui, ayant fait de bonnes études secondaires, ne voient s'ouvrir devant eux, en France métropolitaine, que des débouchés aléatoires ou médiocres.[569]

It is interesting that the author uses the term 'français' to refer exclusively to the metropolitan French population, which would suggest that the *populations d'outre-mer* were considered as

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[565] Roinsard states that in 1946, two-thirds of workers were employed in the sugar industry.

[566] Wolff and Watin, p.6, p. 7.

[567] Roinsard.

[568] p. 72, my emphasis.

[569] Louis-Gabriel Droux, *Guide F.O.M. Guide pratique pour ceux qui veulent vivre en France d'Outre-Mer* 3rd ed. (Paris: Société parisienne d'édition, 1954). Cited in Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 72.

neither 'really' French nor suitable candidates for the work which was offered to young metropolitan French men, including those without qualifications.[570] Thus, the start of mass migration from the metropole to Réunion cannot be wholly disassociated from racist attitudes which refused the Réunionese population equal status as French citizens.

We have thus outlined the context in which the first wave of *zorey* migration to Réunion took place in the period of departmentalisation. However, official statistics show that the *zorey* population has continued to increase year on year: the percentage of the Réunionese population born in metropolitan France rose from 1.4% in 1967 to 7.4% in 1997,[571] and is now around 10% according to the latest (2006) census results.[572] Ironically, whereas it would be illegal under French law to include information regarding other Réunionese ethnic groups in official statistics, the *zorey* population can be estimated from the census data, as this includes information about place of birth and place of residence five years prior to the census date. Migration from the metropole to Réunion has thus not only continued, but has also accelerated, long since the initial need for skilled labour was met. Nonetheless, public sector jobs in Réunion continue to be dominated by *zorey*s: Roinsard states that in 2000-2001, nearly half of all posts created locally were taken by metropolitan-born candidates.[573] Moreover, as in all other overseas departments, these posts benefit from a bonus which results in salaries 32 to 52 percent higher than those paid in the metropole. In addition, *zorey*s are also well-represented in the top-end of the private sector: 'on dénombre trois fois plus de chefs d'entreprise chez les Métropolitains que parmi les Réunionnais'.[574]

In any consideration of contemporary *zorey* identity, then, it would seem that it is crucial to recognise the extent to which the first wave of *zoreys* came to be seen by the Réunionese population as representative of French, Western, and modern cultural values – values which were to play a central role in the shaping of a Réunionese middle class in the

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[570] There is an interesting and informative contrast here between these young unqualified metropolitan employees who could improve their career prospects and attain a superior social status by moving the Réunion in the 1950s and 1960s, and the unemployed unqualified youth in the 1960s and 1970s, who were encouraged by the government agency BUMIDOM (*Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer*) to move from the overpopulated DOM to metropolitan France to take up low-paid work. For an analysis of the policy decisions of Michel Debré who founded BUMIDOM in 1963, see G. Gauvin, *Michel Debré et l'île de la Réunion.* See also Anny Dominique Curtius, 'Utopies du BUMIDOM: Construire l'avenir dans un « là-bas » postcontact', *French Forum*, 35: 2/3 (2010), 135-55. We may also draw a further parallel with the unemployed youth of contemporary Réunion, who are castigated for their lack of qualifications.

[571] Statistics from INSEE, cited in Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 73.

[572] INSEE, '85 % de natifs de La Réunion,' Revue économie de La Réunion N° 7 Hors série, (July 2009) <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=24&ref_id=15183>, [Accessed 11th October 2013].

[573] Roinsard, see note 24.

[574] Roinsard.

second half of the twentieth century.[575] This was also the case even for those *zoreys* who migrated as unqualified or semi-skilled workers, who presumably would have come from working-class rather than middle-class backgrounds. Nonetheless, on their arrival in the department, their socioeconomic status as permanent full-time employees (their financial capital), combined with their European phenotype and mastery of the French language (their cultural capital), meant that *zorey* were, and still often are, placed at the top of the Réunionese social structure. This would appear to break with long-standing social dynamics regarding immigration and integration. In their overview of historical immigration to the island, Andoche *et al.* identify a pattern of stigmatisation of new arrivals;[576] from slave owners giving preferential treatment to Creole slaves (born on the island) compared to those born elsewhere, to the demonization of indentured labourers from India as religious Others encouraged by the Catholic Church.[577] The legacy of fear and rejection of the non-assimilated Other can arguably also be seen to continue to influence contemporary attitudes towards the recently immigrated population of Mahorais and Comorian origin, both referred to as 'Komor' in RK, who generally occupy low socioeconomic positions.[578] The *zorey* population, however, as one of the more recent arrivals, seem to have escaped this phenomenon of simultaneous racial othering and proletarianisation, presumably thanks to their association with Frenchness, whiteness, and high socioeconomic status, to an extent regardless of their actual financial circumstances. Yet this is not to say that *zorey* migration to Réunion has not gone uncontested, as becomes apparent when we consider how the *zorey* population are related to and represented within popular discourses and culture.

Conceptualising the *Zorey*: Colonial References, Youth, Gender

In contrast to marginalised (im)migrant groups, then, the *zorey* 'ne font pas l'objet d'une méfiance ni d'un rejet systématiques', yet their presence would appear to create

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[575] Wolff and Watin speak of '[l]a « moyennisation » de la société, qui intervient dans les années 1980': 'Apparaissent ainsi une nouvelle segmentation en catégories socioprofessionnelles et une classe moyenne qui ne cesse de se développer et qui va être le meilleur diffuseur des valeurs de la modernité occidentale', pp. 7-8.

[576] *Immigrations réunionnaises*, pp. 102-8.

[577] See Bernard Boutter, '« Malbar lé sorsyé... », conversion au pentecôtisme et diabolisation de l'hindouisme populaire chez les Réunionnais d'origine indienne tamoule', *ethnographiques.org*, 4 (2003), <http://www.ethnographiques.org/../2003/Boutter> [Accessed 11th October 2013].

[578] The RK term 'Komor' thus does not distinguish between migrants from Mayotte who have French nationality, and immigrants from the Comoros Islands. For an account of this immigration, see Expédite Laope-Cerneaux, 'Les émigrés du sud: Les « Komors » du Port de l'île de la Réunion', Unpublished dissertation, DESS de Sciences de l'Education « Responsable d'Actions Educatives et Sociales dans l'Espace Urbaine » (University of Paris VIII, CAFOC-REUNION, Sainte Clotilde, 1995).

tensions resulting from the invocation of a paternalistic colonial relationship configuration which generates a desire to both imitate and spurn the *zorey*.[579] As a result, relations with the *zorey* 'peuvent être de cordialité, mais aussi de rivalité, notamment pour tout ce qui touche à la question de l'emploi, du rapport au travail, et aussi souvent de l'expression identitaire.'[580] Paradoxically, then, the *zorey* can be symbolically positioned both as colonial benefactor, and as a direct competitor within a field of limited resources. A related aspect of the *zorey*-as-competitor discourse can be found in association of *zorey* migrants with the verb 'profiter', as is expressed in 'ils sont venus pour profiter du soleil', 'de la plage', or even more insidiously, 'des salaires indexés', the increased salaries (often accompanied by relocation packages) paid to civil servants in overseas France. The particular connotations of 'profiter' as used in this context reflect a common perception that young *zorey* who come to Réunion on a temporary basis are there to have fun and enjoy themselves at the island's expense in some respect, whether environmental, financial, cultural, or societal. This reading of the *zorey* as a transient population motivated by self-gain who take from Réunionese society without contributing in return would also appear to invoke a colonial frame of reference which associates the group with irresponsible colonisers. The evocation of unequal colonial power relations would thus appear to play an important role in eliciting a negative emotive response within representations of the *zorey*, a response which would appear to be justified by observations that *zorey* civil servants have previously 'tended to adopt a colonial attitude quite rapidly in their stay',[581] and 'have a lifestyle that is distinctly colonial in feel'.[582]

These colonial resonances and their emotive appeal thus appear to result in contradictory relations with the *zorey*. On the one hand, the figure of the *zorey* may undergo a process of idealisation which stems from French colonial practices and discourses, still present within contemporary cultural practices in Reunion. For example, Lucette Labache's quantitative study of ethnicity in Réunion, which asked respondents which of a series of ethnic groups they admired, revealed the *zorey* to be the most 'prestigious' group in Reunion, and the group best positioned to serve as a 'modèle de référence' and 'répère'. For Labache, '[c]es resultats montrent une fascination des Réunionnais pour les Zoreils.'[583] On the other hand,

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[579] Jacqueline Andoche, Laurent Hoarau, Jean-François Rebeyrotte, and Emmanuel Souffrin, 'La Réunion', *Hommes et migrations*, 1278 (2009), 218-231, p. 225.

[580] Andoche *et al.*, 'La Réunion', p. 225.

[581] Vergès, *Monsters*, p. 2. She is referring here to a period of research in Réunion in 1992-1993.

[582] 'They do not go to creole cafes and rum bars. They remain on the boulevards, sipping coffee and eating croissants for breakfast, away from the side-streets where they might glimpse squalor or poverty; they have creole maids to care for the children, and generally regard the locals as good or naughty children, depending on their outlook.' Helen M. Hintjens, *Alternatives to Independence: Explorations in Post-Colonial Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995), p. 69. It should be noted that Hintjens, like Vergès, is referring to the context of the early 1990s.

[583] Labache, p. 391.

however, *zoreys* may also be confronted with a form of prejudice which might be termed *anti-zoreyisme*. Though some *zoreys* and others characterise this as a form of racial discrimination, it is arguably better understood as an expression of anger in reaction to rising levels of social inequality in contemporary Réunion. In the early 1990s, it was suggested that

> parmi les composantes de la dynamique sociale apparues depuis un demi-siècle, on notera la plus récente, encore discrète mais en pleine évolution : un sentiment de réserve, et parfois de rejet de la part des Réunionnais à l'égard des 'zoreils', sentiment surtout marquée chez les jeunes. Il ne s'exprime pas actuellement en termes de racisme véritable – du moins s'il y a préjugés racistes, ils sont motives par des considérations d'ordre économique.[584]

Contemporary evaluations suggest that socioeconomic inequality continues to fuel anti-*zorey* sentiment: within his sociological study of youth deliquency in Réunion, Laurent Médéa maintains that 'les rares manifestations des tensions ou de ressentiment entre personnes ou communautés se dessinent autour de critères économiques (« on s'attaque aux riches ») plutôt qu'ethniques, même si certaines communautés symbolisent le pouvoir ou la richesse (les groups *Zorey* et *Gro blan*), toujours selon les témoignages recueillis.'[585]

The fact that anti-*zorey* sentiment is thus associated most often with the youth population of Réunion would seem to suggest that Réunionese relations with the *zorey* are shaped by generational structures and concerns. This appears to be supported by the fact that the practice of graffiti, which has developed as an oppositional youth culture in Réunion,[586] constitutes an important means of expressing *anti-zoreyisme*. The slogan '*zorey* dehors', or 'zorey déor' in RK, can be found in graffiti on public buildings, road sides, and other visible public locations all over the island.[587] The generationally specific aspects of *zorey* relations can perhaps be clarified by examining the particular ways in which the *zorey* population are associated with representations of youth in Réunion. Firstly, it must be recognised that this association does not simply reflect demographics: although it has been claimed that the *zorey* are 'plus jeunes que la moyenne du département (26,5 % ont entre 15 et 29 ans)',[588] it is

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[584] Jean Poirier and Sudel Fuma, 'La mémoire créole réunionnaise' in *Les Monuments et la mémoire*, ed. by Jean Peyras (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), pp. 207-15, p. 214.

[585] Laurent Médéa, *La Délinquance juvénile à La Réunion* (Sainte-Clotilde, Réunion: Zarlor Editions, 2011), p. 144.

[586] See Pierre Gilbert, 'Murs de La Réunion et culture rap', Unpublished Masters dissertation, (University of La Réunion, 1993), p. 18.

[587] Andoche *et al.* interpret this as the result of an exploitation of social tensions: 'En cette période d'intense chômage (plus de 30 %) mais aussi d'échanges et de refonte sociétale, une telle opposition ne manque pas d'être exploitée par les extrémistes de tous bords. En témoignent ces graffitis qui sporadiquement affichent sur les murs de certaines zones urbaines le slogan "Zoreils dehors"'. 'La Réunion', p. 226.

[588] Decloître, 'Une communauté à part'.

perhaps more accurate to state that the majority of this population are working-age adults.
However, Laurent Decloître's assertion that 'ils débarquent dans la force de l'âge', would
appear to be largely true, given that in 2006, half of newly arrived *zorey* were aged between 25
and 45.[589] The common perception of the *zorey* as a young population thus appears to be
based in part on lifestyle choices associated with young adulthood, made possible by their
comparatively higher *pouvoir d'achat*. This can be seen in the unofficial renaming of the town
of Saint Gilles on the west coast of the island, which is visited primarily for its beaches and
nightlife, as 'Zoreyland'. Furthermore, certain leisure activities, such as surfing[590] and
adventure sports like canyoning,[591] are understood to be dominated by *zorey*. Though of
course other factors are undoubtedly involved in the difference in preference for these leisure
activities, the resultant association of the *zorey* with an idealised youth or extended youth
lifestyle is nonetheless shown to be directly connected to the group's relatively higher
socioeconomic status. As has been acknowledged, this serves as a source of tension which may
be particularly palpable for young Réunionese who due to a lack of financial or other resources
are not able to enjoy this type of idealised youth lifestyle. An additional development which
may further reinforce the perception of the *zorey* as a youth population point is that increasing
numbers of Réunionese of the same age are migrating to the metropole and elsewhere to find
work. Young adults within the *zorey* population may thus find themselves rendered particularly
visible, perhaps as a source of resentment, due to the relative shortfall in Réunionese 20- and
30-somethings who they appear to have in some respects replaced. This interpretation again
reveals a positioning of the *zorey* as competitor which, as has been shown, has particular
significance for the youth and young adult population of Réunion.

Finally, it should be recognised that not only generational, but also gendered social
dynamics have affected representations of the *zorey*. These must be understood in the context
of developments following Réunionese economic restructuring in the second half of the
twentieth century after departmentalisation, which resulted in loss of jobs in agriculture, and
predominantly within sugar cane production. As Helen M. Hintjens has observed, this
disproportionally affected the Réunionese working class men previously employed in this
sector.[592] As she points out, 'the change from a primary, commodity-based economy to a
tertiary, service-oriented economy has resulted in a greater proportion of jobs being made

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[589] INSEE, '43 000 personnes arrivées en cinq ans: Jeunes, qualifiées et actives', Revue économie de La
Réunion N° 136, (May 2010) <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=16102>, [Accessed
24th February 2015].

[590] Alex Maillot, 'Le Créole ou la grandeur domestique: Rhétorique de la réparation', *Faire savoirs*,
Special issue, L'île de la Réunion: Regards contemporains, ed. by Philippe Vitale, 7 (2008), 55-63, p. 59.

[591] Decloître, 'Bienvenue à Zoreyland', *L'Express*, 26th May 2010,
<http://www.lexpress.fr/region//bienvenue-a-zoreyland_903392.html>, [Accessed 11th October 2013].

[592] See her analysis in the chapter 'Reunion Island: Being There and Being French', pp. 49-78.

available to women'.[593] From the 1980s onwards, then, Réunionese women have occupied a more active role in the local economy, a development which has significantly impacted on gender relations. Hintjens emphasises the speed at which these transformations took place, creating 'a context of rapid changes in local gender relations between men and women' resulting from the 'dramatic shift in employment from mainly manual and agricultural work, performed largely by creole men, to clerical and service employment, where creole women almost equal men'.[594] Referring to statistical analysis conducted in the late 1980s, she maintains that as a consequence, 'the relative position of the two sexes had altered as dramatically as employment patterns'.[595] Though this assessment must of course be tempered with an acknowledgement that the apparent favouring of Réunionese women within process of economic restructuring was accidental, that unemployment continues to remains higher amongst women, and that the *pied à riz* popular conceptualisation of the Réunionese wife as bread-winner is thus largely a myth, it would seem that the gendered nature of these transformations cannot be denied.[596] As Hintjens succinctly concludes, '[t]he effect, overall, has been to marginalise poor creole men from economic life.'[597]

Given that these changes occurred during a period in which zorey immigration was on the increase, it would seem fair to suggest that relations between *zorey* and Réunionese, and particularly those of a heterosexual nature, were undoubtedly affected. Hintjens proposes that personal advertisements in Réunionese newspapers in the early 1990s can be considered as a pertinent example of how these changing relations were played out within popular discourse. As she explains,

> Usually metropolitan (often military) men seek creole mistresses. Creole women, on the other hand, tend to be looking for husbands, and often for metropolitan men as partners. Being passed over in this way causes anger among creole men, who see these women as alienated and mentally colonised, and metropolitan men as sexually aggressive and colonising.[598]

Hintjens suggests that at the time of her research in Réunion, this resulted in a palpable resentment 'among the young unemployed, but also among students, that metropolitan men are more attractive to creole women and "take our women away"', an expression which reveals that patriarchal gender roles have however not been entirely undermined by the

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[593] Hintjens, p. 66.
[594] p. 65.
[595] p. 65, referring to INSEE, *Femmes en Chiffres Réunion*, Service Régionale de l'INSEE (Sainte-Clotilde, Reunion, 1988).
[596] p. 66, p. 67. The *pied à riz*, literally 'a rice tree', is a Réunionese expression more or less equivalent to the English 'bread-winner'.
[597] p. 65.
[598] p. 66.

increased participation of Réunionese women in the local economy.[599] Hintjens goes on to note the potential for political manipulation within this emotive response, remarking that 'the slogan *Réunion aux Réunionnais* appears to have more resonance among young men than among young women [as it] reflect[s] the formers' feelings of hurt pride and economic and social marginality' which is further compounded by 'a continued colonial mentality of "untouchability" in relation to white women'.[600]

Of course, gender relations in Réunion have continued to evolve in the twenty years since Hintjens' observations. Nonetheless, although the example of the personal advertisements and the reactions they provoked appears as a rather flagrant account of both *zorey* and Réunionese gender stereotypes, I must also acknowledge that during fieldwork I also encountered negative conceptualisations of 'Creole men' which appeared to reflect a continuation of elements of this discourse. In June 2012, during a conversation in a shared taxi to the airport with a middle-aged Réunionese woman and a young *zorey* returning to France after working on the island for six months, the former instigated a discussion of 'les créoles', signifying here Réunionese men. After relaying a list of negative characteristics which largely fitted the stereotype of the macho yet irresponsible and unreliable Creole man, the Réunionese woman asked about our experiences in an apparent attempt to establish sympathy and empathy. Yet when the *zorey* woman asked her in an honest bid for clarification, 'mais vous, vous n'êtes pas créole?', the conversation came to a close. The question appears to call into question the implicit understanding that, due to the particularities of gender relations in Réunion, a Creole woman could be forgiven for renouncing her solidarity with Creole men, in this situation in order to foster commonality with *zorey* women, but also potentially in order to establish relationships with *zorey* men. Though no subsequent comparative discussion of *zorey* men followed, the Réunionese woman's eagerness to hear our negative experiences with Creole men as *zorey* women appeared to imply an underlying comparative judgement which presented 'our' *zorey* men in a favourable light.

It has thus been established that the representation of the *zorey* within popular discourses, which has over time resulted in the establishment of a stereotype, has been fundamentally shaped by, firstly, the invocation of a colonial frame of reference and asymmetrical colonial power relations; secondly, generational structures and issues pertaining to both the symbolic representation of youth and the lived experience of young Réunionese; and thirdly, transformations in Réunionese gender relations which in turn have reified differences between constructions of *zorey* and Creole masculinities. It thus becomes apparent

[599] Hintjens, p. 68.
[600] Hintjens, p. 68.

that the anxieties produced by these representations have created a focus on *zorey* men which arguably obscures the particular social dynamics which are generated through the integration of *zorey* women. As a result, in its dominant mode, the *zorey* stereotype is assumed to be male, unless it is explicitly stated otherwise. It would therefore seem that, at the level of representation, the differences between constructions of *zorey* and Réunionese masculinities and feminities have not resulted in the overturning of traditional gender roles in Réunion, notably as regards the implication that male gender is normative. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I will attempt to show that the act of naming the zorey can in contrast be seen to challenge representations of whiteness as normative within the French national context. Despite their privileged position, the act of naming French metropolitans as *zorey* does in some way invoke a marginal status as non-integrated new arrivals, a identity which may then be contested by 'creolised' zorey individuals. Let us now turn to the etymology of the term *zorey* in order to expand upon the significance of this act of naming.

What's in a Name? Etymology and Use of the Term *Zorey*

No definitive etymology of the term *zorey* exists. We know approximately when, but we do not know why the Réunionese population exactly started calling metropolitan French *zorey*. In his 1974 linguistic survey, Robert Chaudenson notes that, according to his respondents, the term was not used prior to the First World War.[601] Chaudenson suggests that the most likely etymology for this use of *zorey* could be as a translation of 'mena sofina' (lit. 'red ears'), a Malagasy expression for Europeans which Réunionese soldiers could have heard whilst stationed in Madagascar in the First World War. He further suggests that usage of term may have been facilitated by the RK expression 'fé *zorey*' meaning *faire le sourd*, given that metropolitan officers would not have understood Réunionese soldiers conversing amongst themselves in RK.[602]

For the purposes of this analysis, however, it is perhaps more instructive that a number of etymological explanations circulate within Réunionese popular discourse. These range from more benign accounts of metropolitan French people's ears burning and becoming red in the sun, and the newly-arrived having difficulties in understanding Kreol, hence the need to *tendre l'oreille*; to the suggestion that the *zorey* once were thought to act as spies and were

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[601] *Le lexique du parler créole de la Réunion*. (Paris: H. Champion, 1974), p. 1078. He also notes that older Réunionese said that 'autrefois on disait Européen', a term which could no longer distinguish metropolitan French (Europeans in geographical terms) from the Réunionese, who in political terms became Europeans with the enactment of the 1946 departmentalisation law.

[602] Chaudenson, pp. 1077-9.

in effect 'ears' for the French administration in Paris. Another popularly evoked explanation is yet more sinister: the term is linked to the amputation of ears as a punishment for runaway slaves in the colonial era, and the image of the *chasseurs des marrons*, the hunters of runaway slaves employed by the French *Compagnie des Indes*, returning from their missions brandishing the severed ears, and possibly other body parts, of slaves who had run away from the plantations. Though, as Chaudenson points out, this is an unlikely etymology given that usage of the term *zorey* only dates back to the early twentieth century, the fact that this has become an etymological explanation in popular discourse gives an idea of the feelings of bitterness and anger that the *zorey* population evoke. One significant factor here is that, as discussed above, although the *zorey* who arrived in Réunion after departmentalisation were new arrivals, they did not undergo the same social and economic marginalisation which other groups experienced. Furthermore, whereas other migrants may not have successfully integrated in Réunionese society, and thereby benefit from no longer being socioeconomically marginalised, until established on the islands for two generations or more, *zorey* individuals appear to benefit from an 'automatic' privileged socioeconomic status, including those who do not intend to settle permanently on the island. It would seem that this can be tied to two ostensible factors: the fact that *zorey* migrants to Réunion are Francophone, and thus exhibit mastery of French, the language of privilege, and the fact that they are also predominantly white.

However, it would seem that the racial connotation of the term *zorey* is not considered as the term's primary signification. This is instead thought to refer to a person from mainland France, or even more generally, somebody from 'outside', i.e. not from Réunion. As Andoche *et al.* explain, '[l]'angle collectif renvoie à la notion de réunionnité qui se jouant sur cette opposition générale "dedans"/"dehors", permet de distinguer entre les populations historiquement intégrées ("mond' pays") et celles qui migrant récemment, sont considérées comme des étrangers ("mond' dehors")'.[603] In this sense, 'foreignness' is the first and most important criteria used in determining who should be categorised as *zorey*, although this concept of foreignness does not take into account the official nationality of individuals. Given that a proportion of the Réunionese non-*zorey* population is also 'white,' whiteness is not specifically evoked by the term, and yet it is implicitly recognised that the term could never be used to apply to someone who is non-white. Here another parallel to use of 'gringo' in Latin America becomes apparent in that the term is used for North Americans, or even more restrictively: according to Diane M. Nelson, '[i]n Latin America gringo (masc.) is a disrespectful

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[603] Andoche *et al.*, *Immigrations réunionnaises*, p. 109.

term for people from the U.S.'[604] When I was called 'gringa' (the feminine variant of 'gringo')

during a visit to Brazil, it was explained to me that it wasn't necessarily an offensive term and

could be considered a synonym for 'foreigner'. Yet when I asked, they conceded that the term

would never be used to describe a non-white Westerner. In a similar way to 'gringo' in Latin

America, *zorey* doesn't simply correspond to 'foreign', and yet neither does *zorey* mean

'white', because some Réunionese 'Creoles' are also white. Therefore, *zorey* could be said to

signify the combination of 'foreignness' (in the sense of belonging to the 'mond' déor'), with

whiteness. Yet, for most Réunionese, the racial connotations of the term remain secondary:

the term is rarely acknowledged as a signifier of whiteness. When I asked Réunionese friends

and acquaintances whether they would consider me as *zorey* despite my British (i.e. not

French) nationality, they most commonly replied that they would because the term *zorey*

refers to somebody who comes from outside of Réunion. They would never mention my

European phenotype or whiteness as a justification for my inclusion in the *zorey* category. This

is in stark contrast to the experience of a black friend who also grew up in England but has now

lived in Réunion for several years: she is more likely to be called *kafrine*[605] and mistaken for a

réunionnaise, and would certainly never be called a *zorey*.

And yet, despite an apparent reluctance to engage with the racial connotations of the

term, becoming *zorey* through interaction with the Réunionese social context arguably raises

the issue of whiteness, and of one's own whiteness. Conceptualising whiteness as an 'issue' in

this way can itself be seen as having a radical impact: as Richard Dyer points out, 'in the West,

being white is not an issue for most white people, not a conscious or reflected on part of their

sense of who they are'.[606] Thus being categorised in terms of one's racial positioning can be a

particularly disorientating experience for white individuals. Becoming *zorey* no longer allows

French metropolitan subjects to believe that they are somehow living 'racially neutral' lives,

which they may still believe to be the case even after having recognised racial oppression in

the lives of others.[607] In the following section, I intend to further explore this in relation to the

notion of racial (in)visibility, including the 'invisibility' of whiteness and of white people's racial

privilege from the dominant (white) perspective.

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[604] 'Relating to Terror: Gender, Anthropology, Law, and some September Elevenths', *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy,* 9 (2002), 195-210, p. 202 note 33.

[605] Feminised version of *kaf*, often used as a term of endearment.

[606] *White* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 5.

[607] In an ethnographic study of white identity, carried out amongst white women, Ruth Frankenberg analyses interview material regarding the childhood of one of her respondents as follows: '…Beth was much more sharply aware of racial *oppression* shaping Black experience than of race *privilege* in her own life. Thus, Beth could be alert to the realities of economic discrimination against Black communities while still conceptualizing her own life as racially neutral – nonracialized, non-political.' *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 49. Emphasis in original.

Race, Whiteness and Colour-Blindness: Issues of (In)visibility

Considering the position of the *zorey* in Réunionese society from a critical perspective brings up multiple questions of visibility and invisibility in connection with race and interracial relations. These are relevant not only with regard to the specificities of the Réunionese context, but also to those of the French state, and of the Western world in general, given that *zorey* individuals are considered as direct representatives of both, particularly as concerns the continuing prevalence of the 'colour-blind' discourse on race. Questions of (in)visibility may be considered as working on a number of different levels. Firstly, and more generally, they evoke the invisibility of Réunion as a *département d'outre-mer* within the French media and, specifically, within French discourses on the nation. Through her critical analysis of the French media's and government's reaction to the 2006 Chikungunya outbreak in La Réunion, Françoise Lionnet decries 'the centre-periphery relationship that underwrites the continued marginalization of the DOM as *invisible* fragments of the French nation'.**[608]** Réunion, which can boast neither the tourist appeal of Martinique or Guadeloupe, nor Guyane's space programme, may indeed be the least visible of the four original DOM.[609] Lionnet suggests that 'Reunion seems to become significant and "visible" in public discourse only when it is the site of catastrophic natural, medical or political events'.[610] It could be suggested that one reason for this is that Réunionese people, as racial, linguistic, socio-economic, and possible religious Others, are 'illegible' as French citizens – or at least as equal French citizens – within mainstream political discourse.[611] Race and nationality in this sense can be equated with Butler's reformulation of sex within her conceptualisation of gender as performative: '"Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility'.[612] Being, for example, dark-skinned and French may not necessarily bring one's cultural intelligibility into question, but being dark-skinned, French and living on a 'tropical island' (apparently without a specific geographical location),[613] in addition to speaking

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[608] Lionnet, 'Disease, Demography, and the "Debré Solution"', p. 193. Emphasis in original.

[609] Mayotte, also situated in the Indian Ocean, became the 101st French department, and fifth overseas department, in 2011.

[610] Lionnet, 'Disease, Demography, and the "Debré Solution"', p. 190.

[611] Lionnet's analysis would appear to show that this was the case in relation to the Chikungunya outbreak: she claims that 'metropolitan perceptions of this 'exotic' ailment revealed that many in France had great difficulty taking it seriously'. 'Disease, Demography, and the "Debré Solution"', p. 191.

[612] *Bodies that Matter,* p. 2.

[613] We might consider here the way in which the DOM are 'cut and pasted' onto maps of France without any indication of their actual location.

a different language within everyday interaction which itself serves as an indicator of different cultural values, which in turn result from a different sociohistorical context, may do so.

Secondly, the differential power structure invoked by the racial order affects visibility of certain individuals and groups, and vice-versa. David Theo Goldberg reminds us that

> visibility and invisibility are not simply states or conditions of being. Rather they characterise, express, reflect, or they are the effects of strategic relations.[614]

These strategic power relations can be effective to such a point that they render non-white individuals literally invisible. In a different political context, that of the US, where the 'colour-blind' approach to race remains prevalent nonetheless, Ruth Frankenberg conducted ethnographic research amongst white women of differing ages and class backgrounds. When she inquired about her respondents' childhoods, in several cases she noted that non-white figures such as maids and household employees were literally erased from individuals' memories, although the respondents may have been physically close. She suggests that what may have made these 'forgotten and suddenly remembered' women 'invisible'[615] was the asymmetrical power structure between differentially racialised individuals:

> it is primarily through employer-employee, class-imbalanced relationships that women from apparently all-white homes encountered women of color. If not themselves in positions of clear authority, these white middle-class women must have seen their parents in such positions, able to summon and dismiss the racially different Other at will. It is perhaps in this sense of control and authority that the home was indeed all white, and the neighborhood similarly so.[616]

She notes that in her respondents accounts of childhood, '[e]ven the presence or absence of people of color seemed to be as much a social-mental construct as a social-physical one'.[617] When another respondent, Clare, says that there were 'probably' no black children in her primary school, but possibly one or two, Frankenberg explains that this can be seen as indicative of a white-centred viewpoint:

> Clare's standpoint here is clearly different from that of the African American townspeople themselves, for whom it would be impossible to confuse existence with nonexistence. What Clare's cloudy memory on this point perhaps indicates is the lack of importance accorded to Black people in the community by whites.[618]

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[614] *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 82.
[615] Frankenberg, p. 50.
[616] p. 51.
[617] p. 69.
[618] p. 56.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, although *zorey* in Réunion could be considered as an ethnic minority, though not in the sense that the this term is often employed in the West, and although they are 'othered' through linguistic, cultural and other forms of difference which show them to belong to the 'mond' deor' rather than to Réunion, they are highly visible as a social group. They are unlikely to be elided or 'forgotten' in the same way that non-white individuals were in the above accounts. Yet it is significant that this visibility operates in a different way to the (usually unacknowledged) forms of visibility that they may be accorded in the metropolitan French context. Indeed, becoming *zorey* entails moving from a social framework where the dominant group (white European) is juxtaposed against ethnic minorities, which may also include individuals of mixed and partially European heritage, to a system in which *zorey* are contrasted with the 'indigenous' Réunionese. Yet paradoxically, from a European or Western perspective at least, the Réunionese group is, and is recognised as, a racially and culturally heterogeneous group, whereas the *zorey* are presumed to be racially and culturally homogeneous. (This may give a partial explanation of why it would not be discursively possible to include representation of non-white individuals within the *zorey* group). But still, despite, or because of their homogeneity, it is the *zorey* who are marked as Other in Réunion. Thus, *zorey* individuals are primarily visible, or, in Butler's terms, become 'culturally intelligible' by means of a sociocultural, socioeconomic, and racialised group, rather than as individuals marked in other (gendered, classed, etc.) ways.

The third aspect of (in)visibility highlighted by the *zorey* in Réunion relates therefore to the supposed invisibility of whiteness. Frankenberg gives the following three-fold definition of whiteness:

> First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.[619]

It is these cultural practices which, as Frankenberg, Dyer, and others have evidenced, are presented 'simultaneously as generic or normative and as an apparently empty [or residual] cultural space.'[620] For Frankenberg, the discursive repertoire used by respondents' which criticised white (American) culture as being 'formless',[621] when analysed, proves ineffectual and even counter-productive as a form of anti-racist discourse. As she explains,

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[619] p. 1.
[620] Frankenberg, p. 192.
[621] Interview with Cathy, cited on p. 196.

A far-reaching danger of whiteness coded as 'no culture' is that it leaves in place whiteness as defining a set of normative cultural practices against which all are measured as into which all are expected to fit. This normativity has underwritten oppression from the beginning of colonial expansion.[622]

This recognition would appear to provide much of the motivation behind one of the aims of critical whiteness studies: that is, to 'name' whiteness and thereby begin to undo its supposed normativity.[623] It could be proposed that a similar dynamic is brought into play in the act of naming the *zorey* subject/object. This is the case even if, in terms of the first and primary meaning of the term, which evokes a 'dedans/dehors' binary, normativity is simply shifted from the metropolitan French to the Réunionese cultural sphere without calling into question the legitimacy of having one such set of normative cultural values, leaving aside for a moment the difficulties which one might encounter in trying to visualise, even in the abstract, one singular Réunionese cultural sphere. Because, in naming the *zorey*, or, to borrow Butler's terms, '*zorey*ing the *zorey*',[624] the Réunionese subject identifies the individual as forming part of a group – a group which is both characterised by cultural specificity (and racial specificity – even if, as I argue, the racial connotations of the term are underplayed), and marked as Other. The *zorey* individual can thus no longer maintain the illusion of their 'normalcy,' that they are a non-racialised human being, 'not of a certain race, […] just the human race'.[625] Not only is s/he marked as raced, culturally different and Other, but s/he is also becoming 'viable' and 'culturally intelligible' as part of a sociocultural and racial group. In stark contrast to white people in the West, then, *zorey* in Réunion are more visible as a cultural and racial group than as individuals.

It thus becomes apparent that, although the privileged racial position of whiteness may prove to be invisible to white people (Peggy McIntosh conceptualises this as an 'invisible weightless knapsack' full of things which may 'come in handy'[626]), this may not be the case for (racial) others. Frankenberg suggests that '[w]hiteness, as a set of normative cultural practices,

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[622] p. 204.

[623] Frankenberg argues that '[n]aming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its privilege.' p. 6. Dyer maintains that '[w]hite power none the less reproduces itself […] overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal'. He thus advocates 'making whiteness strange.' p. 10. George Yancy states that his aim 'is to *name* whiteness, to mark it, to undo its invisibility, to share a critical way of looking and thereby encourage a new way of discerning and hopefully a new and unflinching way of bringing attention to what has become normative and business as usual.' *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), p. 107.

[624] 'Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he', and in that naming, the girl is 'girled' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that 'girling' of the girl does not end there'. *Bodies that Matter*, p. 8.

[625] Dyer, p. 3.

[626] 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack', *Peace and Freedom*, 11 (1989), 10-12.

is visible most clearly to those it definitively excludes and those to whom it does violence.'[627] In the act of naming of the *zorey*, the Réunionese subject thus demonstrates 'the critical capacity of the black [here, Réunionese] gaze to tease out the subtleties of whiteness and thereby reflect whiteness back to whites themselves.'[628] The same may be said of the particular nature of the 'colour-blind' approach to cultural and racial difference within French Republican policy and discourse, which in fact belies the false universalisms of what we might term a white-centeredness. The French conceptualisation of the individual citizen, which draws from the theories of the Enlightenment, constructs as its ideal the neutral and disinterested subject who strives for objectivity, which allows him [sic] to attain truth and knowledge. In his extended discussion of the cultural meaning of whiteness, Dyer puts forward the case that 'there is something especially white in this non-located and disembodied position of knowledge',[629] an argument which would appear to completely undermine the Republican universalist rhetoric through and in which white French subjects' identities have been and continue to be formed.

A fourth aspect of invisibility is thus raised by Dyer's shrewd analysis of representations of whiteness. He suggests that in dominant (white) discourse, whiteness has traditionally been defined not in terms of physical attributes, in stark contrast to definitions of other racial 'types',[630] but rather in relation to 'spirit', discipline, and being able to transcend bodily desires. Thus what makes 'whiteness' white is in fact invisible – it concerns non-bodily, and therefore non-visible, elements of the individual. Dyer argues that this position draws from the imagery of Christianity and, significantly, from the paradox of 'incarnation':

> of being that is in the body yet not of it. […] All concepts of *race*, emerging out of eighteenth-century materialism, are concepts of bodies, but all along the have had to be reconciled with notions of embodiment and incarnation. The latter become what distinguish white people, giving them a special relation to race. Black people can be reduced (in white culture) to their bodies and thus to race, but white people are something else that is realised in and yet not reducible to the corporeal, or racial.[631]

This definition of whiteness as being above all concerned with the 'spirit of mastery over their and other bodies, in short their potential to transcend their raced bodies,'[632] i.e. that which can only be 'hinted at', but not definitively shown, through the visible body, proves however to be problematic in a number of ways. Dyer proposes that, in a visual culture, social groups benefit

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[627] p. 229.
[628] p. 107.
[629] p. 4.
[630] Dyer notes that that it would be impossible to produce, for white people, 'the kind of taxonomy of typification that had been done for non-white peoples […] because the privilege of being white in white culture is not to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one's whiteness'. p. 11.
[631] p. 14-5.
[632] Dyer, pp. 24-5.

from being visually identifiable: '[b]eing visible as white is a passport to privilege'. Yet, he goes on to outline the first paradox of white (in)visibility:

> Yet […] whiteness also needs not to be visible. The claim to racial superiority resides in that which cannot be seen, the spirit, manifest only in its control over the body and its enterprising exercise in the world. Moreover, the ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of invisibility, the watcher.[633]

As has been established above, '[l]ooking and being looked at reproduce racial power relations'; and yet white people cannot maintain their privileged position of 'observer' of (racial) others if they themselves are not seen as 'white'.[634] Dyer suggests that the choice of the colour white as the term to define the skin colour of people of European origin serves to provide a solution, if only a temporary one, to the paradox of the (in)visibility of whiteness:

> Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen. To be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal. The paradox and dynamic of this are expressed in the *very choice of white to characterise us. White is both a colour and, at once, not a colour* and the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen: the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death, all of which form part of what makes white people socially white. *Whiteness is the sign that makes white people visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible*.[635]

This can then allow for a conflation of (male gendered) whiteness with a universal or 'neutral' subject position, much like that constructed within French Republican discourse:

> non white people are presumed to be still, and perhaps forever, at the stage of 'particular, local sensations', not having made the move to disinterested subjecthood. […] They are the particular, marked, raced, whereas the white man has attained the position of being without properties, unmarked, universal, just human.[636]

To thus conclude this discussion of (in)visibility in relation to race, whiteness, and French Republican discourse, '*zorey*ing the *zorey*' could arguably be seen as a way of redressing the invisibility and supposed normativity of white culture and white privilege. It could thus be considered as a means to demand some form of responsibility from whites for the unequal positions of whites and non-whites in the racially structured society – both

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[633] Dyer, p. 44.
[634] Dyer, p. 45.
[635] Dyer, p. 45. My emphases.
[636] p. 38.

historically and in contemporary Réunionese society. The act of naming someone as a *zorey* is one which marks the white individual, s/he who, knowingly or unknowingly, may have been the 'unmarked marker of others' differentness'.[637] It delimits them as 'foreign', as a particular form of French citizen rather than 'a universal and universalising' citizen, and even differentiates between them from other light-skinned people in Réunion. '*Zorey*ing the *zorey*' therefore arguably constitutes a formidable challenge to the supposed 'normativity' of whiteness in both the regional (Réunionese) and national (French) social context.

'*Zorey*ing the *zorey*' also confronts the racially privileged – and especially those for whom their racial privilege is invisible or 'normal' – with the unsettlingness of being seen first and foremost as a 'racialised being', an experience which is powerfully conveyed by Linda Martin Alcoff in relation to reactions to mixed racial heritage: '[w]hen mythic bloodlines which are thought to determine identity fail to match the visible markers used by identity discourses to signify race, one often encounters these odd responses by acquaintances announcing with arrogant certainty 'But you don't look like...' or then retreating to a measured acknowledgement 'Now that you mention it, I can sort of see...' to feel one's face studied with great seriousness, not for its (hoped for) character lines, or its distinctiveness, but for its telltale racial trace, can be a particularly unsettling experience'.[638] This experience would seem in some respects to parallel Butler's discussion of 'cultural intelligibility', or, in this particular case, the limits of cultural intelligibility. Furthermore, the figure of the *zorey* makes evident sharp contrasts between what is necessary for 'cultural intelligibility' in the Réunionese and metropolitan French social context: whereas in the latter any form of cultural or ethnic 'difference' can risk intelligibility, in the former, racial, ethnic, cultural and class-related specificity forms an important part of intercultural communication.

Whiteness and (In)visibility in the Mauritian Context: Some Comparisons

The preceding discussion has thus applied insights from both representational and ethnographic analysis from what has come to be known as the academic field of critical whiteness studies to the Réunionese context, resulting in a productive engagement with the politics of *zorey* identity as concerns the visibility and normativity of whiteness. It might then be asked whether aspects of this analysis might also be applied to a consideration of the social identities associated with whiteness in the Mauritian context. In contrast to the Réunionese context and the French Republican policy of colour-blindness, ethnic particularity is inscribed

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[637] Frankenberg, p. 198

[638] 'Philosophy and Racial Identity' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies Today*, ed. by Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 29-44, p. 31.

with the Mauritian constitution, which recognises four distinct 'communities'. The population groups which are identified as white, including the Franco-Mauritians and recent South African immigrants, are however grouped within the residual category of the General Population. This categorisation is usually contested from the point of view of those claiming to represent the majority of Mauritians regrouped here, usually conceptualising all non-white members of the General Population as a particular ethnic community, the 'Creoles'.[639] However, applying the insights of critical whiteness studies, the official categorisation might be criticised for not explicitly addressing issues of white privilege. It could therefore be argued that this should be changed in order to make whiteness visible in Mauritius in the same way that the creation of the category *zorey* within popular discourse arguably works towards making white privilege explicit in the Réunionese context.

In one respect, however, white privilege is particularly visible in Mauritius, if we take into account the continuing legacy of the racial hierarchy, whereby a small group of white people hold the most privileged positions at the top of the social structure, as has also been the case in Réunion. Unlike Réunion, however, Mauritius does not have a historical population of poor whites, which would appear to render instances of white privilege yet more explicit. However, it would seem that the comparison with analyses of normative whiteness in the contexts of Europe and the US is made difficult by the fact that whiteness is not always presented as 'neutral' in Mauritius. However, it would appear problematic that whiteness in postcolonial Mauritius is not automatically associated with visible manifestations of power and authority. This results from developments following independence, from whenceforth political power has generally been associated with the majority Hindu population, at least as concerns the highest level of political representation, the role of Prime Minister. In tandem, the sphere of influence of historically dominant Franco-Mauritian families has moved from the public to the private sector, where they now exert control over the Mauritian economy.[640]

Finally, though Mauritius has also experienced immigration of white population groups in recent decades, particularly from South Africa, no direct equivalent to the *zorey* social identity exists in the Mauritian social context. This is arguably due to the relatively invisibility of white population within everyday life in Mauritius, whether this be powerful Franco-Mauritian families, or immigrant South Africans who live in gated communities. Whiteness

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[639] See my discussion of 'The Creole Population of Mauritius: Issues of Terminology, Race, and Social Class' in Chapter 2 of this study.

[640] See Gregoire's analysis of the Mauritian tourism industry: '[l]es principaux groupes mauriciens présents dans la filière touristique sont directement liés aux grandes propriétés sucrières franco-mauriciennes, notamment les quatre principales familles (Dalais, Espitalier-Noël, Lagesse et de Spéville) qui contrôlent une partie de l'économie du pays'. 'Développement touristique et reproduction sociale à l'île Maurice', *Civilisations*, 57 (2008), 91-106, <http://civilisations.revues.org/1141?lang=en#ftn9>, [Accessed 23rd May 2014].

thus remains primarily associated with tourism, which evokes a much more visible, although temporary, white population group. For this reason, an individual or group identified as white who does not originate from Mauritius is thus more likely to be read socially as a tourist, or where positioned as non-tourist due to, for example, length of residence, they are more likely to be seen as a social anomaly rather than integrated into a visible and recognised social group. The lack of visibility as a social group would thus appear to prevent the development of contestatory discourses which might parallel expressions of *anti-zoreyisme* in Réunion. Furthermore, in being positioned as tourists who are understood to give to Mauritius financially, white individuals recognised as outsiders may be associated with a colonial benefactor role which, unlike in Réunion, is not problematised by the simultaneously conceptualisation of the white outsider as competitor.

Conclusion

In her preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler provides the following explanation of her objectives behind the publication of the text, and the often misinterpreted concept of performativity in relation to gender identity:

> the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. One might wonder what use 'opening up possibilities' finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is 'impossible,' illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate is likely to pose that question.[641]

Could talking about *zorey*s in La Réunion open up possibilities in a similar way? Though some may deny, ignore, or accept it, *zoreys* may also come to resent the additional identity they acquire upon arrival on the island. This can result in a tendency to essentialise the Réunionese population in reaction to what is perceived as their essentialising of the *zorey* individual. Could an acceptance of *zorey* as a situated, relational and performative identity – as all racial identities indeed are – provide a solution? And do *zorey* who somehow are not quite French enough, or quite rich enough, figure as 'illegible' in Réunionese society, within which the image of whiteness and Frenchness is still so powerfully linked to prestige and power?[642] And would accepting that 'white' can mean poor and uneducated, or at least accepting that white is not an 'empty' or 'normative' cultural reference serve to somehow undo, or at least undermine,

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[641] *Gender Trouble*, p. viii.
[642] In his MA thesis on maloya music and rituals, Benjamin Lagarde says of others' reactions to him as a French (white) student (poor) in Réunion: '[l]'idée d'un *Zorey* pauvre parait impensable', p. 11.

the 'dazzle' of whiteness[643] which, it must be remembered, is closely interlinked in complex ways with the 'dazzling' mastery of the island's 'more prestigious' language, French? Could this in turn help us to accept that there is no inherent reason why non-white RK-speaking individuals cannot be successful, intelligent, rich, or physically attractive, without having to model themselves on white or *zorey* cultural traits in some way?

Butler goes on to explain her account of performativity in relation to a struggle against 'the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex' and 'presumptive heterosexuality':

> The dogged effort to 'denaturalize' gender in this text emerges, I think, from a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality. The writing of this denaturalization was not simply out of a desire to play with language or prescribe theatrical antics in the place of "real" politics, as some critics have conjectured (as if theatre and politics are always distinct). It was done from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such. [...] How must we rethink the ideal morphological constraints upon the human such that those who fail to approximate the norm are not condemned to a death within life?'[644]

As Butler herself recognises may be the case, race does not function here as a perfect analogy for either gender or sexuality. The 'normative violence' implied by performative race roles is arguably not as extreme, and yet stereotypes, prejudices and other lasting effects of racial hierarchy continue to have significant effect on people lives and within people's interactions with racial and socioeconomic Others. The implication of violence in relation to individuals who are seen not to 'fit' gender norms is arguably greater than that towards individuals who do not 'fit' racial categories – which themselves may be recognised to be changeable and slippery, at least in some cases. It would seem that as concerns race, it is more the effect of being categorised, marked, or racialised which does violence to individuals, as it has done from the beginnings of colonisation in Reunion, and continues to do so today. It is precisely the supposed 'unmarkedness' of the category of 'white' that has formed the basis of its legitimacy as the dominant social group: so much so that physiologically 'white' people who did not fit the expectations of the group's superior socioeconomic status, had to be renamed and thus categorised much like non-whites, as was historically the case with the *petit blanc* population.

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[643] 'Notions of the primitive and the civilised which had been integral to pre-modern understanding of "ethnic" differences became fundamental cognitive and aesthetic markers in the processes which generated a constellation of subject positions in which Englishness, Christianity, and other ethnic and racialised attributes would finally give way to the dislocating dazzle of "whiteness."' Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 9, referencing Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: WW Norton, 1977).

[644] *Gender Trouble*, p. xxi.

Yet here we must also recognise that *zorey* individuals also engage in social acts and cultural practices which challenge received ideas about social class and the racial order in Réunion. In turn, this can be seen to raise the question of the responsibility of the Réunionese population as regards the perpetuation of the racial hierarchy. Examples of these practices include wearing 'scruffy' clothes, as is typical of the island-style fashion adopted by many young *zorey*, growing dreadlocks, and wearing flip flops. All of these can be seen to value comfort and practicality over the social pressure to dress to match one's perceived social status. Such apparently benign acts could arguably lead some Réunionese to question their own internalization of colonial mentalities concerning what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour for differently racialised social groups.

What may prove potentially even more complex is the question of *zorey* engagement with practices, ways of living and cultural forms generally considered to be Réunionese and/or in some way indigenous to the island. This brings up complex issues regarding white appropriation of black cultures, and simultaneously invokes white anxiety over where the line is drawn between respectful interest in another culture to inappropriate intrusion. It also raises the particularly controversial question of which cultural practices are considered to be 'truly' or 'authentically' Réunionese, and who might be thought to have ownership of these cultural practices. This is alluded to in Benjamin Largarde's account of his experience of trying to subvert *zorey* stereotypes, living at the time in St Gilles on the island's west coast, popularly known as 'Zoreyland'. By the end of his stay, however, he had adopted elements of 'traditional' Réunionese culture, such as using a bertel, a bag worn like a rucksack made from vacoa leaves. This prompted a variety of reactions:

> '« Il se moque de nous » (entendu dans le bus) ; « Rentre chez toi ! » (lancé, depuis la fenêtre arrière d'une voiture […]) ; "Aou lé pa tro à la mode – tu es démodé » (Madame Baba ['informant'] en riant […]) ; « *A ou lé Kréol* ? – Tu es Créole ? » (commerçant) ou « *Ou in vré Kréol koméla* – Maintenant tu es un vrai Créole » (des amis créoles).'[645]

Yet he also cites a 29-year-old friend who says of the *zorey* in his commune:

> Ils cuisinent créole, ils apprennent notre culture. Il y en a même pour travailler la terre. Leurs enfants, *zorey* ou *zoréol*, grandissent ici avec ceux des *Réyoné*. Avant il n'y avait aucun habitant ici et l'ile n'appartenait à personne alors c'est eux, c'est banna les Créoles de demain ! »[646]

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[645] p. 12.
[646] p. 16.

It could thus be concluded that the whilst the *zorey* are marked as outsiders in the Réunionese context, the naming of the *zorey*, when accompanied by openness to learning about Réunionese cultural specificity, could constitute a first step towards integration within the island's heterogeneous society.

Conclusion: In Defence of Cultural Politics

This study set out to explore how contemporary popular music and youth culture engages with political and social issues in Réunion and Mauritius. It is informed by the assumption that popular culture is not 'doomed to remain forever merely pre-political',[647] and reflects a willingness to take popular cultural seriously within academic analysis. It has also been shaped by a conscious decision to privilege the experiences and cultural practices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the beginning of this thesis, it was asked whether popular cultural practices and output can be said to respond to the postcolonial politics and social conditions of the two island societies, which remain heavily marked by their respective histories of racial violence, and which today find themselves positioned at the periphery of global economic flows and at the mercy of neoliberal capitalist financial markets. Despite the complex relationship between popular culture and capitalism, given that popular culture is constituted through and characterised by its commodification, the preceding analysis sought to demonstrate that popular culture might serve to create a space in which criticism of existing structures of power could be expressed, thereby formulating an oppositional and progressive cultural politics. In opening up such an alternative, oppositional space, popular culture can therefore been seen to engage with dominant discourses on Mauritianness and Réunionness and point towards alternative conceptualisations and representational strategies which aim to speak to those who are marginalised within dominant discourses, and to challenge neo-colonial hegemonies which continue to affect the life chances of marginalised young people.

Following an outline of the study's methodological approach in Part I, the preceding analysis has thus presented a number of case studies in which popular music and related aspects of youth culture in Réunion and Mauritius can be said to engage with the postcolonial politics of their respective contexts. This was divided into a consideration of popular music's engagement with contemporary language politics, which was itself often mediated through re-appropriations of globalised culture, in Part II (Chapters 2 and 3); and with the politics of belonging in Part III (Chapters 4 and 5), which explored aspects of competing discourses on the nation-state and community, and how these are positioned in relation to differing conceptualisations of race and ethnicity.

Part I: The Politics of Research

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[647] Gilroy, 'Bio-politics', p. 84.

Just as the present study acknowledges the political potential of popular culture, it also recognises that the research process itself is necessarily political, and is ultimately shaped by the politics of the researcher. In Part I, therefore, I outlined the methodological approach which informed the ethnographic research I undertook in Réunion and Mauritius, and discussed this in particular in relation to my involvement with Abaim, an NGO and community music group involving young people from a disadvantaged neighbourhood in central Mauritius. I questioned to what extent practices of thick participation, might shape the relationship between researcher and participants, particularly in situations where these are conditioned by significant differences in terms of power, social status and cultural background, as was the case in my own experience of conducting research.[648] I argued here for the importance of shared experience, with reference to Wikan's concept of resonance as an alternative – and complementary – way of understanding ethnographic data, which might serve to guard against our perhaps instinctive desire as scholars to decipher text rather than to comprehend the meaning that participants are trying to convey to us.[649] However, I also drew attention to the particular ethical issues that may arise when conducting this type of research because of the ambiguous researcher role. As both researcher and fellow member of the music and community group, my own research experience led me to acknowledge that it was in fact inevitable that through prolonged and frequent interaction, we risk becoming part of people's lives, and vice versa.

Choosing to adopt a thick participation approach in ethnographic research therefore involves choosing to share our personal lives, and not just our research personas, with participants. It also means choosing to value participants as individuals, and to value rapport over speed, efficiency and range of data collection. As a result of conducting thick participation research, I cannot say that I was guaranteed an 'insider' or emic viewpoint on either Mauritian or Reunionese popular culture. However, it would seem fair to say that the position from which I approached my analysis changed as a result of my experiences, and as I learnt from my participants. One such result of my experience of conducting research and of living in Mauritius over an extended period of several months concerned my changing opinions towards nationalist movements when formulated as the basis for social change in favour of greater equality. As a result, I was able to consider cultural engagement with nationalism from a less dismissive perspective, which I previously saw as a concept which was necessarily politically conservative rather than progressive due to my inability to disassociate it from the context of recent European political history. My perspective on commoditised forms of globalised popular culture was also significantly altered by seeing how young people in

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[648] See Spittler.
[649] See Wikan, *Resonance: Beyond the Words*.

Mauritius and Réunion appeared to engage with these 'imported' or 'foreign' musical forms, and what meanings they attached to them.

Part II: Globalised Popular Culture, Language Politics and Youth

The ever-increasing global circulation of cultural forms which marks our contemporary era is popularly bemoaned as the cause of young people's perceived preference for globalised popular culture and waning interest in locally produced culture in peripheral locations like Réunion and Mauritius. Young people's participation in 'traditional' music groups like Abaim (see Chapters 1 and 2) and Titan Maloyèr (discussed in Chapter 3) would appear to trouble this assessment; however, it cannot be denied that young people's access to global popular culture has been greatly facilitated by technology such as the internet and satellite television. The increased visibility of black, often African-American culture within globalised popular culture would appear to add another layer of complexity to cultural developments within Réunion and Mauritius, given that its impact arguably remains ambivalent: Ellis Cashmore, for example, has sought to demonstrate how the prominence of black culture in the US entertainment industry does not necessarily promote a more progressive cultural politics, as within this power relations remain essentially unchanged. Indeed, he suggests that '[t]he most significant value of black culture may be in providing whites with proof of the end of racism while keeping the racial hierarchy essentially intact.'[650] Constructions of racialised subjectivity and ethnicity within popular culture which are subsequently projected beyond their original local or national context as globalised popular culture thus appear at best problematic as a basis for the development of oppositional politics in the 'receiving' peripheral locations. Yet pessimistic accounts of cultural imperialism[651] are challenged time and again by empirical ethnographic analyses which suggest that globalised cultural forms can undergo processes of 're-localisation', and thereby develop meanings specific to the local context in order to voice social critique.[652] The global reach of the musical cultures of reggae and hip hop would appear as two very pertinent examples in this regard. However, if we accept Gilroy's assertion that 'black global culture as a world culture is American',[653] we might then ask how do young people in

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[650] *The Black Cultural Industry* (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

[651] Space does not permit a full discussion of the concept of cultural imperialism here. For a discussion of the problematic nature of the term see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), especially 'The Discourse of Cultural Imperialism', pp. 1-33

[652] See, for example, Sarah Daynes, 'The Musical Construction of the Diaspora: The Case of Reggae and Rastafari' in *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, ed. by Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 25-41.

[653] Gilroy in Green and Guillory, pp. 255-6.

peripheral locations relate to representations of black subjectivity, noting that the concept of blackness itself is arguably tied to a history of oppositional political movements in the US context, including the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, of which neither Réunionese nor Mauritian history has direct equivalents.

As globally peripheral locations where the languages of everyday communication (MK and RK) are conceived as minority languages on an international level, despite remaining the majority language within their respective island contexts, analysis of the circulation of globalised popular music and cultural forms in Réunion and Mauritius must arguably also take into account the politics of language. RK and MK are yet to be fully accepted and incorporated within official spheres in either Mauritius or Réunion; they remain stigmatised and devalued in relation to the former colonial languages of French and English, which are perceived as languages of prestige and of international importance. The preceding analysis thus asked how Kreol languages might interact with other languages within popular culture. The combination of Kreol languages with those recognised as 'international' could appear to confirm the marginalised nature of the Kreol languages and their inevitable decline, as they are thus presented as no longer relevant to the (post)modern world. However, in the musical texts discussed in Part II (Chapters 2 and 3), it was suggested that actors can be seen to creatively draw on global culture within their inclusion of international languages, predominantly English(es), in order to accord prestige to the respective Kreol languages. Therefore, despite their very different cultural aesthetics and musical styles, the youth music group Abaim (Chapter 2) and dancehall artists in Réunion and Mauritius (Chapter 3) can be said to employ similar strategies within their engagement with globalised popular music. It would seem that the latter plays a strategic role in the development of an oppositional language politics which challenges common perceptions and the neo-colonial tendency to devalorise the Kreol languages which has persisted into the postcolonial present.

In both cases, the concern with the revalorisation of the stigmatised Kreol language appears interlinked with a conscious effort to provide representation of childhood and youth in the respective contexts. In Chapter 2, this is expressed through Abaim's implicit critique of 'auto-ethnicisation', the dominant strategy used in demands for cultural recognition which are legitimated by their being made on behalf of a recognised ethnoreligious group. This strategy relies upon an ethnicised notion of cultural ownership which underlies Mauritian official discourse on culture. It was argued that Abaim's musical representations can be seen to develop a counter-narrative to dominant discourses on culture and language, in that they appear to reject the model of auto-ethnicisation and instead claim recognition for MK on behalf of all children in Mauritius, rather than a specific ethnic group. Furthermore, it was suggested that by associating MK with childhood, Abaim engage with complex emotions of

simultaneous shame and affection experienced within multilingual contexts where the mother tongue co-exists alongside one or more languages which are considered as languages of prestige and as linguistic capital crucial for social mobility. Abaim's position on language politics is thus situated in stark contrast to that of the post-independence Mauritian state, which attempts to sidestep these issues through instead promoting a conceptualisation of postcolonial dignity which is founded upon the dissemination and learning of ancestral languages. Finally, it was proposed that Abaim's musical translations convey both a sense of equality and complementarity between MK and more 'prestigious' languages which would appear to anticipate parents' concerns and to engage with ongoing debates regarding the introduction of MK in schools in January 2012. At the same time, however, their translations' divergence from the source text would appear to point towards an autonomous Mauritian sociocultural experience and sociocultural specificity, which itself can be seen to coexist and interact with globalised popular culture within the national cultural sphere. This in turn can be said to further problematise overly simplistic conceptualisations of cultural ownership, in that it allows Mauritian children to say of what have become globally popular songs 'this is also mine', and therefore also Mauritian. Thus, despite the fact that the globalised culture engaged with here would appear to speak to notions of a process of global cultural homogenisation resulting in Anglophone cultural dominance, and thereby support the cultural imperialism thesis; the analysis of Abaim's musical translations would seem to suggest that even the most commercialised and banal forms of global pop culture, such as Christmas songs, can be shown to provoke creative responses on the part of locally-based actors. Furthermore, these responses can be seen to speak directly to the problems of their national context, most notably here concerning the status of MK and its position within the education system in relation to the rights of Mauritian children.

The images of youth invoked by dancehall music discussed in Chapter 3 appear far removed from the associations with innocence which might be evoked within Abaim's representations of Mauritian childhood experience. However, dancehall as a genre would appear to also be concerned with making visible the problems of young people, particularly those from the lower classes. Similarly, it also conceptualises the revalorisation of RK as central to resisting the marginalisation of lower-class youth, although this revalorisation would appear to be formulated rather differently here. The preceding analysis attempted to establish that, despite its seemingly commercialised nature and reproduction of clichéd tropes of sex and machismo, the musical production of dancehall artists in Réunion can be seen to engage with existing discourses on Réunionness, authenticity and modernity. I suggested that the juxtaposition of English and RK in dancehall lyrics challenges the presumed mutual exclusivity of authentic Creoleness and global modernity, which arguably serves to further marginalise

unemployed Creolophone young people in Réunion. Therefore, though in many cases Reunionese dancehall would appear to exemplify the 'bio-politics of fucking' much maligned by Gilroy, which he claims have obscured and replaced the political agency of previous black musical forms, it was argued that dancehall in Réunion can also be seen to engage with political issues and that therefore it does deserve to be taken seriously within academic analysis.[654]

Furthermore, building on my observations and participatory research with a maloya youth music group in Le Port, a disadvantaged urban area in Réunion, I suggest that the rupture framework set out by Gilroy in his criticism of post-soul black musical expression cannot be applied wholesale to the Réunionese context, in that we can identify continuities and parallels with previous forms of musical expression. The conceptualisation of struggle, encapsulated in the term 'militer' and 'militant', can be seen to link dancehall artists to the proponents of politically-engaged electric maloya of the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed to act as a *porte-parole* for subordinated Réunionese culture in the face of French acculturation following departmentalisation. Furthermore, the centrality of the concepts of 'défouler', and of playful engagement with shock and vulgarity (sometimes in relation to expressions of sexuality), can be seen to suggest a continuity which stretches further back to maloya as the musical practices of the subordinated population in the colonial era.[655] Both maloya and dancehall can thus be conceptualised as subaltern forms of expression, concerned with conveying and speaking to the experience of subordinated population in Réunion; however, because maloya has now been sanctified by official processes of cultural recognition, notably through gaining status as world intangible heritage granted by UNESCO in 2009, it could be asked whether its capacity to resist marginalisation has diminished. Dancehall, on the other hand, arguably continues to oppose this through an articulation of a Kreol modernity which is self-proclaimed as both authentically Réunionese through its proximity to the lived experience of the lower classes, and as insistently part of global modernity. Thus, though dancehall can be said to advocate a rather different set of cultural politics as compared to the production of Abaim, both are concerned with establishing the place of both their respective Kreol languages and of Creolophone children and youth in global modernity, thereby affirming the continued relevance of RK and MK as living, evolving languages, rather than as symptomatic of a dying culture.

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[654] Gilroy, 'Bio-politics', p. 88.

[655] This would appear to parallel Stolzhoff's approach to Jamaican dancehall and previous musical practices of the subordinated classes, who contends 'that the dancehall has been a space of cultural creation and performance since the slavery era, even though the name given to this constellation of oppositional practices has changed over time.' Stolzhoff, p. 3.

Part III, The Politics of Belonging: Contesting Community, Race, and Nation within Popular Culture

It would therefore seem that the findings of Part II suggest that globalised culture can play an emancipatory role within Réunionese and Mauritius popular music, especially as concerns its representation of children and young people. This would seem to indicate that contrary to popular belief, young people's engagement with globalised popular culture need not always be symptomatic of global cultural homogenisation or cultural alienation. However, there remains a need to balance celebratory accounts of forms of 'pop cosmopolitanism'[656] with a continued awareness of specificities of the local contexts. In this respect, we would perhaps do well to heed the calls of those who counter an emphasis on global flows with assertions of the continued relevance of the national context within cultural analysis.[657] These assertions would appear to be supported by the analysis of Part III of this study, which considered how Réunionese and Mauritian popular culture can be seen to articulate an oppositional postcolonial politics through negotiating and contesting categories of community, race and nation. This was discussed in relation to cultural nationalism in Mauritian popular music (Chapter 4), and the metropolitan French *zorey* population of Réunion (Chapter 5). Mauritian and Réunionese popular culture can thus be seen to challenge the continuing legacy of their colonial histories in the shaping of their contemporary societies both by drawing on globalised popular music as a strategic resource, and by engaging with and contesting existing discourses on the nation, and the role of community and ethnicity. In other words, exploiting globalised cultural forms is thus not the only possible way to counter neo-colonial hegemonies which perpetuate social inequality and adversely affect lower-class young people's life chances.

Prior to conducting fieldwork, I primarily visualised my research as structured by the contrasting spheres of the local and the global, but I soon realised that the two spheres often appeared to blur, making it difficult to maintain a clear-cut distinction in relation to either popular music or to the lived experienced of young people. In addition, focusing on the interaction between the local and the global can appear to prematurely proclaim the decline

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[656] Though Henry Jenkins conceives of this notion primarily in relation to consumption of Asian popular culture in the US, he also notes the possibility of resistance to Anglo-American domination through alternative modes of consumption: see 'Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence' in *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, ed. by Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Desiree Baolian Qin-Hillard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 114-40, p. 118.

[657] Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights, for example, argue for a reconsideration of the national in 'Introduction: National Popular Musics: Betwixt and Beyond the Local and Global' in *Music, National Identity, and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. by Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1-18.

of the nation-state. My initial experience of fieldwork in Mauritius, however, led me to reconsider the relevance of the national context to analysis of popular music and youth culture. The question of the national context would appear to be further brought into relief in the context of this study by the difference in political status enjoyed by Mauritius, an independent nation-state, and Réunion, which as a *département d'outre-mer* (DOM) forms, in political and administrative terms, an integral part of France. Furthermore, the preceding analysis also demonstrated that cultural continuity cannot be presumed within the national territory in either context: indeed, the analysis of Mauritian nationalism undertaken in Chapter 4 presumes a certain level of division between ethnic groups, which is seen to be emphasised by communalism, and Chapter 5 reveals the disparity between the social interpretations of ethnic identity and of the intersection of race and class in the Réunionese and metropolitan French contexts, which would appear to be crystallised in the *zorey* population's lived experience in Réunion.

Thus, Chapter 4 explored of representations of Mauritian nationalism by means of an analysis of both political nationalist movements within post-independence Mauritian politics, and of what was identified as a simultaneous cultural nationalist movement. The representation of the national community in popular music was analysed, where Tritonik, a group who showed open support for recent protest movements, was considered as a case study. I suggested that the construction of nationalism in post-independence Mauritius characterises itself as a progressive social movement which positions itself in opposition to communalism, the term commonly used to refer to political and other practices which are seen to lead to the reification of social divisions between ethnoreligious groups. After giving an overview of nationalism in postindependence Mauritian politics and having established the shortcomings of political nationalism on a theoretical level, I then considered the concept of cultural nationalism and how this might apply to the music of Tritonik as cultural text. I argued that they can be said to formulate a cultural nationalist vision of the Mauritian national community, and that they use the concept of cultural nationalism and its assertion of a prior existing national community in order to formulate a social critique of contemporary Mauritius, thereby engaging with contentious issues such as tourism and environmental conservation. However, in contrast to political nationalist social critiques which tend to focus on the divisiveness of communalism, their main concern appeared to be the division of society along class lines and differentials in relations of power. Tritonik can thus be said to make claims and voice a critique on behalf of the disenfranchised and oppressed which is addressed to those who hold power, the government and the ruling elites.

As problematic as nationalism may appear as a strategy and theme on which to base calls for a more equitable society and progressive social change when viewed from the

perspective of Western politics, we can thus see that in the context of both movements for greater recognition for MK, for example, as formulated by Abaim (see Chapter 2), and of the vision of social change envisaged in Tritonik's music (see Chapter 4), it is the necessarily imagined national community that appears to have triggered demands for change within Mauritian society. For the moment at least, it would seem that in the Mauritian context, the concept of the national community opens up rather than closes down debate as regards social exclusion and social inequality. Engagement with the national community and nationalism has arguably opened up a space in which issues of marginalisation and increasing social inequality can be discussed, whereas previous conceptualisations of community in Mauritius may have served to obscure such issues. Formulations of cultural nationalism can thus be understood 'to make cultural identity a premise of political action rather than a substitute for it'[658] whereas the dominant discourse of 'unity in diversity' arguably does not.

Nationalist sentiments have also provided a basis for calls for social change in favour of greater social equality in the post-departmentalisation history of Réunion, perhaps most concretely in the calls for political autonomy formulated by the *Parti communiste réunionnais* (PCR) from the late 1950s onwards.[659] The process of departmentalisation, through which Réunion became part of the metropole, the former colonial power, has arguably rendered the question of nationhood particularly complex. Through the rapprochement of political ties, Réunion has benefited from dramatically improved standards of living and from significant infrastructural development, but departmentalisation has arguably also created an additional set of economic, social, cultural, and indeed psychological problems, as Glissant indicated in relation to his native Martinique in the opening observation to *Le Discours antillais*.[660] Whereas the political will for independence has been less fervently advocated in recent years, cultural and social actors continue to draw on competing visions of Réunionese nationhood in order to contest the dominance of Frenchness in twenty-first century Réunion.

In the final chapter of this study, I suggested that a critical consideration of the *zorey*, the metropolitan French population of Réunion, and their representation within popular discourse can be seen to illuminate many of the problems and contradictions surrounding the question of nationhood in contemporary Réunion. The fact that the *zorey* (who now form 10% of the population) are characterised as cultural foreigners in Réunion, and that their interactions with the Réunionese social context might are experienced as such, highlights the

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[658] Gilroy, 'British Cultural Studies and the Pitfalls of Identity' in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* ed. by Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara and Ruth Lindeborg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 223-39, p. 238.
[659] For an overview see Gilles Gauvin, 'Le parti communiste de la Réunion (1946-2000)', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 68 (2000), 73-94.
[660] pp. 11-2.

paradoxical nature of French overseas departmental status. Furthermore, it may be said to contest the supposed total integration of the DOM into the French nation. The critical perspective adopted in this chapter led me to advocate an understanding of race and whiteness which is informed by Judith Butler's conceptualisation of performativity in relation to gender: I suggested that race, like gender, is best understood as a verb, resulting in this context in the 'zoreying of the *zorey*'. As a social identity, therefore, *zorey* is best understood as a processual identity formed through interaction with the Réunionese social context. The naming of the *zorey* can thus be interpreted as a political act which refutes the supposed invisibility and non-racialised nature of whiteness. This can be read not only as a rejection of the colour-blind approach to race which can serve to uphold institutional racism, but also as a defiant countermove to the discourse of Frenchness as whiteness, which denies full citizenship to non-white French populations, including those in the DOM. Paradoxically, however, the naming of the *zorey* can simultaneously be interpreted as an inclusive gesture, in that it creates an ethnic moniker or 'tag' for the growing metropolitan French population which thereby legitimises their position as part of Réunionese society in the popular imaginary, in which the pertinence of racial and ethnic identity in everyday life is acknowledged despite the fact that ethnic difference is not officially recognised by the French state.

It could however be argued that analysing the experience of what is commonly perceived as a privileged group would appear to call into question one of the principal aims of this study, namely to foreground the experience of marginalised youth. Nonetheless, I maintain that understanding the experience and categorisation of the *zorey* population constitutes an important means of understanding the wider dynamics of Réunionese society in terms of how race and class intersect. In this respect, the analysis here can be seen to build on that of Chapters 2 and 3 in that it advocates an intersectional approach to the study of youth cultures, although admittedly here we see the interaction between categories of race and social class in Réunion from a rather different angle from that discussed in the analysis of dancehall music. Yet just as dancehall offers young Réunionnais alternative representational strategies which can be seen to negotiate the fixity of blackness as indicative of low socioeconomic status, the figure of the *zorey savatte* as young and lacking in actual financial capital to sustain the symbolic capital of French whiteness can also be seen to negotiate and perhaps work to undermine the fixity of the Réunionese racially hierarchical social structure. Finally, considering the zorey population also brings us back to issues of researcher reflexivity and authenticity which have underpinned the approach adopted in this study.

Limitations, Contributions, and Areas for Further Research

The various case studies presented in this thesis might thus be seen to support the assertion that popular music and youth culture can be seen to engage with postcolonial politics in Réunion and Mauritius, and to formulate oppositional discourses in relation to what are perceived as neo-colonial hegemonies which continue to structure young people's lives. However, I am also aware that I might be accused of selectively choosing popular cultural forms which can be most easily characterised as representative of a progressive politics, such as the music of Tritonik (discussed in Chapter 4), which would appear to demonstrate a clear awareness of and a consciousness engagement with contemporary Mauritian political issues. This is the charge which was made by Jim McGuigan against proponents of cultural populism amongst British Cultural Studies researchers, who he criticises for adopting 'a disingenuous selectivity in populist cultural research, a characteristic veering away from disconfirming instances, instances when "the people" do not quite measure up to sentimental expectations.'[661] It is certainly true that the present study by no means represents a comprehensive anthology of Mauritian and Réunionese popular culture, which itself would be beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis, and that selection has therefore taken place. This selection, however, was primarily informed by my experience of living and conducting participatory research in Réunion and Mauritius. I chose to write about the artists and music genres, and wider trends and issues within popular culture, which research participants and friends appeared to identify with, and ascribe particular meanings to. This arguably in fact led me to consider musical forms which I personally might not have chosen to analyse because they do not appear to present an obviously and unproblematically progressive cultural politics. Dancehall music (Chapter 3) appears as a particularly acute example of this, but similarly Abaim's utilisation of internationally popular children's songs (Chapter 2) and Tritonik's articulation of a form of cultural nationalism (Chapter 4) do not automatically appear to represent a particularly progressive set of cultural politics.

I have suggested that my analysis establishes the necessity of an intersectional approach to issues of race, ethnicity and class within popular music and youth culture in both Réunion and Mauritius. This would seem to trouble William F.S. Miles's assertion that ethnicity remains the most important structuring principle in Mauritian society, an observation which would seem to inform much sociological analysis.[662] In contrast, this study's consideration of how categories of class and ethnicity are negotiated within popular culture shows us that an intersectional approach is needed which also pays attention to the importance of class in

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[661] McGuigan, pp. 171-2.
[662] 'The Mauritius Enigma', *Journal of Democracy*, 10: 2 (1999), 91-104, p. 101.

Mauritian society. This could be traced back to the decision to foreground the experience of lower-class youth within my analysis; however, a concern with interrogate relations of power can be seen to run throughout the chapters of this study. For example, this would appear to be implied in Tritonik's privileging of subordinate experience in their representation of Mauritian society, which they assert was literally built by 'dimounn mizer', the poor and disenfranchised, contesting the official history taught in schools and disseminated elsewhere in the public sphere which foreground the role of the colonisers. I am thus led to conclude that in order to work towards a better understanding of the dynamics of Mauritian and Réunionese society, it is perhaps less constructive to ask whether it is ethnicity or social class which constitutes the 'driving social force', but to ask how these two and other categories interact. I propose that a consideration of popular culture may be particularly instructive here, particularly as concerns studies which wish to privilege those with the least resources and least symbolic capital, such as the working class and young people, as it constitutes a space in which actors and consumers can negotiate with alternative representational strategies which resist the legacies of racial hierarchy and (neo)colonial prejudice, although they may also bring up a new set of limitations, such as those imposed by gender roles and stereotyped representations of black masculinity.

However, this also brings to light a limitation of this study: namely, that it generally restricts its intersectional approach to a consideration of class and race/ethnicity, and does not include issues of gender or sexuality in any detail. I am also aware that there is also a disproportionate representation of male artists and performers within my analysis, despite attempts to rectify this where possible (see, for example, the consideration of Malkijah, a female dancehall artist in Chapter 4). Given the prominence of gender roles within both globalised black popular culture and Réunionese and Mauritian popular music, this would appear as a fertile area for further research, which could be used to establish how young people draw on and develop different versions of femininities and masculinities within their cultural consumption and practices. It could then in turn be asked how these interact with the formulations of oppositional cultural politics discussed in the present study, and whether the gender politics of popular culture can also be characterised as progressive and as resistant to neo-colonial hegemonies within Réunionese and Mauritian society.

Finally, the present study is also limited by the decision to privilege popular music within my analysis of popular culture. However, I have chosen to do so because it is perhaps the most established of popular cultural forms in Réunion and Mauritius. In both locations, popular music is historically associated with subordinated populations, and has more recently been linked to oppositional movements which questioned the truly postcolonial nature of Réunion and Mauritius in the 1960s and 1970s. Further research would be therefore be

needed in order to compare the politics of other forms of popular cultural expression with those of popular music, and consider the extent of interplay between different forms, such as in music videos which are circulated via the internet.

The Politics of Popular Music and Youth Culture: Equality and Difference

In very different ways, the popular cultural practices discussed in this study are concerned with representing sectors of the population which are perceived to be marginalised, and constructing a reformulation of Mauritianness or Réunionness which might prove more inclusive and be able to foreground the experience of the lower class youth. It would also seem that many Western researchers, myself included, who become interested in studying Other cultures are often drawn to the subject matter through a combined concern with issues of social inequality and of cultural difference. We thus find ourselves studying contexts with a history of extreme levels of social inequality which was justified and naturalised through a colonial ideology of absolute difference which affirmed the superiority of European culture, and where the social hierarchies established in the colonial era continue to make themselves apparent in the most cursory observations of these 'postcolonial societies'. This is arguably the objective Prabhu wishes to work towards in her reformulation of postcolonial studies, which aims 'to align more closely the notion of hybridity in postcolonial studies with the exigencies that led to the founding of this academic discipline itself.'[663]

In his reflections on the issue of cultural identity in the preface to *Identité et société réunionnaise: nouvelles perspectives et nouvelles approches*, Michel Wieviorka states that 'les identités culturelles ne sont jamais longtemps totalement indépendantes des inégalités sociales, la différence n'est jamais longtemps dissociée de la hiérarchie et de l'injustice sociales'.[664] Yet attempting to address both issues at the same time has proved problematic. Trying to address issues of social inequality through a politics of cultural difference, more commonly referred to as 'identity politics', has been recognised by some academics as an effective strategy in certain contexts, but it is generally seen as 'communalist' or 'tribalist' due to the recurrent problem of (self-)essentialisation. The increasing political valency of identity politics is also bemoaned by many on the left for having sidelined what is seen as the more pressing issue of social inequality, which is conceived of from a Marxist perspective in terms of

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[663] Prabhu, p. 1.
[664] 'Introduction' to *Identité et société réunionnaise: nouvelles perspectives et nouvelles approches*, ed. by Laurent Médéa (Paris: Karthala, 2005), pp. 15-22, pp. 18-9.

social class.[665] Yet at the same time, these movements have at least brought to our attention that many of the supposedly universal values which are supposed to be upheld by national institutions are tied to Eurocentric, male, bourgeois conceptualisations of 'the citizen', 'the human', etc.

In response to engagement with these issues within postcolonial studies, in his critique of the centrality of issues of 'hybridity' and 'inbetween-ness' within postcolonial theory, Hallward argues against cultural studies in favour of

> a sharp conceptual *break between culture and politics*. The idea of a 'cultural politics' is a disastrous confusion of spheres. If politics is to mean anything at all, it should apply only to the domain of strictly in-different principles: principles of justice and equality, principles that apply to all relations without discrimination. […] As far as the political pursuit of justice is concerned, we need to find the courage to accept that the whole ethico-culturalist 'predication based upon recognition of the other must be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question – and it is an extraordinarily difficult one – is much more that of recognising the Same', i.e. the austere in-difference of egalitarian justice itself. As a matter of universal principle, it is everyone who deserves security, legal protection, access to health and education, and so on.[666]

I don't think any scholars interested in cultural politics would disagree with this last statement. However, as of yet, we have no real practical experience of this 'austere in-difference of egalitarian justice' because our institutions are still marked by 'European provincialism' and other forms of discrimination and prejudice. In other words, the 'norm' is still skewed towards benefiting some individuals more than others: we need only to think of the idea of whiteness as an 'invisible rucksack'.[667] 'Universal' values appear much easier to uphold from a position of privilege: and conversely it is perhaps easy to understand why those who have first-hand experience of the non-neutrality of institutions would turn towards identity politics as a possible solution, and thereby begin their political quest for social equality from an affirmation of cultural difference. Until we reach a stage where cultural difference is not read through an implicit hierarchy, and where different values are no longer attributed to different cultural, ethnic and racial identities, then it would seem that Hallward's proposition can only work at the theoretical level.

In short, it would seem that we are still grappling with the question of how to devise universal notions of justice and equality when the concepts themselves appear so tied to Eurocentric ideals. Furthermore, we live in an increasingly divided world in which 'difference'

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[665] For an overview of this debate, see for example Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking Recognition', *New Left Review*, 3 (2000), 107-20.

[666] Hallward, pp. xix-x, citing Alain Badiou, *L'éthique: Essai sur la conscience du mal* (Paris: Hatier, 1993), p. 25.

[667] See McIntosh.

for many has very real consequences, and, contrary to postmodern assertions of identitarian fluidity, is not simply a colourful mask to be put on or taken off at will. I believe that culture, and perhaps popular culture in particular, can be understood as a sphere in which we continue to grapple with such issues, but these are often formulated in more immediate terms which can be related to lived experience more easily. The various forms of popular music and social phenomena presented in this study have all been analysed in terms of their cultural politics. I believe this to be a valid approach which has allowed me to treat in a balanced way my combined concern with social inequality and cultural, ethnic and racial difference. This thesis does not attempt to claim that all forms of culture, popular or otherwise, are necessarily and intrinsically political; I instead suggest that culture interacts with social contexts, and it is this interaction which has political potential. This is why some Kreol-speaking writers have spoken of the impossibility of producing work in Kreol without being it being interpreted as an expression of cultural militantism, because within the context, writing in Kreol is not the norm and the language is not considered 'worthy' of high literature, which makes writing in Kreol a political act.

Many of the cultural actors studied here would appear to be concerned with not only gaining recognition of their cultural difference and making themselves visible from the globally peripheral location of the Western Indian Ocean, but also with a more abstract objective: the assertion of equal humanity. Réunionese dancehall posits the existence of a Kreol-speaking youth culture which is equally modern and equally global in relation to its Jamaican and metropolitan French counterparts. The act of calling a metropolitan French person *zorey* asserts that I, as a Réunionese subject, am equally able to name you as an ethnic, cultural and linguistic other, in the same way that you may name me. It is also an inclusive gesture, in that it includes *zorey* on a equal footing to other groups as forming part of the Réunionese social make-up, though this may not be on their own preferred terms of the neutral citizen of the neutral Republic. Thus, the assertion of difference within movements and social phenomena termed 'identity politics' can in fact be interpreted as a response to not having been recognised as equal, that is, as equally human due to systematic denials of the rights of group in question. It could therefore be argued that, while such phenomena continue to take place, we do indeed need to recognise the interrelatedness of cultural difference and social inequality, and that considering the politics of popular culture may provide us with one means of doing so.

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