

Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations

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‘Amarres’ [moorings] in Réunion Creole means many different things: *link, attachment, bewitchment, spellbinding, to be in love, to be captivated, to be in a relationship, to care for* [*amar lè ker*], *to enliven the senses* [*i amar la boush*]. *And a few other things as well ...*

The island

*Oh no
I am not writing goodbye again
no
I am not rewriting the ledger of returns
to the homeland
but
playing knucklebones
for childhood renewed*

Patrice Treuthardt, *Pointe et Complainte des Galets*

We are native to an island that is often left off maps of the world, and often confused with other French overseas territories. We want to bring to bear a problematic starting with this forgetfulness and confusion. Since it is true that it is the lot of so many peoples and groups to be forgotten, or not to count, we have to ask: ‘Forgotten by whom, and why? Counting for whom, and why?’ So starting from this forgetfulness, this ‘non-existence,’ and asking oneself the fundamentally political question of ‘who counts and for whom,’ is to go straight to the heart of what brings sociality into being, that is, being accepted by the community of citizens. But this community is not a purely national one, it relates also to what it means to live together, on the soil of Réunion and in the Indian

Ocean region, a community that is both imagined and concrete, ancient and still being created.

When Europe used to think of itself as the centre of the world, and organised the world around this centre, we were somewhere over there at the end of the world. Then, we were still moored to France, but it was an imposed mooring that strangled us on occasions. Today, now that Europe has become one of the provinces of the world, we are rethinking our moorings. Our project is now one of decentering the gaze and redrawing the cartography of the world from the Indian Ocean viewpoint, here where France, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Muslim worlds cross paths. We want to inscribe our island into a network of meetings and exchanges, at the crossroads of African, European, Asian, and islander worlds. Sure, this is a somewhat peripheral world, but it is one we can think with, work over, and transform into an asset or an advantage. We are not in the centre of the world, we never will be. We will always be a little on the sidelines, in the margins, but so what? We suggest a mode of reinscription in diversity, and think of globalisation as a series of meetings and exchanges in a multipolar world. Moorings—so that we can anchor ourselves in the ocean, and then—we slip the moorings, to enter into relationships.

What is our motivation for writing this text? One might say that everything has already been said on questions of Réunion, *métissage*, the intercultural, and other cultural crossovers, and that we could only go over the same ground, but less effectively. There would be nothing to add, or at least very little. Do we have the capacity to renew all this, or should we wait for the ‘next generations’ who would naturally be identified with the ‘new’? The need to write this text emerged as a response to several things: the increasingly significant presence of artists and culture in the Réunion landscape, and the questions arising from that presence; the new interest taken by Paris in these Réunionese artistic developments; the lack of thinking about them; the superficiality of public debate; the aggressively masculine ethic of the Réunionese discourses on art, culture, politics, and the social; new questions and new practices arising from the profound changes of the last thirty years; and the need to take part in the postcolonial debate. On the one hand, we will base our work in part on the structuralism and poststructuralism of Michel Foucault, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, James Clifford, Régine Robin, Chantal Mouffe, and the insights of

psychoanalysis, feminism, contemporary art and architecture; and on the other hand, the theoreticians of postcolonialism, among them Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, Stuart Hall, Edward Saïd, Paul Gilroy, Arjun Appadurai, Arundhati Roy, Sara Suleri, Salman Rushdie, Achille Mbembe. It is on the basis of all this that we hope to develop a critical movement on Réunion.

The language of the Other

This text was written by two people from Réunion, a woman and a man who grew up here, who feel native to the island, and who have taken part in, and continue to take part in, the cultural and political debate. To be native for us means not just to be born on the island but also to care for it as regards its place in the Indian Ocean; the reassessment of its local practices and modes of expression; and of the reclaiming of its territory. For us, being here means (without having any choice in the matter) being bilingual and pluricultural. Europe has privileged monolingualism and monoculturalism for a long time. The European didn't have need for others' languages and cultures since in his eyes his own culture or language was considered universal. In the colonies plural languages and cultures were an inevitable fact of life, but made out by imperialism to be signs of backwardness. Yet, they are now the necessary condition for intercultural practice. The language of the other has become ours—we are not proud or ashamed of it—and we have not lost our native tongue. It is also without fear or favour that we borrow the techniques and conceptual tools useful to us, and that we express our love for the arts and literatures of the West. We want to take on board the saying of the great African-American poet Audre Lorde: *Using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house*. Despite that, we are not into binary oppositions: Europe is one of our worlds. Africa, Asia, the Moslem and island worlds are all part of our matrix. We are simply beginning a critical inventory. Binary oppositions can be dispensed with, all cultures interpenetrate and nourish one another, and none is isolated and pure. For all that, we will not idealise mixing, nor indulge in wide-eyed celebration of *creolité*, but we will pay attention to the conflicts and tensions, and to the impulses that are always possible out of compensatory ethnic identification.

Frontiers of the 'we'

The ideas we are presenting are open to debate; they are partisan without seeking either to be exhaustive or neutral. This is a text that highlights certain points. We have

knowingly and willingly left others to one side. As we wrote we were confronted by the multiple meanings of ‘we’: the ‘we’ that refers to the authors, the ‘we’ that stands in opposition or confrontation to a ‘they’ (be it on or beyond the island) and the ‘we’ that brings together the island’s inhabitants. We are conscious of the exclusion effects brought about by the ‘we,’ but we know that no group is brought into being without some strategy of exclusion. There can be no process of identification without the establishment of a frontier between a ‘we’ and a ‘they.’ But this in no way signifies that frontiers cannot be crossed, that the other does not constitute the self, and that such identifications are not constantly subject to negotiable transformations. This also means that one has to be wary of the transformation of the ‘they’ into a fantastical threat to our existence, bringing about the emergence of closed identities. The common ‘we’ of this essay is in the process of becoming. There are two reefs to avoid sailing into, on the port the nationalist and/or communalist we, and on the starboard the risk of being diluted in the abstract and ahistorical universal of the so-called ‘global village.’ If nationalism—as invention of European romanticism—was quite rightly used as a force in decolonisation struggles, if the nation-state remains the dominant model with all the problems that it brings with it (repression of languages and cultures), we know, then, from the examples of the rise and fall of nationalisms in the second half of the 20th century, that this model is not the only one we might use for our own emancipation and reappropriation.

Réunion, as a part of the French Republic, therefore in Europe, and a region anchored in its Indian Ocean environment, has to invent its own postcolonial model. The absence of an enlightened bourgeoisie in Réunion—apart from some rare exceptions, few have anything to do with any movement to reinvest in the territory and its cultures—is associated with both communitarian¹ tendencies and a fascination for the ‘global village,’ both of which are ahistorical attitudes. The rapid growth of communications and the accelerating access to consumer goods, along with the disappearance of scandalously visible poverty have inevitably produced the illusion that all this has come to pass without friction. The social and cultural struggles that brought about a better way of life have been quickly forgotten. We have slipped under the clouds of an amnesia that has obscured and personalised social difficulties and conflicts (the media have by and large reflected and reproduced this amnesia). In this way certain typical characterisations of the Réunionese (the hopeless man, the possessive mother, Dad the

¹ *Communaliste*, a term used in Mauritius, as noted by the authors, is used in the original.

rapist) are put forward by way of explanation for Réunion's 'lack' of progress, while the inheritances of colonialism with its brutality and violence, are moved to the background. For us, only an analysis that works the engagements between the political and the social, the economic and the cultural, the private and the public, can allow us to understand the complexity of life on Réunion. The Réunion bourgeoisie, for the most part, has remained withdrawn, while the lower middle class, the children of farm workers, shopkeepers, labourers, clerks, quickly wanted to forget, in the rush to the 'metropolis,' where they came from, as they grasp the secondary signs of Frenchness—cars, holidays in Mauritius, contempt for the poor—while at the same time being unaware of cultural and intellectual movements in the region or in Europe. It is rare to find people who have passed on to their children the family genealogy, the struggles and battles, which have opened the door to the current phenomenon of compensatory identities. These social classes are quite like the postcolonial middle classes that have, consciously or not, taken part in what Sarat Maharaj calls 'multicultural management' (2001), which can accept a little cultural difference but not too much, and especially if it is well-framed by a strict separation between the social and the cultural, the cultural and the political. So we are looking to develop a 'we' that would avoid cultures of recrimination, the mythologisation of history, self-referenced identity or the fundamentally static notion of identity and choose responsibility, the present, the heterogeneous and creolisation. This is a 'we' that remembers the past but is not enclosed there; it is situated in a genealogy of struggles for justice, equity and democratisation.

*I invoke you, land of sapodillas
 In the reverberations of the riverbanks
 [...]
 I invoke you, land of Babel
 hidden like a shameful illness
 bazaar of erased alphabets
 beatitude of cargo God
 dried entrails
 monuments of corrugated iron
 I invoke you, scorched land
 crossroads of nowhere bringing in contraband portulans*

Riel Debars, *L'Oriflamme léthargique*

The island archipelago

We propose to begin from what made us: the land where we grew up—the volcanic peak, the uninhabited land, isolated in the Indian Ocean, known to the Arabs, avoided by the Portuguese, colonised by the French—by retracing the trading routes criss-crossing the

worlds that made it. The first inhabitants were French colonisers with their Malagasy and Indian slaves. It was an island of slaves and masters, then an island of masters and indentured labourers. It is an island where History has thrown together Malagasy, Africans, Comorans, Indians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malays, Europeans and French, atheists, Catholics and Moslems, Buddhists and Hindus, animists and polytheists. But this would be no simple business of juxtaposition. The island allows for people to be at the same time Christian and Hindu, Christian and animist, or Hindu and animist. It is *an island of the Creole world, on the route between Africa and Asia, a 'French' island, an island-archipelago. It is an island of the Indian Ocean world, an island of Indian-oceanic creolisations.*

Exiles, reappropriations

Exile and deportation framed our birth. We have had to give things up, give up the right to return, give up the story of the European travellers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Their myth was biblical—paradise or hell. We wanted to renounce the hegemonic story of pain and suffering because we didn't want to inspire pity. We *live* on the island. There would be no reparation ... We were born in violence, the violence of slavery, indentured labour and colonialism. Nothing can repair this primordial violence. Nothing. Only by building the present will our land be ours. So it is from this angle that we have to consider questions of repair. That in itself is not enough to constitute the ground or the foundation for our identity. Because there is no doubt about what is the issue: a reappropriation of the land and the creating of a 'living together.' Let's revise these facts and turn once again to the scenes of subjection to slavery or indentured labour. The island was a long way away and isolated; the French colonised it and it quickly became the 'sister-island' of the *Île de France* (Mauritius). The French were not particularly interested in the island: they had no great plans for it; it would simply be a stopover on the way to India. A few settlers were sent out from France, but they did not think they were actors in a great colonial scheme. They were forced to leave because of poverty in rural France. They were poor landless peasants, pirates, impoverished aristocrats, and a few tradesmen. They were not allowed to develop on their own account, they had to follow decisions taken for them in Paris—monocultures of coffee or sugar cane—and were forgotten on this island; the Empire forgot them. It was rather in San Domingo, the pearl of the Antilles, that imperial glory flourished. Over there, courtly balls were put on that rivalled in luxury those of the metropolis. This was to be Versailles in the

Caribbean. In Réunion the masters tried one way or another to imitate the life of those masters: furniture from India, large estates, silks, black domestics, black nannies, reserved pews in church ... all the outward signs of the life of white masters, in the same mould, from one plantation to another across the world.

The dwelling is an entrenched camp.

Riel Debars, *L'Oriflamme léthargique*

Scenes of subjection: A cartography of power

The scene of subjection marked the territory. The apparatus of colonial slavery and post-slavery had to be inscribed again and again. It had to be repeated, to be made visible for public display. The territory was marked by this display; the territory of the masters' houses or those of the lesser whites were distinguished from the territory of the subjected. The latter lived in a camp. As the years went by, he squeezed from the master the cultivation of a small plot of land, for his vegetables, his animals or his garden, but all that remained precarious. The island was divided into territories: plantations on the coast, with the territories of the master, the freed man and the slave, then in the centre, in the mountains, the territory of the runaway, the maroon. Let's not forget the territory that remains uninhabited, not yet entirely crafted by humans: that of the volcano, the forests, the ravines, a natural territory that has not yet come under human hands. *The territory of the plantations marked out the social and cultural cartography of the island.* There was a cartography of power that imitated the territory of colonial power: towns organised around the Church and State institutions (first monarchical, then republican). A capital with the Governor's square and the institutions of power—Government House, the cathedral, churches, customs houses, police, municipalities, schools—with the botanic gardens, the main street, the shops ... the other towns followed the same pattern. The cartography of counter-power, that of the maroons, shaped an island interior where the toponymy retains the traces of the warrior chiefs. The war against the maroons destroyed the vestiges of their villages, so the spatial organisation of their power remains in the realm of speculation. The raids they carried out on plantations were evidence of their capacity to develop strategies of resistance. But there was another cartography of resistance: conspiracies among slaves to organise revolts, with designated targets. The time was at night, the site the plantation. What they wanted was freedom, to take back their lives even at the risk of death. The uprisings at Saint-Leu or

at Sainte-Suzanne at the beginning of the 19th century are outstanding proof of this.

*I was born over on Zanzibar
Who am I now?
I will go look from high on the cliffs
I will climb to Dimitile and be reborn*

Danyèl Waro, *Bwéo*

Land of the banished and the deported

This land of masters, slaves, maroons, freed slaves, indentured labourers, is first of all a land occupied by *men* dominating other men. There were few women, a third of the population for centuries. Slavery, like indenture, was predominantly a masculine affair, because growing coffee and sugar cane demanded physical strength. You had to know how to wield the machete all day long, repeating the same movement: grabbing the cane with the left hand, cutting it with one blow, trimming the leaves and throwing it down. Cane dust irritated the skin, the leaves were sharp, ants bit the feet and legs, the wall of cane hindered movement, and the cane-cutting season was during the summer ... you had to go on. Then the cane had to be baled and taken to the mill ... The scenario of oppression was of one man submitted to another, possessed by the other, like his household goods, *one of his heritage items*. This was a masculine world where nature yielded to an economy of plunder. Once the war against the maroons was won, once the uprisings were crushed, once the abolition of slavery had been achieved, colonial power was in a position to put its own stamp on the territory, on the periphery of the great French colonial empire.

*Lives crouched in the grass at the water's edge
Devour the horizon with wide open eyes*

Claire Karm, *Rue d'Après*

Peripheries

Réunion remained on the periphery of the Empire, despite the efforts of certain *grand Blancs*.² For a long time the island did not appear on all the maps. No one was interested, no one cared. It is still somewhat neglected, of secondary interest compared to Mauritius, Madagascar, India, the Antilles. It is on the last rung of the imperial ladder. It remains in the margin, still confused with (or at best placed in comparison or

² The 'big white [families]' are big land-holders from the colonial and slave era, now mainly involved in the import-export business, marketing, banking, automobile franchises, etc.

competition with) the Antilles, already a minor player. Throughout its history there were those looking to create a destiny as the ‘colonising colony.’ It would work for imperial triumph in the region, they said, it would proudly fly the flag of the colonial army, and subjugate other peoples for the greater glory of the colonial empire. Men from Réunion took part in imperial conquests and won fame as colonial mercenaries. Others realised they were colonised when they encountered other colonised peoples and became anti-colonial militants: George Garros, Raymond Vergès, Lucien Barquissau, Paul Dussac.

After the abolition of slavery the territory was reorganised for further colonisation. The freed slaves and poor whites [*petits Blancs*] were moved off the more fertile and easier to cultivate lands to the high parts and isolated corners of the island. The island was divided between *les Hauts* and *les Bas*. Sent to the margins of public colonial space were the labourers, the small plantation owners, the laundresses. Our modernity was shaped by this territorialisation of wealth and power. Shantytowns transformed the urban areas, marking the territory of the poor and the excluded around the centre of the city. In the course of the last fifty years the invention of new territories—the beach, the road, the shopping centre, the far South, the East and the West—compounds the phenomenon of territorialisation. Spaces disappear or are marginalised: the large plantation, the factory, the railway, the *boutik sinwa*³ ... The social, imaginary, cultural and economic space has been deeply changed by all this.

*Signs of the cross at the great division of the world
between fidelities and humilities
a house
only
so the evenings might pray
passage with passengers towards unknown lands*

Alain Lorraine, *Sur le black*

Writing histories

Our past, even though it is the object of commemorations, studies and reappropriations, still remains a polemical field. Colonialism remains a minor research topic, and if slavery is indeed studied, it still has not become part of the *common story* even though we might assume that the voices of victims, the place of genocide, of crimes against humanity in politics and the law, within the development of international criminal law,

³ [*boutique chinois*] Local grocery shop which also doubled as a bar. For a long time this was an essential social and economic space, before the appearance and development of supermarkets.

would be integrated without too much controversy. What is at stake with this resistance? While France, despite everything, was still able to finally confront Vichy or the Algerian war, in Réunion it still seems too dangerous to confront the past because that would threaten either the ties that bind ('dangers of communitarianism') or the ties to France (asking the question about 'being linked to those who subjected you') and would bring about a rereading of notions such as citizenship, equality, and national identity starting from the position of who is in or out.

Along with this resistance is a tendency to mythologise. There is an absence of evidence, and there is difficulty in accessing the archives (neglected for a long time, totally abandoned, some even no doubt destroyed). The fact that the majority of the eye-witness accounts are those of the masters, of the magistrates or other administrators of the colonial and slave-owning society, has promoted a compensatory history that rejects complexity, grey areas and complicity in order to highlight only suffering and heroic deeds. The absence of concrete traces paradoxically brings about an inflation of memory, as if only this inflation could make sense of the suffering. As Paul Ricoeur has pointed out, the imperatives of memory run the risk of sitting in opposition to the imperatives of history and lead to what Régine Robin defined as 'saturated memory' that no longer knows how to sort out myth from history. From our point of view, it is the writing of history that is crucial. It is accompanied by memory, but it is not reduced to it, because memory is a social construction following its own logic. In any society we can observe memories superimposing themselves on each other or opposing each other. Our proposal is to *build a 'common story'* that would make place for memories, pointing out at every turn that the story can be subject to critical revision. We want to do an inventory of the places of memory, of which too many have already been lost, defend them against destruction, preserve them, make them known. We want to inscribe the historical threads and genealogies so that transmission can occur. We want to confront gaps in memory and continue to develop scientific rigour in the research. We want to reconstitute *this* particular history of violence, of plunder and of dehumanisation in the general history of violence, plunder and dehumanisation. *We want to live with absence, so that this history stops being the history of lost souls, but rather gives meaning to the lives of the women and men who have lived in this land, and to the present.*

Figures of exclusion

Work must be done to locate the figures of exclusion in order to deconstruct them, to make an inventory of the stereotypes and insults: *l'argent braguette* [social security cheques], *l'assisté* [someone on the dole], *le lèspèrkui* [parasite], parents in retirement, *les cagnards*,⁴ *la tantine larou*.⁵ The descendants of slaves and indentured labourers do not have the same fate as those descended from the masters. This is a fact, and we need to study the effects of that heritage today, showing the various discriminations, stigmatisations, and racial stereotypes. We have to think about the social politics of reparation, already begun thanks to political and social movements (unions, women's movements and political parties) and put into practice through social welfare. To speak of welfare dependence or of parasitism, as certain kinds of well-known discourses like to, returns to a denial of the need for reparation; it stigmatises people already in a precarious state, and excludes a significant number of Réunionese from citizenship. But we should also analyse the lethal consequences of aid that is not accompanied by responsibility, and that organises a life predicated on the wait for the next dole cheque or piece-meal job. The growing vulnerability of a sector of the population, hidden by welfare and a kind of getting by, can nevertheless be read in the daily violence that articulates the anxiety of a present going nowhere and a future that appears absent.

The politics of reparation

Past events do not save us from critical interpretation. No one can occupy the moral high ground because of the suffering of their ancestors. When a crime has affected the whole society and can compromise its future, reparation needs to be collective. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa showed how a society could collectively heal a crime by putting executioners and victims face to face while highlighting the question of responsibility towards the past and the future. We don't want to make that the sole model, but we can see there a collective will to confront past evil, and move beyond revenge in order to live together. Frantz Fanon did not want to be a prisoner of the past: 'I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanised my fathers,' he wrote (Fanon 1986: 230). For him, the important thing was to be a man in the present, who would not have to carry the burden of the victimisation of his ancestors.

⁴ Pejorative and discriminatory term used to designate rough young men, particularly those from the suburbs.

⁵ Pejorative and discriminatory term used to designate young women who are supposed to like riding around in flashy sports cars.

Contemporary debates around the world suggest a whole series of responses on the question of reparation: tribunals, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, positive discrimination, financial compensation, restitution (of objects, bodies, documents, lands), the construction of memorials, and teaching. We have noticed that young people in Réunion have no idea about the recent past, nor of the history of decolonisation that is so important for their understanding of the world and for their place in it and their ability to take part in its debates.

For us, a first step in the process of reparation would be for the education system genuinely to take that history into account—there is no reason why it shouldn't be included in the national curriculum. The production and distribution of visual documentation could be supported and encouraged by the government, there could be a department of African and Indian Ocean Studies at the University of Réunion, all sorts of archives could be made more easily available, a critical sociology of Réunionese society could be developed and, as we have said, a survey of sites of memory should be done in order to protect them.

We have a responsibility. The responsibility of writing history and of living together. The conditions under which slaves and indentured workers lived cannot explain the current situation. To do so would be to disrespect them. And yet, can one ignore the morbid social effects that such systems have produced? The cleaving of social links, the rupture of transmission between generations, the reduction of the human being to a thing, the inevitable violence of human relations, all that has had an impact, as has been proven elsewhere, on the fabric of society, on the relations between women and men, and parents and children. It is for this reason that history has to be explored and not repressed, why we must not be afraid of the excessiveness of certain discourses: these expressions must be understood as part of a desire for integration and recognition rather than a desire for exclusion. We consider it indispensable to maintain a tension between the sometimes turbulent emergence of these voices for so long kept out of the Réunionese master narrative, and the need to integrate them into the new narrative we will construct together.

This is what we call *being moored in history and not to history*. This is why we are answerable to the present. It is *us* who throw rubbish into the ravines, who destroy the lagoons, ruin the soil with pesticides, destroy flora and fauna, agree to the construction

of monstrous structures, let the landscapes be spoilt, buy thousands of cars every month. Spoiling the island continues the predatory practices of colonial imperialism, since it is founded on the right to exploit while minimising the responsibility to pass things on, the consciousness that what one does today can have irreparable effects on resources and landscapes. Since the landscape as a social construction is part of our imaginary, destroying it threatens our imaginary and culture. *Because the landscape is linked to and part of our social, psychological real-life experience.* So when we speak of reparation, it is about all this: it is as much about the social spaces as it is about the historic, economic, linguistic, cultural and imaginary scapes. This politics of reparation is one of the moorings we are suggesting. It is explicitly located in relation to the countries that surround us, the continents we have come from: Africa, Asia, Europe and the islands.

Indianoceanics

*We plough the waves of the Indian Ocean, searching for
the most marvellous clouds, the most enchanting breezes
the most iridescent flasks,
songs, the subtlest colours, blue is
our idol, and we know how to break
waves on the sand and the reefs*

Jean Albany, *Fare Fare*

Seascapes

Our understanding of land includes the ocean. The notion of *seascape*, untranslatable into French, is useful here: the ocean is an immense, imaginary landscape, a space of slave trading, of forced migrations, of deportation *and* of ties. It is a place of crime, of separation, but also a place of primary transformation, of the first creolisation that unites diversities.

Exchanges, encounters, commerce, new languages and cultures; all took place in the Indian Ocean long before the arrival of the Europeans. There were cosmopolitan cities, genuine global towns where Jews, Armenians, Arabs, Indians, Chinese, Malagasy rubbed shoulders... prefiguring (as evocative singular figures rather than models), contemporary global cities. If the arrival of the Europeans profoundly changed the Indian Ocean world, it did not destroy it completely. The decolonisation period, followed by the construction of nation-states, consolidated the nationalisation of space.

In recent years, transnational and transcontinental exchanges have undergone a renewal. They are uncovering new routes and itineraries. A new cartography is being drawn with the emergence of new global cities like Johannesburg, Dubai and Singapore. The study of such spaces presupposes the study of the ‘production’ of the space, which is a social and cultural production. The Indian Ocean is a *space without any precise supranationality or territorialisation*. It is a cultural space overarched by several chronotopes, where temporalities and territorialities are constructed and deconstructed. An ocean linking continents and islands. A space that is Afro-Asiatic, Moslem, Christian, Animist, Buddhist, Hindu, and creolised. An ocean of trade winds, monsoons, cyclones and winds.

Time/space—world

The Indian Ocean contains several historic time zones. Successive globalisations have produced regionalisations that go back to Antiquity, to about the 4th to the 6th centuries. At that time this part of the Indian Ocean progressively entered a ‘time-world’ characterised by a variable multipolarity. What was often at stake was control of the routes of communication and exchange. Its vastness, via numerous seas lapping numerous bordering lands, qualify it more than any other ocean for the name of *cross-roads of civilisation*, with the existence also of various *fringe civilisations* flourishing in many archipelagos and islands. As a contact zone, the Indian Ocean still contains the most significant maritime sea-lanes linking the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe and America. A lot of the crude oil and related products from the Persian Gulf and Indonesian oil wells goes through this ocean.

It is not a homogenous space. Its diversity and heterogeneity is highly visible. It looks like a transnational, transcontinental world in formation, with its inequalities, tensions, potential wars, its cosmopolitanism, its multipolarity, its dynamism and its creativity. It is piecemeal and fragmented, but also traversed by common itineraries; this ocean is marked by the different temporalities found there: Malayo-Indonesian, globalisation, the Muslim economic world, European thalassocracy, pre-European global empires, trade and slavery, and European empires. As a commercial vector among cultures and peoples from the earliest times, it is today undergoing a new ‘globalisation.’ The geopolitical, cultural and economic stakes are doubled in this situation. Tensions are exacerbated by the strong American military presence, civil wars and ethnic cleansing, environmental

degradation, demographic growth, pandemic diseases, the struggle to control natural resources (water, forests, oil, gemstones, minerals), and entrenched identities and religious positions. It is important to observe how changes register. Those that make new exchange routes visible while submerging others follow a broad social logic. By looking at modes of affirmation, legitimation and strategic identification, we can analyse their interaction. The renewal of diasporic identities sometimes encouraged by their nation-states of origin, new circuits of exchange and traffic, including the mafia, should be analysed. Réunion is not sheltered from reconfigurations of power or from ways of contesting it.

Indianoceaness: Anchorage and moorings

We want to suggest an *Indianoceaness* that comprises *both anchorages and moorings*. We highlight the metaphor of anchorage because it helps us think about exile and displacement, movement and flux, without forgetting about the territory we have left. We want to work with *an identity that is anchored yet travelling* (concretely or through the imagination), marking or recognising routes and itineraries where exchanges and meetings happen. The reappropriation of territory liberates the imagination, allows us to take leave without fear or sorrow and to set sail. The island remembers its continents. We see a to-and-fro movement, a hither and thither, between continents and the island, between the island and the world of islands. The presence of the horizon means that one cannot forget what is over there beyond it. *The horizon, that which is not yet known, that which arrives, the unpredictable, the unexpected, that is to say history*. This geographical line is the metaphor for our political horizon, which is always subject to modification, to new contradictions, new conflicts, new challenges. This horizon that tricks the eye by appearing curved is a good metaphor for our position: the horizon recedes, the curve approaches. Indianoceaness is not just cultural, or rather it recognises the cultural as an element of geopolitics and economics.

Our island, on the Asia-Africa axis, has been a crossing point of different economies and world-cultures. It is a space shaped by the successive territorialisation practices that cross each other, destroy each other, get mixed up and reordered. Indian Ocean creolisations are always being reworked, they are never finished. Its dynamics are controlled by negotiation, as things necessarily get lost or relinquished. *There is no creolisation without loss, just as it cannot happen without inequality* because

creolisation demands or requires room to manoeuvre where tensions and conflicts are resolved without being dissolved. Something has to be given up to find space for the other, for the stranger, to share the land, the island. We explore processes of Indianoceanic creolisation on an island at the edge of the continents and situated in an oceanic space where civilisations have experienced multiple territorialisations.

Postcoloniality

*I salute you my queen
[...]
from the holds a black wind opening up the Asian dawn
a nova on the portulan of my oceanic island*

Boris Gamaleya, *Vali pour une reine morte*

Bricolage and Borrowings

Postcoloniality does not just refer simply to an historical period, but to a way of rereading the world. The world is multivalent, and modernity is not the prerogative of the West alone, with the rest of the world trying to catch up. It asserts that other *modernities* exist, that mixing is inevitable, that the intercultural is a feature of any civilisation, and that there is both conflict and exchange in the relationship between coloniser and colonised. Postcolonial theory is sensitive to regimes of representation and identification (masculine/feminine), the constructions of subjectivities of self and other (orientalism, the black body, insularity) and to strategies of creolisation and hybridisation. Without assuming uninterrupted traditions, it speaks of borrowings, *bricolage* and reformulations. It is in itself a theory based on the idea of borrowing, drawing ideas both from local expressions and practices and Western thought. It is wary of totalising discourses. It recognises that several different temporal regimes can coexist in a space layered with different territories. It does not oppose ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity,’ rather it asserts that a situated subject constantly negotiates the interaction between traditions and modernities. The gaze is necessarily decentered within and among transnational, transcontinental and diasporic movements, as these are translated in the imagination and the praxis of artists. Post-colonial theory does not forget that the world is beset by conflicts, wars and inequalities.

We date ‘post-coloniality’ in Réunion from the beginning of the 1960s. The colonial order was breaking up. Voices were raised to assert the solidarity of the Réunionese *people* with other Indian Ocean peoples, with social movements in France, to affirm the

existence of a Creole language, and a culture moored to Africa, Asia, Europe and the other islands of the Indian Ocean. Intellectual history merged with political demands that countered an hysterical campaign for ‘Frenchness.’ The hegemonic discourse of Frenchness took the line that Réunion had no history, culture or language; that the inhabitants could not *count as a people*; only France could give it *meaning, identity and existence*. We could not exist without a France that was, as conservatives politicians proclaimed, ‘our sun.’

The women and men of Réunion countered this cultural attack using the vocabulary of decolonisation, dignity and identity. They affirmed that our language exists, that we have a culture, a history that could not be subsumed to the French (‘hexagonal’) one, and even if we were connected to France, we were not reduced to it. Indeed, events might have taken place that had a greater effect here than there. Obviously the abolition of slavery and the mass importation of indentured workers had no impact in France: they are still not fully inscribed in French historiography. Social and cultural movements emerged and began to spawn innovative and creative action. From the 1970s through the 1980s, journals (*Les Cahiers de l’île de la Réunion, Bardzour*), poets (Boris Gamaleya, Alain Lorraine, Gilbert Aubry, Agnès Guéneau, Alain Armand, Patrice Treuthardt), novelists (Alain Cheynet, Axel Gauvin, Daniel Honoré, Jean-François Samlong), musicians (Firmin Viry, Lo Rwa Kaf, Granmoun Lélé, Danyèl Waro, Ziskakan), cultural and political activists (Laurent Vergès, Firmin Lacpatia, Reynolds Michel), researchers working on language, history and anthropology, created the broad outlines to think the foundations and the modes of expression of Réunionese cultural, historical, and social identities. There were movements (the UFR,⁶ the Southern Cultural Front, the Réunion Cultural Movement, the ADER,⁷ the UDIR,⁸ the UGTRF⁹) and places (*Farfar* at La Rivière-des-Galets). All brought together eyewitness testimonies, offered meeting places and drafted demands. Books such as *Réunion 69*,

⁶ Union of Réunion Women. Founded in 1958 and closely linked to the Réunion Communist Party, this organisation was the spearhead of a great number of social movements.

⁷ The Association of Réunion Writers. With other organisations, like the Réunion Cultural Movement, the *Mouvman pou nou droi kozé*, les Editions des Chemins de la liberté, this group took up the cause of Réunion literature and the Creole language.

⁸ The Union for Réunion Broadcasting. An association of writers with a long history in the *créolie* movement, which was initiated by Gilbert Aubry and Jean-François Samlong, beginning with the neologism forged by Jean Albany.

⁹ The General Union of Réunion Workers in France. This union had a long history of federating student and progressive worker unions of people from Réunion in France, especially between the 1960s and the 1990s.

une colonie française or *La Réunion, département français* belied the toned-down image of ‘the little France of the Indian Ocean.’ None of this was easy. The repression was vicious: censorship, discrimination. Conservative newspapers, radio and TV never reported what was going on, attacks never ceased. A little reminder: the bicentennial celebrations of colonisation in 1965 excluded the Madagascan inhabitants; they refused to broadcast the *maloya*,¹⁰ celebration of a ‘white’ Réunion, and frankly disdained the Creole language.

A mythic France

The assertion of abstract and ahistorical Frenchness sought to alienate (in the Fanonian sense: to despise oneself) Réunion society, relegating our dreams, our lives, *to non-existence*. The ‘France’ that came our way was mediocre, stupid and sub-cultural. We saw nothing of the *New Wave* cinema, nor the poetic, literary or dramatic avant-garde, nor the renewal of thought around structuralism and post-structuralism, nor the critical Marxist debates, nor contemporary art, nor the debates in the human and social sciences, nor psychoanalysis, nor the sexual revolution, nor the women’s movement, nor the gay movement ... these things were blocked. Not to mention what was going on in Africa and Asia. It was forbidden to talk of torture in Algeria, to do so led to prosecution. Civil servants who led trade unions, who joined anti-hegemonic cultural and political movements were punished and children deported by the thousands. We only got a dumbed-down mass culture: Guy Lux,¹¹ *Connaissance du monde* tours, B-grade movies, photo-novels ... it was a France of mythic, provincial, timid and inward-looking dimensions. Even if its domination was not completely hegemonic, it was given nonetheless considerable powers of distribution and legitimation by the state. The world was read according to the binary logic of the Cold War, of the battle between the ‘free world’ versus the ‘communist world.’ This was not without its effect in Réunion, which also had its binary structures hard-wired into its society (master/slave, master/indentured, colonialist/anti-colonialist). This concatenation of binaries brought about a Manichean discourse that masked social and cultural complexity. Manichean discourses became the dominant explanation of life on Réunion. A strong opposition

¹⁰ The *maloya* is song and dance coming from slave and indentured culture, practised either at mystical ceremonies celebrating the ancestors (servis *kabaré*, servis *makwalé*), or in more profane versions on musical evenings (*kabar*). While the *maloya* was marginalised for a long time, it was revived and celebrated by the Réunion communist party militants and officials at the end of the 1960s.

¹¹ A Game-show host [trans.]

between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was even picked up by the anti-colonialist movement, opening the way for the emergence of an ‘us’ from Réunion, which played two roles: one to try to get away from the two-bloc logic (campaign for the ‘Indian Ocean Zone of Peace’), and the other to try get recognition for the fact that on Réunion there were networks and practices more complex than the simple Creole-French opposition.

The cultural movement of the last decades mobilised the society. Vernacular music became a space of resistance. We rediscovered our voices in literature, art, theatre, music and poetry. It was a period of militancy and engagement. The cultural debate was turned around and forever changed. It was a remarkable time of creativity and dynamism. It was possible to celebrate exile and *métissage*, and the Creole language was strengthened. The stakes in present debates cannot be understood unless one goes back to the economics of the dissent, discontent and disturbances of those years. Now we have the task of a postcolonial/sociological rereading of the politics and culture of those years to reinsert the complexity of the real. For instance, we think that the opposition of French and Creole languages ignores the presence of other languages like Gujarati, Chinese, Malagasy, Swahili, Tamil, Urdu or their mixtures on the island; in Réunion there exist *languages*.

*I have no need to look, myself
the pot of my identity
overflows
with my mixing
I have no need to look, myself
the container of my identity
overflows*

Danyèl Waro, *Métissage*

Rereadings and reinterpretations

The 1960s and 1970s movements have been a source of references for our thinking ever since. *Batarsité*,¹² *Créolie*, banyan people, coral people ... ideas have emerged to define our *presence*. The official celebration (since 1981) of the 20th December—the date of the liberation of the slaves—has opened the way for a rereading of history. We have spoken once again of slavery, of our forebears who were enslaved or indentured. We have dared to denounce crimes and lies. No, slavery was not ‘softer’ on Réunion than in the Caribbean. Yes, we are *all* inheritors of this history. No, the slaves were not just

¹² *Métissage*. *Batar* in Réunion Creole does not have the same connotations as *bâtard* [bastard] in French.

Africans. Yes, there was resistance—maroons, abortion, suicides, revolts, poisoning of masters, sabotage. No, it was not all resistance, slavery and indenture also succeeded in breaking peoples' will and in their dehumanisation. Yes, indenture work was brutal, perhaps as much as slavery. No, Réunion was not a Garden of Eden. Yes, there was racism. Historians—Michèle Marimoutou, Prosper Eve, Claude Wanquet, Sudel Fuma—and economists—Hai Quang Ho—are reconstructing this period.

*The airplane, the biggest Boeing ever, lands
at the huge aerodrome at Grillot.
When it arrives, this airplane
makes a noise like hell, and when I speak softly,
some say that I am noisy.*

Christian Jalma, *Le Pouvoir éphémère des lapsus*

Yet, we were still too much a people 'spoken' through others. Our space has been filled with representations in which we didn't recognise ourselves. The French are telling us: 'We will explain to you who you are.' A whole series of contradictory statements are blocking us in, spatially. We are at the same time always too much of this (violent, mute) and not enough of that (responsible, hard-working). We are 'The France of the Indian Ocean' yet ungrateful. This double-bind situation of contradictory injunctions (in the psychoanalytic sense, as an 'effort to make the other mad') is a feature of colonisation. As long as one is the stereotypical 'Creole' it is acceptable: charming, singing, dancing, 'nice,' but not 'angry' and acting. This brings about a paradoxical situation where the subject is drawn into conforming to the stereotype the better to be indicted for following it. We affirm that it is preferable to assert our autonomy, to reject the slick touristy image of the 'intense' and 'mixing pot' island, in order to bring out the rough edges, the conflicts along with the wonders; life as a whole, basically. Still, negative stereotypes are long-lived and even in 1985 one was able to read this interpretation: 'The simplified gestures of miming, as symbols of expression appearing in the two dance types, *maloya* and *sega*, and intellectual introversion as refuge of the self, underpin the relations that Réunion people have with the outside world' ('Report de la Commission traitant des violence intra-familiale' 1985).

Our voices are regularly interrupted and our silences over-interpreted; we scarcely begin to say something and the gag is put in place. We have learnt to speak in an oblique or indirect fashion. We will have to invent a conceptual vocabulary to speak our world.

The vocabulary of complaint and accusation is far too limiting, while assimilationist language has worked hard to deprive us of a sense of self. And if the anti-colonialist language opened us to the world and led us to tie together forms of solidarity once again, it also induced a habit of simplifying the facts. Face to face with the violence and racism of a rigid society, with the denial of justice (electoral fraud, discrimination), we learned to be on the defensive. Today we will have to forge new alliances, leave behind simplistic approaches, and recognise complexity.

We are not pure deserts

Agnès Guéneau, *La Réunion: une île, un silence*

Today we acknowledge the need for a new movement, the need to think up new approaches and ways of seeing. We have to take into account the profound transformations that have taken place over the last twenty years. They demand new concepts and a new methodology. Tens of thousands of unemployed, thousands of young people out of work, almost half the population on social benefits, the hegemony of oil and cars, bad city planning, spoilt environment, a daily life of domestic violence, rising delinquency, disappearing agriculture, 753,600 inhabitants of whom 40 percent are under 25, the region of France with the highest unemployment (31 percent), nearly 40 percent of the population below the poverty line, the continual rise of people with the right to access unemployment benefits (67,915 enrolled); rising numbers of women working outside the home, domestic violence, rape, incest, drugs, large numbers of suicides (especially young men, and especially in a region—the south of the island—famous for having ‘kept its traditions,’ for its ‘authenticity’), alcoholism, murderous road accidents. These are some indication that Réunion society has problems. To this we can add the rapid changes taking place in the region and globally. Yet these facts and data do not tell us everything. What we need is a sociology of these transformations, of the effects on society of the number of active women, of the constant rise in the proportion of *zoreys*,¹³ of the presence of mobile and other new forms of communication, of the car, of television, of the number of students, of the emergence of rap and hip-hop in Réunion.

¹³ A term of uncertain etymology, designating people born outside of Réunion (most often in continental France), residing in and/or working on the island.

We have to know how to perceive the 'small' or the 'minor,' the scarcely visible manifestations of adaptation to change. The urban-rural dichotomy will henceforth have less meaning, since the urban fabric and its representations dominate, carving out territories that are interlaced but also confront each other. An urban sociology is called for. How did the inhabitants acquire public housing? What are the new urban cultures, or the modern semiotics of belonging to one group or another? What is the language of young people? What are the signs of belonging? What are the inhabitants' uses of spatial strategies? What have the thousands of Comorans, and their children, now Réunionese, brought to Réunion creolisation? What have the *zoreys* brought? What are the new social networks? Who is doing what, and why? How is knowledge and social status being transmitted? How are masculinity and femininity structured? We need an anthropology of the political, of 'how we live together.' Who is speaking for whom? Who is being heard? How does one become 'Réunionese'? Certainly the work of young researchers is beginning to build new knowledge, but we sense a lack of transfer, of fruitful exchanges, of a useful and vigorous public debate.

Obstacles exist. We witness a campaign whose goal is to put a stop to new developments and to impose a particular way of thinking. Here and there histories are rewritten so that past tensions and conflicts are erased or relegated to 'prehistory.' Medias (newspapers, radio, TV), the university, the schools are tools of *pacification*, which is threatened by any appearance of cultural diversity (understood as communitarian threats). The aim of this rewriting and revisionism is to make people forget their responsibilities towards each other. However, archives (both material and immaterial) inevitably reveal, and are revealing, multiple forms of complicity in brutal repressive strategies of silencing. Preaching about novelty is also a way to mask the fact that novelty is a new disguise for past repressive measures.

*My country is a crazy ship
Where are they taking us?*

Axel Gauvin, *Chants pour ouvrir la langue et le Coeur*

Conservatism, fears

Bitterness and resentment characterise too often the attitudes and discourses of intellectuals from Réunion. In their opinion, communitarianism is a danger, the politicians are not up to it, people are alienated by supermarkets and consumerism and

suffer from becoming uprooted. They are disillusioned, and from this disillusion, they extract a knowledge of what should be ‘good’ for Réunion. These are *yaka fokon* (must do) experts, setting up shop for their grievances in the media. Often sexist, they speak freely of the offended or humiliated ‘Réunionese man’; there are no women in their universe. No *fathers* in their world, not to mention *mothers*. They speak of a long-lost past so the present can be pasted over and the future made to look rosy. Trading on others’ struggles in which they did not take part, they take few risks. They believe that ‘speaking is doing’; speaking, speaking, holding forth, these ‘kings of the word’ are free with words, but refuse to recognise that they are confounded by complex situations. They have solutions; they ‘know.’ They hide their power behind a low-risk populism, going about accusing others of being ‘intellectuals’ cut off from ‘the people.’ ‘Intellectual’ is even an insult.

Over the last few years, a set of rhetorical strategies have been presented as ‘truths.’ It is important to deconstruct them in order to make visible the conditions under which these opinions are transformed into incontrovertible truths, into commonplaces. We have to understand how and why some of these expressions are picked up by the media, circulate, and become dominant, why a whole series of opinions are transformed into points of reference, the commonplaces of common sense, so that one no longer even asks where they have come from, and who created them. The function of these opinions is to construct a ‘truth effect.’ One of these classical strategies consists in stereotyping adversaries and denigrating them. In the public space that should be open to the agonistic encounter of diverse positions, insult and defamation move in. Demonising the adversary seeks to take away his or her autonomy in action and thought. Adversaries of hegemonic thought are presented as being controlled by forces greater than themselves (conspiracies abound), always suspected of having secret motivations. This anti-intellectual populism is the inheritance of a world where might created right. One often hears, for the most part from the middle classes, ‘This is too intellectual, people don’t want to hear that,’ which tells us a lot about the kind of opinion they hold about those who are not allowed to think. This current ‘caste,’ the *petit bourgeoisie*, often civil servants, gained social and economic status thanks to the union struggles of the 1950s and 1960s (from which it is still reaping the benefits) and thanks to the French state handing over public responsibilities to them. This caste (rather than a ‘class’ since it does not even fight for its rights, it begs the State to protect them) gives itself all too

easily the legitimate right to be the spokesperson of the people, a people that is being constructed as generic, rather than diverse and complex. At the centre of this rhetorical machinery, 'the truth' is the obsessively marked term that is able to mask the conditions of its own production. For instance, a 'truth' was that Blacks were lazy, Malbars thieves,¹⁴ Réunion women lascivious and men violent. The traces of racism and the denial of difference still impact upon the society.

Another common rhetorical strategy: 'Africa' refers to a homogenised, stereotyped and racialised space. Africa is a space of catastrophe, victimisation, misery, purged of any content; the artistic, intellectual, economic and philosophical production of a rich and diverse continent, along with the productive conflicts and the philosophical and legal contributions, are wiped out. In May 2004, an open letter was published in the Réunion press that claimed that 'The African civilisation has lost everything.' Now, for one, there are African civilisations, and two, extremely alive cultures. Think, for instance, of the great writers: Hampâté Bâ, Amadou Kourouma, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Naguib Mahfouz; of the great filmmakers: Med Hondo, Youssef Chahine, Cheick Oumar Sissoko; of the philosophers and social science researchers: Jean Godefroy Bidima, Achille Mbembe, Ato Quayson, Rehanna Vally; of the artists: Ousmane Sow, Sotigui Kouyaté, Fela, Youssou N'Dour; of Nelson Mandela. Such a statement flies in the face of all the decolonisation struggles, as well as the contributions to international law, to theories and cultural emergences.

At the beginning of 2004, South Africa celebrated ten years of democracy. Now without diminishing in any way the problems this country has been facing, like the rest of the nations of Africa, and with respect for the peoples of Africa and for what they have achieved, in admiration for their artistic and cultural expression, we reject totally the idea that 'an African civilisation would have lost everything.' Africans have deemed this opinion racist, as they have denounced the 'Afro-pessimism' that banished them to the void so that Western superiority could settle in more comfortably. We are talking about *African worlds* whose creolised traces have contributed and are continuing to contribute to the richness of Réunion society.

¹⁴ *Malbars* are people in Réunion who recognise themselves as having, or going back to, a South Asian origin (Bengal or southern India), or who follow the rituals linked to the forms of Hinduism in Réunion.

The paternalist position towards the African continent (rich, complex, multiple) goes hand in hand with the opinions of those who refuse to see current mutations. Too often, in the peoples of the region, in the civilisations that have given birth to the groups that constitute the peoples of Réunion island, Réunion paternalists see only minor civilisations, only minor peoples among the people. When they recognise their connections to the continent, they rarely acknowledge its contribution to Réunion culture. The history of the island is recent, its culture is young, they say, and its survival will depend entirely on its being moored to France. They have a nostalgia for *tan lontan* [a long time ago], they are fearful of a new, more complex, more brutal world, of young people who ‘have no respect,’ and they hide under the wing of ‘Mother France.’ They seek its parental protection, worried about having to take risks or assume responsibilities. They do not even notice that France has deeply changed, that she herself has been subject to profound transformations over the last fifty years, that she is facing up to new facts, and to unavoidable social and political changes. Because of these changes, it is more important than ever that we make our voices heard. *We are a society born in the first globalisation (slavery and colonisation), and from the beginning the society was multi-religious and multi-ethnic.* (We will not digress on the demographic use that is made in Réunion of the term ‘ethnic’; today anthropologists have agreed on the use of the term ‘ethno-cultural constitutions’). We can explain how we have managed, how we have made do to live together in this little land. We do not embrace any kind of idealism. We know that ethnic stereotypes, racist insults, and racialised fears exist, but we also know that Réunion would not be Réunion without the confrontation of differences. The idea of confrontation implies a cultural and political debate; a cultural debate that is not frightened of the political. Let us underline this point for all those who would like to put aside politics so as to impose a demagogic populism (‘the elites are all corrupt’), where it is ‘every man for himself,’ where anonymous denunciations are encouraged, rumour is spread over the radio, in the papers, while mediocrity, sexism and racism is the order of the day.

*We know very well
That no one can suffocate
The well-springs of meaning
And the fire of emergence*

Gilbert Aubry *Rivages d'alizé*

Breakaways from the institutionalisation of culture

In the 1980s, the French State had put quite a bit of money into decentralised cultural structures. These policies had positive and unintended effects. As numerous artists and art critics have noted, massive institutionalisation and museumification have the tendency to empty the political content, in the broadest sense, out of culture, and lead artists for the most part to focus entirely on the market. This institutionalisation has muddied the waters on the question of *moorings*. If it is quite legitimate for an artist to want to sell her art, to be promoted and therefore enter the circuits of trade, or follow trends, the question of the relations of culture and politics, art and society, should be debated. The development of a critical space would be a good start. During a debate with artists on the 3rd May 2003, the problem of a ‘Réunion art’ was raised. Among the statements produced were: ‘Wouldn’t the term ‘Réunionese’ restrict the artist’s expressive scope? Enclosing him or her in a space, whereas they may want to aspire to the universal? Wouldn’t ‘Réunionese art’ revert to a ‘regionalism’ in which people would necessarily look for ‘authenticity’?’

Numerous philosophers, historians and anthropologist have reminded us that the notion of the universal was invented in Europe (as the heritage of secularised Christianity after the 18th century), which then led to the imposition of the equation Europe = Universal. Europe’s singularity was hidden behind its universalist mask. If, after the second half of the 20th century, this analogy has been radically thrown into question, its continued use needs clarification. There is no doubt that the notion of the ‘universal’ is often used to go beyond things that appear too localised, to contain a space where the differentiations are fixed, leading to a ‘balkanisation,’ an ‘ethnicisation’ of identities. In the domain of art, it will be useful to be more precise about the *Réunionese contribution to modernity*.

In Réunion, the republican secular education system imposed the European notion of universality and modernity. One might ask oneself how the term came about in an historical context that denied the universal to a large part of the world’s population. What is the Réunionese contribution to the artistic and theoretical work towards new definitions of universality and modernity? What kinds of artistic works would answer to this context? Over the last few years, artists have explored new arrangements. Photographers—Laurent Zitte, René-Paul Savignan, Frédéric Pothin, Yoyo Gonthier; plastic artists—Esther Hoareau, Colette Pounia, Thierry Fontaine, Alain Padeau, André

Robér, William Zitte, Gabrielle Manglou; and in the area of new expressive forms like rap and hip hop, slam, cartoons, video. That said, there is no school of criticism, and it remains forbidden to suggest a debate on aesthetics. All expressions, all creations should be celebrated on their own terms. Jealousy, envy and resentment have contributed to the creation of little feudalities. Yet, new forms of artistic expression also bring into play what there is to be thought about, and to be translated into concepts and actions. Young architects, social workers and psychologists have accumulated knowledge on new sites of negotiations. Scattered knowledges are the foundations of a new methodology for coming to terms with Réunionese society.

Anprèt amoin dé Mo

Axel Gauvin *Romans po détak la lang démay lo kèr*¹⁵

The literature of absence

The literature of Réunion has always said one thing: there ‘is no history because there is no place.’ Or more precisely: ‘there is no appropriation of history because the place is uninhabitable’; there is ‘no tongue nor language which can really convey this history or this place, because neither tongue nor language are inhabited by the place or this history, nor really do they live here in fact.’ *This is where the challenge lies: to take charge of the place and the history, and the languages of the place and the history.* Where is the fiction in trying to come to terms with the history and the place, unless it is *through traces, through ghosts? How can one live in a land of migrants? How can one live when one is a migrant?*

Debré, with his willing and systematic denial of history and space, sought to erase Réunion’s memories.¹⁶ The film *Sucre Amer* [dir. Yann Le Masson, 1963] is worth looking at again and again: the dead are voting, and as for the living, they get nowhere near the ballot box. Let’s have a look at the literary status of the slave: a non-person, a spectral figure; that of the maroon, condemned to wander, like a shadow; that of the indentured labourer, that of the *petit Blanc* who successively confronts the maroon, then the uninhabited that remains uninhabitable, because in history they never met. The

¹⁵ ‘Lend me two words,’ from Axel Gauvin, *Chants pour ouvrir la langue et le coeur.*

¹⁶ Michel Debré, a Parisian minister, arrived in Réunion in April 1963, and succeeded in being elected Député for Saint-Denis on May 6 despite local opposition to the *Ordonnance Debré* law he had introduced in 1960, that allowed Civil Servants in the overseas departments and territories of France to be put into forced exile on mainland France if suspected of disturbing public order. Supported by those who rejected autonomy, he immediately became the leader of the local right wing.

literature is haunted by the idea of trying to making the space habitable, taking account of history, speaking this place and this history, as it dreams of the missed meeting between the ‘white’ and the maroon. *The real was there, and no one knew how to talk about it.* Literature goes back, in its encounter between history and place, to the inventory of its phantoms and fantasies.

The always-fictionalised history of the origins of the *encounter-as-living-together*, of the very origins of the island, is always set up as a disaster about to happen, as an unaccomplished possibility, as original sin, of the primal scene as failure. The dream of paradise in the offing, prior to the occupation of the space, transforming it into a non-place, is a recurrent effect in Réunionese literature like a pre-origin myth that would come instead of, and in place of, the impossible (or the unthinkable) origin myth. This way of presenting the island as a paradise allows it to be situated outside of the history being made there, and to be thought beyond conflicts, in the classical framework of colonial paternalism. The island is thought of through the figure of the marvellous, but above all it is constructed as a foundation myth that puts ‘the Creole’ (white settler) at the origins of the island and the world, lending that figure a legitimacy that history would not acknowledge.

The fantasy of a pre-human paradise is immediately outweighed by the fantasy of a scorched earth, of a hellish space. If the island is both hell and heaven, even before man set foot there, the founding narrative of place will have to take account of this: *there is really no purity to be rediscovered.* If Réunionese literature allows itself to be the space/place of a fictional memory that takes the place of an unthinkable mythic or historical memory, it is emerging also, at the same time, from *another memory*, which is that of the texts and of the languages that are considered forgotten, and which are only awaiting for a space in which to be heard again.

The ethics of solidarity

*Mon shemin lé pa galizé
Li lé pa malizé*

Mikaël Kourto, *Lao*¹⁷

¹⁷ *My road is not smoothed/It is not difficult* Mikaël Kourto, *Up There*.

Monstrous and human

The revolution in thought and culture that began around the world in the 1960s, with social, feminist and gay movements that questioned heterosexual and dominant masculinity, arrived in Réunion twenty years later disconnected from these social movements. Conformity to the colonial norms and taboos applied by religious orthodoxy or their insular versions (prohibition on masculine homosexuality, fear of feminine sexuality) impacted on the forms of emancipation. Even today it is extremely difficult for a Réunionese homosexual to be out in a society that caricatures, fears or excludes him or her. The reality of Réunionese homosexuality may be seen in the personal columns or on the radio, but there is still no social space to express it. Heterosexuality, on the other hand, stills run on masculinist desire and its representations, and the relations between men and women are structured by predatory violence. How else can we understand conjugal rape, the rape of infants, of young and old women? How else can we understand incest? When a father rapes his baby, or a young man rapes a woman forty years older than him, the violence is amplified by intergenerational confusion.

Beyond the judicial and moralising discourses on crime, why is a woman's (or sometimes a young boy's) body nullified? We have to both judge and condemn the crime and make the victim aware of her rights, as well as carry out an analysis in which the Réunionese men are not turned into monsters. Making the crime monstrous puts it beyond the frame of the human condition by way of saying, 'This is not a human thing.' But these particular *monsters are human beings*, and their acts do cause us to ask about humanity and its capacity for cruelty and the horrific. *Yet we do know about horror, brutality and cruelty; our society was made of it.* We can examine how the crime manifests itself, in its major expression—rape—by approaching it in a comparative context. Contextualising rape (which is not to excuse it!) stops it being a 'Réunionese crime.' The observation of post-totalitarian situations (like South Africa after apartheid) shows how much the inheritance of a politics of violence, segregation and negation of the other has its effects on relations between men and women. It is as if man has to take revenge on woman for his past humiliation and make her body the territory of vengeance for his own body that was 'feminised' through humiliation, rape and torture. The observation of war and conflict situations today shows rape to be a massive phenomenon, whether in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Tibet or India.

But it is not only war situations that have rape at the borders of masculinity, it is also where speech no longer takes place, where sexuality (contradictory, under the spell of the unconscious, of desires) disappears in favour of predation or gang-bangs. *It is the symptom of a crisis in masculinity where 'being a man' means dominating a woman, branding her body, annihilating her.* Brutality becomes the very expression of masculine identity. Rape on Réunion can be understood both as a sign of an inheritance and as a symptom of a global crisis in masculinity. In contemporary globalisation the body has become a commodity once again, with massive increases in prostitution, sale of organs, the trafficking of women and children, and according to this logic, the weaker body (child, women, senior) is seen as the first to be the object to be traded, mutilated or violated.

Masculine, feminine

To this analysis of man/woman relations in Réunion, we have to add that of the encounter of two forms of masculinity: the one which develops in a colonial world where physical strength gave the Réunionese man his social status (working hard, working the land), and the other that arrives with the economic and social transformation brought about when office work and the mastery of French began to take over from the world of rural labour and its values. With unemployment, large numbers of men have lost their social position. How can we expect a man to occupy a parental place while at the same time the economy deprives him of all the symbols related to this function? Working men's experiences are not found in school or in the media; the physical strength that made his world is no longer valued. He reacts to this loss with a compensatory violence.

*Mon vi I vol o van l'an par l'an
Somin domin
In ot kalité
Domoun*

Barbara Robert, *Fannfoutan*¹⁸

Limits

We hear people ask, 'Where is civil society?' yet there have never been so many associations and activities. They say, 'You have to bring people in from the outside to

¹⁸ 'My life flies away with the wind year after year/the roads of the tomorrow/another kind/of people.'
Barbara Robert, *Joking*.

break down insularity,' yet there have never been so many conference delegates, visits of artists and researchers. What's missing? Is there really a lack? We suggest this unease has several causes: physical, political and economic limitations. *Physical limitations*: only on a small part of the land, can constructions be made. There is a lot of pressure on fundamental resources. We have to admit that resources are not unlimited, that nature cannot be extended, and that technology is not the solution to all these limitations. To local limitations must be added the extra burden brought about by exterior constraints: climate change, attacks on biodiversity, exhaustion of resources, and the pressure on resources. Do we have the illusion of being protected from these pressures? And how are we going to work together to find solutions to these local limitations? *Political and social limitations*: the local political elite faces the same challenges as everywhere else. Populism and demagoguery are easy ways out. When problems demanding careful consideration present themselves, the political tendency is to wait on France. Demography poses its own specific problems: from 1930 to 2003, the Réunionese population quadrupled. Every year 10,000 young people enter a workforce with annual places for only 3,000. In 2030 the number of retirees will be multiplied by three. *Economic limitations*: as a product of the first globalisation (slavery and colonisation), the island's economy was limited. Slave owners lived on credit and went easily into debt to buy their bonded workforce. Few had the willingness to take risks. Well before the massive effects of free-market globalisation on economies (delocalisation, privatisation of public services, impoverishment of the middle classes, the rule of finance), the island's economy went through a period where its industrial and craft structures were destroyed. The economy depends in large measure on government contracts, and couldn't protect itself from liberalisation. The limitations of free-market globalisation are forcing us to be more inventive.

*At the heart of our unbridled ravines
the surf has carved itself an islet
where mother springs sing
where the murmurs of a country's roots entwine*

Idriss Issop Banian, *Je suis d'ici et d'ailleurs*

Inheritances

While the battles of the 1960s for language, history and culture are still to be fought, we also have to respond to new challenges. We acknowledge our debt to the women and men who had the courage to assert Réunionese singularity. Standing on their shoulders,

reading over their writings, *we inscribe ourselves in the present*. We have no regrets, we have no vindictive or contemptuous feelings against political ‘elites,’ ‘bureaucrats’ or ‘welfare recipients,’ *our starting point is who we are, not what we would have liked to have been*. Thus, with language. It is wearying to constantly have to prove that Creole should be taken seriously at schools, to point out that it is a language, that it can be written and read, and that, like all languages, it borrows from others. It is wearying to see how those who negate Creole are given space in public debates: teachers, psychologists, social workers, while at the same time the National Education Ministry has recognised the teaching of Creole. And yet, the same old reactionaries, in the name of the fantasy of purity, showing their fear of diversity, are doing everything they can to take us back to a former world. Yet, on this point there is no negotiation.

We also have to take into account new facts that throw into doubt the binary structure of anticolonialist struggles: the emergence of new identities and cultural and confessional loyalties, massive exclusion through unemployment and a world of precarious lives, a more complex fragmentation of society, the relation of young people to new technologies and cartographies (New York, London, Mumbai, Maputo, Antananarivo, Chennai, Johannesburg). People in Réunion have learned to manipulate the tools and methods of globalisation and its communication technologies (internet, mobile phones—in 2007, 900,000 cell phones for 810,000 inhabitants). This flexibility in adapting new tools goes along with the difficulty of adapting to social and economic mutations and sets up a number of questions that force us to listen patiently. We have been enmeshed in a catch-up economy (catching up to the ‘metropolitan model’—statistics are always showing us the comparison between household disposable incomes in Réunion versus data of ‘the metropole’). In order to justify itself (with the question: ‘are we supposed to leave people as they are?’), it dictates all our actions. *We must put in place a new economy, an economy of time to listen, of time to negotiate*.

New cartographies are asking us to develop an *ethics of responsibility*. Our colonial past should make us more sensitive in our behaviour towards the countries of the region. Artists and researchers should ask themselves questions about the relations of knowledge and power. There is a need to build a real space for collaboration and exchange. Any Réunionese, being a European citizen, can move around the region at will. The reverse is not true: queues and humiliation are the lot for our neighbours

seeking visas for our country (not to mention the different currency exchange values). All Réunionese tourists should be conscious of their positions and their prejudices. As for the sex tourists who head off from Réunion to Madagascar or other countries in the region, the idea of a colonising colony is alive and well in their heads.

Living together

The ethic of responsibility that the metaphor of *moorings* suggests led us to the analysis of the laws that regulate the right to speak. We easily find scapegoats, most recently *zoreys* and people of the Comoros. We have convinced ourselves that we are owed something, and we find comfort in the idea that others have nothing to teach us. *To share is to speak and to listen to what others have to say as well as to the silences*. To live somewhere is to build a common space where the very question of the political is posed: who wants the right to speak? Solidarity is too often cliquey. We need to *accept critique, understand that without a critical space the world shrinks* and paternalism is waiting in the wings. Debate is replaced by verbal abuse or what we call *grocer* (jealousy, resentment). The structure of silence is deadly when silence becomes law. We are struck by the way in which the story of the Creuse children has the contours of a secret.¹⁹ First movement: a silent conspiracy. Second movement: the scandal breaks in the media. Third movement: justification and legitimation (talk of poverty of the families from whom the children were taken, of the neglect of the children, of the possibility of a better life for the children, minimising and banalising, ‘there are some unfortunate exceptions, but the majority was better off in the end’). Fourth movement: the finger is pointed at the whistleblower. This reminds us of the plot of the film *Festen* [Vinterberg, 1998], it is not the person who commits the crime who upsets the apple cart, and who is rejected in the end, but the person who names him. He uncovers the family secret, brings the skeleton out of the cupboard and spoils everyone’s fun.

Too often we are our own worst enemies. Too often, we don’t allow ourselves dignity and pride. The practice of *moucatage*²⁰ is testimony to a perverted relation to otherness. *Moucatage* can be funny, yet it can also be destructive, signifying the social prohibition

¹⁹ From 1964 to 1982, social services obeying Debré’s orders, took away more than 1,600 Réunionese children from their families and transported them to the department of Creuse in France’s Massif Central, ostensibly because of overpopulation of Réunion, under-employment and a large demographic of young people. These children were often abused. Some families never saw them again. All the attempts to bring the affair to court were rejected.

²⁰ Teasing and bullying, often nasty, stigmatising physical characteristics or social behaviour.

of crossing the bounds of the normal, and the will to bring the other back to conformity. We read practices like *ladilafé*,²¹ *moucatage*, clannish loyalty, as symptoms of envy and jealousy. How can we bring back practices of solidarity, that is to say of common consciousness? Réunionese society is not lacking in compassion, it is a lack of solidarity that too often lets us down. We have yet to build a notion of territory as a common good and a space of shared practice. The outlines of the limits of private property (‘never go through the *barreau* [gate] without being invited!’) indicates the importance of security fences in Réunionese daily life. Quarrels among neighbours (with sudden explosions of violence) underline our susceptibility when it comes to these barriers. The separation between public and private, which is very important (someone might leave a pile of rubbish outside their gate, no problem, but one’s own *kour* [front yard] will be spotless, an aesthetic jewel) no doubt represents the difficulty in acknowledging the common good. But perhaps one has first to feel secure before opening one’s door. This process goes back to what we were suggesting: a reappropriation of the way the territory of ‘Réunion’ is moored.

Indian Ocean creolisations

O Ramaloya (raya m’aloya) dia Ralaloya (raha m’aloya)
Alevena ao anatin’ny dihy (dia) re ny lasa fandrao managérat

Éric Manana, *Maloya*

Creolisation is not an accumulation or a sum of differences. It has the dynamism of an unfinished process that is subject to mutations and loss. It borrows mimetically and creatively. It has no problem with putting down roots, because a root is not necessarily stultifying, if it is a mooring that allows us to move on more easily. We do not idealise movement. Mooring is a relation that accepts the link, that has no fear of submitting to meaning, to desire, and is happy to let things go.

The Other can no longer be evaluated according to the rulings of the One. All civilisations have been in contact with others, none has the monopoly on the universal or on modernity. Each is traversed by conflicts among different traditions and modernities, each has movable frontiers, complex configurations. Territories are overlapping, histories are interlaced. Cultural diversity is a fact, and dialogue among

²¹ Rumours, often uncomplimentary.

civilisations a given for the future. Homogenisation of the world is an offence against interculturality, multiplicity and diversity. We are speaking of *areas of civilisation*. We reject the particularisation of religions, civilisations, philosophies. We defend a *philosophy of borrowing, forgery, imitation, and a dynamic of patching up, making do, of fixing up, of mending*. A world quick to imitate, but which creolises the imitated thing to make something else of it, which invents the quotidian. *This is a dynamic of alterity where we see no alienation or submission, rather a creativity of a world subject to continual conflicting inputs*. A society has always recourse to imitation. All social groups and individuals are constituted by a network of borrowings, debts and recreations.

Creole

We want to focus here on two versions of creolisation, bearing in mind, once again, that this text has no pretensions to completeness. We are interested here in language and *maloya*, but there are also rituals, housing, cuisine. Creole was born of the need for communication among people coming from different places, myths, imaginaries and languages, of the need for spoken exchanges under work conditions of a settler and plantation society. Words from masters to slaves, slaves to slaves, masters to indentured labourers, labourers to masters, labourers to labourers, freed slaves to freed slaves. Discourses and knowledges of the world, delivered to language in the form of meanings to be made, were produced from perceptions and experiences of place and of relationships of production in the place. Creole language necessarily carries, in the heterogeneity that presided over its development, the mark of languages, dreams, imaginaries, which were there at the very start, delivered unconsciously, subterranean, cryptic. But they burst forth again, in one way or another, in the everyday exchange of words, in poetic speech, in the lyrics of *ségas* and *maloyas*, in proverbs, word-play, riddles.

Crossings, meetings

Heterogeneity is a fact, transformed by the encounter of the imaginaries that produce the imaginary of the place; it bursts forth in crossings and appropriations. One legend, *Granmèr Kal*, is built from an amalgamation of myths from India, Madagascar, and Africa in the popular memory of Réunionese oral traditions. This memory is linked to the apprehension that slaves hold for the master and his powers, and to a specific

perception of the supernatural. It bursts forth in a *maloya* by Firmin Viry where the heroine of an Indian epic, Sità in the *Ràmàyana*, transformed into a female plantation worker, meets an ancient French romance. It bursts forth in street theatre that mixes sacred spaces with profane spaces, as in the *jako*,²² which brings into its dance style and repertoire of movements practices that are reinterpretations from Dravidian India and Mozambique. It bursts forth in the *narlgon*²³—Tamil or Malabar theatre—where what was ritual in the original context becomes theatrical spectacle in the site of a *terukkutu* (traditional Tamil theatre) gathered in the unconscious. It burst forth no doubt without the knowledge of the performers themselves, who have left the origins aside, but it is there, always present and immediately to hand.

Maloya is a stage for the space of processes and practices of Indian Oceanic creolisation, a common ground for a Réunionese ethos. The lyrics of the *maloya* take on meaning and value in a festive or ceremonial context, where there is internal interaction (singer, chorus) and external interaction (players/participating audience). The lyrics of the *maloya*, often improvised from a base of uncertain origin, are infinitely variable, according to the conditions under which it is uttered, to the public's role, how the singer is feeling, and how the chorus is made up; in short, *maloya is a performance*. It is both a social practice and a discursive practice, with its own internal logic. It can be read as a text, it has deconstructions/reconstructions of established collective speech, it has lexical shifts, and is the unique text of a unique artist.

Maloya is a community-in-living represented linguistically, socially and discursively. What was marginal becomes central. *Maloya* mixes up and multiplies speaking positions and identities. The closing ceremony is challenged by its own formal devices. What disappears is the voice of the community and its connivance, which is the only thing that can assure the control and closure of meaning. Yet the meaning is open to all voices and pathways. Where the same would want to return to the same, the other is always present. So what does the text tell us, stripped of authorised language? It shows us precisely the impossible community; there is no protected historical space, no fixed time. A story of loss emerges that opens the way to melancholy, to an impossible task of

²² A street theatre character who usually appears on the first of January. Jako is an acrobat in monkey/jaguar costume, most likely the product of the mixing of Indian and Mozambiquian practices.

²³ Song and dance theatre probably from the south of India and creolised by Indian indentured labourers. It has been practised for a long time on religious occasions, marriages and other festive events. The repertoire is borrowed from major Hindu myths.

mourning. What is narrated, in face of the desired or dreamed of utopia of spatio-temporal closure and of respect for the communitarian norm, is rather, *a contrario*, a declension in major and minor keys, all sorts of violence, the dark side of desire, loneliness of the self, the permanent friction at the heart of everyday life. No one could deny the robust modernity of this poetic structure in which the poem is an object constantly under modification by its conditions of interpretation. *The song, thus understood, carries within it hundred of texts, thousands of possibilities, a practice of reappropriation founded on the knowledge of loss.*

Moorings

*Mon papa moutardié
mon monmon bingali
a moin même batard moutardié
mi boire de l'eau
dane coeur fatak*

Firmin Viry, *Moutardié*²⁴

Proposing the paradigm of Indianoceanic creolisations, we suggest a problematic of loss and reappropriation. The picture we have painted may seem depressing, but we think there can be no programme of reconstruction without the work of turning the critical gaze on oneself. Moving towards a pedagogy of life together, we have not been afraid to drag the skeletons from the closet, to put forward dissonant voices, emphasise contradictions and limitations and zoom in on conformities and taboos. Dreaming of harmony is out of the question. Democracy needs a space of negotiation where opposed and divergent interests can find a resolution around a common decision where everyone is prepared to give up a part of their egoistic goals and come to own a part of the others' goals. We can find in creolisation a methodology for living together.

We want to keep our eyes and ears open to see how creolised people are inventive and capable of appropriating the unexpected. In Réunion we have moved, in less than fifty years, from a colonial society to a post-modern post-industrial one. Few peoples in the world have had to face up to such mutations and such uncertainties *without* experiencing violence. We are proposing a contemporary inscription, as we live on this island, in the margins of the world and linked to all the continents. Old links offer space

²⁴ My father is a weaver bird/my mother a Bengali bird/I am cast from a weaver bird/I drink water/stalks of the *fataque* plant.

for new solidarities. We live in the Indian Ocean, one of the most dynamic places in the world today, a place of conflicts and encounters where new configurations are emerging. New cartographies remain to be drawn, reinterpreting the former cartographies from the present and inventing future ones.

We suggest paying *particular attention to vernacular practices and forms of expression*. Vernacular does not mean *tan lontan*, rather negotiation between different modernities and different traditions. It is for this reason that representations have to be deconstructed, the urban youth cultures of young boys and girls interrogated, along with the middle class cultures, and the new creolised forms of rites and customs. To achieve this we propose putting practices in relation to each other, in tension, practices that in a binary relation would cancel each other out. We wish to privilege a comparative approach of coming and going, using complexity, without trying to construct a totalising theory. For example, comparing hip hop cultures in Maputo and Saint-Denis, diasporic manifestations in Mauritius and Réunion, the informal economy in Antananarivo and in Le Port, the trappings of wealth in the middle classes of the Indian Ocean. This methodology teaches us to be ready for unexpected developments that might contradict what we are expecting. It warns us of the danger of transforming the past into a burden for the present and future generations, making them feel guilty (they have the right to want to forget in order to reappropriate the territory in their own way).

The world is increasingly confronted with multilingualism, multi-religious practices, multicultural practices. Colonial managing of differences made them minor and marginal and inscribed them in a relationship of inequality. Today, no culture or area of civilisation would accept being placed on a hierarchical scale. The idea of monoculture no longer makes sense, if indeed it ever did. Creolised people have a long experience of the intercultural, or of the negotiation between marked contrasts and a constant doubt about resolving them into one fixed set of practices. It is a fragile space, always on the edge. One can easily fall on the side of ethnicisation or assimilation. *Creolisation is not the only model of cultural contact, and is not looking to set itself up as such*. We do not know what will emerge from current globalisation. Creolisation is one of the products of different globalisations; as such it offers a contribution to the debate. For us it represents the moorings that, going out from the island, attach us to other islands and continents.

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