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Impact of Language and History on Identity in Mauritius and La Réunion Through the Lens of Torabully and Marimoutou

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Impact of Language and History on Identity in Mauritius and La Réunion Through the Lens of Torabully and Marimoutou

Brooklyn Isabel Sophie Stam

University of Vermont
Honors College Thesis 2019

Dodo in Mauritius

Advisory Committee:
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1 Photo taken by author Brooklyn Stam in traditional Creole house in Mount Ory, Moka on Mauritius
Maps

La Réunion

Mauritius

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2 Photo taken by author Brooklyn Stam in traditional Creole house in Mount Ory, Moka on Mauritius. Photo below from Google Maps.
Outline

This thesis explores the making of Creole identity and how it manifests itself in the poetry of La Réunion and Mauritius, specifically focusing on poets Marimoutou and Torabully respectively. There is now a movement that is working to reclaim the Creole culture as something to be celebrated and used as a model of how cultures should engage with diversity in race and ideas. It will research in what ways Marimoutou and Torabully articulate Réunionnais’ and Mauritian’s identity with regard to the diversity resulting from the colonial heritage of these two islands. This thesis will answer the question: How do language and the history of colonialism influence the Creole identity as conceived of by Marimoutou and Torabully?

This thesis begins by providing a brief history of the colonization of Mauritius and La Réunion. It focuses on slavery, which peoples were brought in and how. The second section focuses on the making of the Creole identity. There are many root identities present in Mauritius and La Réunion that prevent people from wanting to adopt this Creole identity. This section outlines the positive and negative perceptions of creole and the Creole identity. The third section will place Creole identity within a more concise framework through a discussion of the two poets’ conceptions of Creole identity on their home islands. Finally, the fourth section, will explore what these varying visions say about post-colonial society on each island today. It will be interesting to compare and contrast the poets with regard to Mauritius’ independence in 1968, and La Réunion’s continued political dependency, as part of France. Mauritius, which gained its independence in 1968, has a varying...
public opinion about the decision to become independent. In this section, I hope to highlight attitudes commonly held on these two islands toward their former colonizers. The conclusion ties everything together. In the end, the reader will have a much fuller understanding of some of the complex identities that exist within the Indian Ocean World and the continued conflicts with former colonizers as well as advances that have been made. Focusing on modern-day society, this thesis will answer the question: In what ways does the poetry of Marimoutou and Torabully shed light on the influence of language and the history of colonialism on Creole identity on their respective islands? It will also reflect on the nature of the resistance of these two poets against the vestiges of colonialism and against the neo-colonialist forces within a globalized economy.

4 Mauritian people are proud of their independence, but frustrated by the fact that they are limited by it. If one is born in La Réunion, they are born with an EU passport. This opens many doors for them and gives them privileges that Mauritian citizens are not granted. This is a point of contention for many Mauritians, as the job market in Mauritius is relatively limited and the process of getting work visas in other countries is tedious and complicated.
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Chapter 1. Historical Background

1.1 The Histories of Mauritius and La Réunion

Mauritius and La Réunion have been considered sister islands since their discovery. They share similar histories of colonization. They belong to the Mascarene islands which also includes the island of Rodrigues as well. This island group bears the name Mascarene because of Portuguese explorer Pedro Mascarenhas who was the first Westerner to discover these islands in 1512. Mauritius had explorers coming and going with some regularity, but the first formal efforts of colonization were made by the Dutch in 1638. Their colonization was predominantly an effort of the VOC\(^5\) to continue their dominance over the Indian Ocean – it was supposed to be a deterrent to the French and English from attempting to take possession of the island (Vaughan 7). Mauritius was a desirable colony for its ebony, which was prevalent on the island in the 17\(^{th}\) century. Richard Grove, a British historian who specializes in environmental history, argues, “Mauritius was seen by the Dutch less as a settlement and far more as a source of raw timber” (8). Although, due to their lack of manpower and successful social organization, this proved a difficult task. Dutch commander, Adrien van der Stel, decided the colony would benefit from the labor of slaves to add to his seventy Dutch workers he had already logging ebony for the island. To acquire these slaves, van der Stel went to the island of Madagascar – the same place from which

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\(^5\) The Dutch East India Trading Company or VOC was a large corporation that functioned as a trading company and shipping company in the early 1600s until 1800.
Payet says that the French drew their first slaves when they took possession of La Réunion in 1642.

It did not take long before the Dutch colonization of Mauritius started to fail. Slaves were escaping, and soon colonizers and slaves alike shared a common desire to leave the island. In 1652 the Dutch chose to abandon the island, leaving several Dutch ex-cons and Malagasy\(^6\) slaves to live off the land. Between 1664 and 1710, the Dutch tried again to colonize Mauritius. They brought in a small maroon\(^7\) group from Madagascar, Africa, South India, and Batavia.

For perspective, La Réunion became an outpost of the French East India Company in 1665, approximately the same time the Dutch started their second efforts to colonize Mauritius (Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations – French Dependencies). Beginning in 1643, “the French had been in possession of Île Bourbon\(^8\), a sleepy agricultural backwater, settled in part by Franco-Malagasies expelled from Fort-Dauphin in Madagascar and by slaves of mainly Malagasy origin” (Vaughan 20). It was a relatively quiet settlement; not much news left the island. By 1686, a priest visited La Réunion and reported that “the island’s population consisted of around three hundred people [presumably not counting slaves]. They included families of mixed French and Malagasy origin, and of those arising from marriages between French and Portuguese from India. There were also fifteen Indians, prisoners from San Thomé” (Vaxelaire, cited by Vaughan 21). It is interesting to consider that mixing between races was already happening on La Réunion in the late 1600s. Even when the slave/master dichotomy was ever present in the society, this mixing between races and cultures had already begun – albeit, not in an equal manner and mostly from

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\(^6\) People from Madagascar.  
\(^7\) Maroons were Africans who formed settlements away from plantations. Some had escaped slavery and others had always been free.  
\(^8\) Île Bourbon was the original name of La Réunion
necessity, seeing as there were few, if any, white women on the island – but all the same, there
was racial mixing, proving that this island has been Creole since its inception.

La Réunion’s primary crop was coffee. It gained renown for its prolific coffee crop
production. The small population that resided there in the early 1700s were farmers with slaves
hard at work producing these crops. Once the Dutch abandoned Mauritius around the same time,
tensions began rising among the settlers living in La Réunion. They thought that the sudden
attention to the amount of coffee they were producing would pose a security problem for them.
“According to the governor of Île Bourbon, Desforges Boucher, the word had spread that ‘the
Arabs who produced [coffee] would come to slit their throats and the Dutch who conducted a
lucrative trade in the coffee of Moka and Java would come to ravage the island’” (Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo,
cited by Vaughan 22). The perceived threat of
invasion led to a surge in settlers who had been living
in La Réunion moving to Mauritius to colonize it.
Their primary motivation for the colonization of
Mauritius, was to “protect Île Bourbon from attack.
The new colony would be productive and strategic:
populating the island in itself acted as a deterrent to
foreign powers, or so it was thought” (22). This
marked the beginning of French domination over these two islands in the Indian Ocean.

The first people to colonize La Réunion were French. They brought Malagasy and Indian
slaves with them. The island was predominantly a slave nation, with masters and slaves. “It is an
island where History has thrown together Malagasy, Africans, Comorans, Indians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malays, Europeans and French, atheists, Catholics and Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, animists and polytheists” (Vergès and Marimoutou 6). Slavery lasted until 1848, and from the beginning it was a very diverse collection of different backgrounds. Vergès and Marimoutou point out that La Réunion lends itself well to plural identities. Creole is powerful as a language and as an identity. It serves as evidence of the scale of the different languages that groups were using at the time, and mixes them in a way that creates a new more all-encompassing mode of communication.

The French claimed Mauritius in 1715 with a prise de possession. They began to settle it in 1721. They remained in control of the island until 1810 when the British came in from Rodrigues (another nearby island) and attacked. The transfer of Mauritius to British hands was confirmed in 1814 by the Treaty of Paris. This is when the island's name officially changed from the "Île de France" to "Mauritius." In an act of capitulation, the British agreed to respect the customs, languages, laws, and traditions of the inhabitants. This means that the Napoleonic code was upheld and the most widely spoken language on the island was French.

Meanwhile in La Réunion, the name changed from "Île de Bourbon" (this name was to honor the royal family of Bourbon) to its current name, "Île de La Réunion," after the abolition of slavery in 1848. This was done when "the delegates to a Revolutionary convention reassembled (in a 'reunion') and the first order of business was to rename the far-off colony with an appellation that did not recall the hated royal family" (Robin Cohen in the forward of Médéa xix). The Republic of France continued, and continues, to exercise a tight grip over the island. Over the

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9 It is important to note that this is a process of mixing that happened over the course of centuries.
years, following slavery, this grip has taken the form of colonialism and finally départmentalisation.\textsuperscript{10}

The British abolished slavery in Mauritius 1835 and turned to indentured labor in order to find cheap labor for the intensive sugar plantations in Mauritius. The first round of indentured laborers were of Chinese, Malay\textsuperscript{11}, African, and Malagasy descent. But the country who ultimately supplied the largest number of laborers was India. The word used for indentured laborers on the island at this time was the word "Coolie." This word came to refer primarily to those of Asian descent working on the island and is a highly offensive term. This term is used by the Mauritian poet, Khal Torabully, in his poetry as an emic\textsuperscript{12} form of empowerment, which will be explored more in depth.

Mauritius gained its independence from the British in 1968. It is, at least in theory, free of all tangible colonial bonds. However, La Réunion is still very much under French influence. The island is a department of France. Robin Cohen puts it nicely, when he states how everything on the island is France; the official language is French, they use the Euro, even the supermarkets, hotel chains, and TV channels are all French. Yet, nothing of the island's environmental and cultural geography resembles mainland France; the tropical vegetation, volcanic craters, climate, and the creole language, religious expressions, cuisine, music, dance, and the appearance and customs of the islanders. This is the dichotomy in which the Réunionnais live. How does one navigate this duality? These two cultures seemingly contradict one another at every turn. Cultural

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item This means full integration into the metropolitan structure and the European Union. However, centralized policymaking has distanced the government from the governed in France's overseas departments.
\item The Malays are people from Malaysia and Indonesia.
\item The word “emic” refers to the view of the social group from the perspective of the subject. In this case, it means that the power comes from the people themselves, not a third party.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
and national identity are not easily defined for this group of individuals. But before one can fully explore this, one must first understand what is meant by the word “identity.”

1.2 Defining the word identity

The way one defines the word, identity, can vary dramatically from person to person. Within the framework of this thesis, when referencing identity, the working definition will be: the way you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world, and the characteristics that define you. Additionally, this term will refer to the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a group.

When creating an identity, there needs to be a classification between who is a member, and who is not. Often, identities center around physical characteristics so it is easy to tell who is in the in or out group. But, these physical lines can be crossed. “Identity as a social representation of a society thus becomes a marker of difference and sameness between groups. A variety of manifestations of cultural identity, such as food and music, participate in this process of national identity formation” (Médéa 13). Identity is not only based on physical characteristics, it is also closely linked with language and culture.

In the context of this paper, an identity is how one chooses to identify oneself. It is important to note that this identity can shift to adapt to different contexts (for example, local, national, or international). One might have shifting perceptions of one's own identity depending on one's environment. This could be within the framework of a geographical nationality, for example, one who was born and raised in Mauritius and identifying as Mauritian. But this could also be a cultural identity, for example, for one born and raised in Mauritius but to parents who
were Chinese and raised them to practice Chinese traditions, culture, and language. This is the reconciliation this thesis will attempt to make – while one can be raised in one culture, but exposed extensively to another, how might one conceive of their identity? This is also the focus of the writings of the poets examined in this thesis.

The reason that Marimoutou and Torabully are the poets featured in this thesis is because of the different perspectives they give. They offer an instructive contrast regarding composite identities, which this thesis will study in the broader context of the islands' separate histories. Marimoutou and Torabully are among the most famous poets within their respective islands. Torabully, a poet on a small, independent island, gives a large, broader view of identity. He is focused outward. He is using French, the language that links Mauritius to La Réunion, as a lingua franca. This choice is a strategic move on his part, in order to connect with the world and speak to the devastating consequences of both nationalism and globalization. Marimoutou, by contrast, has an inward focus on La Réunion and its people. He places them within the physical and cultural geography of the island, which is still dependent on mainland France. This dependent status is key to his political commentary, making him the voice of the oppressed Creole people on the island. For the reasons above, I have chosen them as the subject of my study. They each offer a distinct perspective on identity within the post-colonial world.

A discussion of Négritude is important to contextualize the work of these two poets. Négritude is a literary movement developed by francophone writers, intellectuals, and politicians of the African diaspora in the 1930s. Two of its most prominent leaders and contributors include Aimé Césaire, a poet and politician from Martinique, and Léopold Sedar Senghor, a Senegalese poet, politician, and cultural theorist. This movement centered around the colonies fighting back
against Western, colonial powers through the form of writing. The intellectuals rejected colonialism and spoke to the importance of a worldwide African identity. Due to the fact that many of its contributors came from little known African countries, this movement functioned to give the writers more power by amplifying their voices. Négritude is the ancestor to the poetry of Torabully and Marimoutou, in particular their recuperation of maligned aspects of their identity. One sees this in Marimoutou's poetry’s evocation of Creole culture as a basis from which to develop new paradigms. In the case of Torabully, he attempts to create his own all-encompassing identity with his reappropriation of the word Coolie.

In order to get into a more in-depth critique of identity to speak about these poets’ works, it is necessary to define what “Creole” means. Creole people compose a large percentage of both Mauritius’ and Réunion’s populations. Additionally, the creole language is the lingua franca in Mauritius and the language most Réunionnais people speak in informal situations. A study of this word is imperative.

1.3 Defining the word Creole

There is not a specific point in time when either island became “Creole”. Since their inception, the settlers on these islands have been mixed. Even the colonizers present in Mauritius have historically been very diverse. The Dutch settlers and their slaves were “a varied and cosmopolitan group, a product of the far-flung colonial world in which they lived. Piet of Bali’s small maroon group was drawn from Madagascar, Africa, South India, and Batavia, and many ‘Dutch’ colonists were from Germany, Switzerland, and England” (Vaughan 22). La Réunion has
a similar diverse background; some of the early French settlers and their slaves already had a long
history of creolization before their arrival: those who were drawn from Madagascar, for example.
Île Bourbon was largely peopled by small agriculturalists whom one might have labeled
“peasants” were it not for the crucial fact that they owned slaves. The majority of their slaves
would have come from Madagascar (Barendse 1995; Larson 2000; Gerbeau 1997; Ho 1997; Fillot
1973). Madagascar itself was the site of a complex mélange of cultures, and while some of the
slave owners had come originally from France, others had reached the island by a more circuitous
route (Vaughan 23). This is evidence that since their inception, the populations of each island
have been mixed. La Réunion and Mauritius share a long history of mélange and the exchange of
ideas and culture. The creole language and identity are inherently a byproduct of the mixing that
occurred, and continues to take place, on each island.

It is important to make the distinction between the language and the racial category when
implementing the word “Creole.” In this paper, when using the term “creole” with a lowercase
“c,” it refers to the language. The word creole (with a lowercase c) can also refer to an island that
has no indigenous population – an island which is the product of multiple influences, which have
merged and taken root. For example, one can observe this in Mauritius. It is often advertised as an
island of racial and communal harmony. It has been referred to as a "rainbow nation." However, it
does not deserve this reputation. In reality, Mauritian society is "deeply anxious and divided" with
a long history of "exile and exclusion" (Simmons 1982, quoted by Vaughan 2). This definition
shows creole as “reflecting its many colors in the ocean,” which is an important theme in the
literature of mixed identity. Both Torabully and Marimoutou speak to the importance and fluidity
of the ocean in their identities.
In Mauritius, Creoles, with a capital C, who “look most ‘African’ in their features are members of it, although their descent is likely to be very mixed” (Vaughan 2). But the term Creole can also be used to define a group of people who are defined by what they are not. That is to say, the Creole community is "the residue of these racial/ethnic/cultural categories, a residue that purportedly lacks a distinct culture and suffers from what is known as ‘le malaise créole,’ a ‘disease’ not only of poverty, but of social marginality and abjection" (3).

This group is also comprised in large part by the descendants of African and Malagasy slaves that were brought to the island from the 17th to the 19th centuries. But in today's society, Creole people differ in their racial makeup. "Under slavery Mauritian society and identities have experienced both fragmentation and hybridization, such that three hundred years later, Creoles are a people of mixed African, Indian, Chinese, and European heritage” (Boswell xvii). This is the more inclusive definition, but the stereotype is that Creoles have darker skin and more African features. In this paper, when using the word “Creole” with an uppercase “C”, it is in reference to this group of people; "creole" with a lowercase "c" refers to the language.

Today, one can see the implications of the uneasiness regarding the Creole identity in “le malaise créole.” Interestingly, even the language, which is spoken by most of the Mauritian population, has a large stigma attached to it.

The treatment of Creoles as a residual category is also apparent in the treatment of the Kreol\textsuperscript{13} dialect, which is spoken by most Mauritians but is attributed to the descendants of Africans and Malagasy in the country. As Eriksen (2002) notes, Kreol has been

\textsuperscript{13} Kreol is the Mauritian creole spelling for Creole
stigmatized in Mauritian society as ‘an impoverished, shallow and context-dependent idiom’ (Eriksen 2002: 80). The stigmatization of the language is caused not only by these characteristics but also to its hybridity, as Kreol is made up of African, Indian and European languages” (Boswell 55).

In Mauritius, hybridity is often rejected. People tend to stereotype those from mixed backgrounds as marginal groups in society, instead of celebrating them for their diversity. Historically, colorism has been in Mauritius since times of slavery. Mixed-race, lighter skinned individuals were referred to as the “gens de couleur,” according to Norbert Benoit.

[The] gens de couleur were generally liberated before 1835. As a result, they had a longer period during which to mingle socially and physically with the European population in Mauritius. Closer to Europeans in phenotypical and social terms, they systematically dissociated themselves from those who appeared to be African. (Boswell 56)

This separation led to even stronger negative stereotypes of darker skinned Creole people. With respect to these persistent stereotypes, it is important to reference Martiniquais Aimé Césaire's important work for the African diaspora through his poetry. With his literature movement, Négritude, he worked to empower black people from within their own group. He, a black man, wrote for his people. His goal was to use Négritude as an emic form of empowerment.

Kreol carries the same connotations and stereotypes as Creoles, which are generally negative. In La Réunion, when referring to “Creole” people, there is a similar connotation. The only difference is that there is less overt racism in La Réunion as opposed to Mauritius. The question is, how can one reconcile the marginalization of a group with a thriving language which

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14 Colorism is defined as racism between different shades. For example, racist behaviors of an individual who is half-black towards someone who has darker skin than they do, or vice-versa.
bears a similar title? By analyzing Torabully and Marimoutou’s poetry, this thesis will examine this disparity, in addition to speaking to their continued efforts to articulate an identity that resonates with their subject.

In La Réunion, Creole is a more widely adopted identity. There are many Réunionnais people who choose to identify as Creole.

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. (Vergès and Marimoutou 6)

This quote reinforces the importance of plurality in identity that exists on La Réunion. However, this does not come without its complexities. La Réunion is not a place in which there are no racial tensions; all races are not celebrated equally. However, there is a broader acceptance of the Creole identity on the island than in Mauritius. "For us, being here means (without having any choice in the matter) being bilingual and pluricultural" (Vergès 3). This quote from two Réunionnais authors and scholars, serves to highlight the extent to which La Réunion accepts their pluricultural identity.

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. (3)
In La Réunion, to be Creole is not to have lost a language or an identity, but rather to have adopted a mix and blend of multiple different traditions, languages, and cultures. The native tongue in La Réunion is inherently a combination of the languages which had been present since its colonisation. In order to effectively communicate between slaves of all different backgrounds and slave owners, the creole language was formed. As time progressed and the island became increasingly "civilized" by French nationals, this language was looked down upon as being overly simplistic and basic (in fact, these connotations still exist today). This mixing and blending of languages is not something that is of great pride to the Réunionnais people necessarily, but merely a fact of existence, Marimoutou and Vergès argue.

The creole language is widely used in La Réunion, except by those who are “above” it. This includes those of a higher socioeconomic status, predominantly white French nationals, referred to as the Zorey by Réunionnais people, who refuse to adopt any kind of Creole identity or speak a word in creole. There are also a group of people who can "pass" for Zorey who cling to this nationality and reject their Réunionnais side. This serves to create a divide between these white French nationals (including the Zorey-wannabe's) and Creole people who have inhabited the island for generations. However, to say it is one group vs. another is to ignore the plurality of the society. The Creole identity is beautifully complicated and a further study of this identity and language are necessary in order to paint a clearer portrait of the gravity of what it means to be Creole in La Réunion and in Mauritius.
Chapter 2. The Making and Deciphering of the Creole Identity

2.1 The Making of the Creole Identity

The word creole, if one looks at its etymology likely comes from the Portuguese word "crioulo". In 1690, a French linguist, Furetière wrote "Crique : C'est un nom que les Espagnols donnent à leurs enfants qui sont nés (né, je rétablis l'orthographe) aux Indes" (cited by Torabully in “Créolité, coolitude, créolisation : les imaginaires de la relation”). It is important to note that by India, in this context Torabully says he is referring to anywhere outside of Europe, reminiscent of Columbus’s error. "On comprend, dans la coolitude, comment le créole, qui est l'Européen/Africain/mulâtre né hors de la terre ancestrale, acclimaté à sa terre d'accueil, devient un créole, un ‘autre’ en quelque sorte…” (Torabully, same article as above). Coolitude is a literary movement and an identity created by Khal Torabully. It connects slaves and indentured laborers and their descendants. It is an identity for them to cling onto since they do not know or have a specific link to their past. This quote states that Creole, by extension, can be used to encompass all people born far from the land of their ancestors. Using this definition, everybody living in Mauritius and in La Réunion is Creole, regardless of their racial makeup.

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15 In the document itself, the writer says "font" nez, in place of "sont". Rather than editing the quote, I keep it as it appears in this article.
16 Translation: Crique: It is a name that the Spaniards give to their children who were born (born, I restore spelling) India.
17 Translation: We understand, in Coolitude, how the Creole -- who is the European/African/Mulatto born outside the ancestral land, acclimated to his host land -- becomes a Creole, an "Other" in a way.
The common/colloquial definition of Creole in both La Réunion and Mauritius, serves as a racial category. A person is Creole if they have an African background. In today's society, especially in Mauritius, the Creole identity is not the most attractive to adopt.

2.2 Negative perceptions about Creole Identity and creole language

Creole languages have been criticized since their inception and Creole peoples have faced discrimination. There are a myriad of negative perceptions of the Creole identity and the creole language. In mainland France, as well as in other European and American countries, there has been a trend towards xenophobia. Immigration is viewed as inherently negative and many people are perceiving it as a threat to the “traditional” (white, homogenous) society of their upbringing. Instead of being viewed as an opportunity to enrich the culture that is already in place, people fear change and are rejecting this influx of new citizens from different backgrounds.

Médéa, a scholar who specializes in Réunionnais identity and language, presents an interesting dichotomy with which La Réunion grapples. He claims that the Réunionnais identity is formed on the principle of community and collectivity, while the French identity is formed on the "notion of civic allegiance and individualist principles" (Médéa 13). There is no open clash between the French and Réunionnais cultural identities, he claims, but instead underlying "negotiation, competition, resistance and conflict are present" (13). In this way, in the private sphere the Réunionnais person is born with a Réunionnais identity of “community, intimate, compelling and strongly held, and with another [French] identity, [that is] more distant, born of civic allegiances, unconvincing, unconvenced and weak, and more distant” (13). The weaknesses of the French democratic model aside, the Réunionnais are faced with adopting a linguistic,
cultural, and ethnic French identity which is offered to them as a model to follow in the public sphere. The paradox lies in the prevalence of these elements of French identity in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the Réunionnais people are in need of reconciling these two identities.

How can one belong to a culturally Réunionnais society while they are French? There is a deep seeded need on the island to reject one or the other. If one is too French, they are seen as against their own people and as romanticizing a country that is distant and controlling. Yet if one is too Réunionnais they are rejecting the side of them that is French. Today, Réunionnais people are uncertain about which identity is appropriate to adopt in the public sphere. This dilemma is featured in the table.

Dufort, a Martiniquais scholar who specializes in African studies, says that, “Le discours politique s’empare de la question de l'identité comme pour rappeler aux citoyens les valeurs de la République : une et indivisible. Une langue, une nation brouillant ainsi les frontières entre identité
politique et identité culturelle” (Dufort 79). She is referencing French citizens who pride themselves on being more traditional people and firmly believe all individuals within the society must have something bonding them all together, something that makes each person distinctly French. For a lot of these people, their way of achieving this coherence is through language. They believe that all citizens should speak one language and this will give France their central identity. At the base of their argument, they have a point. Language is a great unifier between peoples. However, their ideal of a monolingual France comes at the cost of denying immigrants of their right to speak their native language. Within the context of mainland France this idea of monolingualism is a relatively achievable goal.

This idea of one language, one nation, one identity is strong. It is fruitful to see these ideals within Benedict Anderson's concept of *Imagined Communities* (1983), an analysis of nationalism. Anderson paints a nation as a "socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group" (Anderson 10). He argues that the media also is responsible for creating these imagined communities. It can manipulate the images the public sees and the rhetoric the public hears in order to perpetuate stereotypes or promote a certain vernacular. Nations, he argues, are comprised largely of people we do not know, we do not see, and with whom we do not come into contact. Ergo, a nation is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. While members of the community probably will never know each of the other members face to face, they may have similar interests or identify as part of the same nation" (Anderson 24). This means

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18 Translation: Political discourse takes up the question of identity as if to remind citizens of the values of the Republic: one and indivisible. One language, one nation blurring the boundaries between political and cultural identity.
that members have a feeling of belonging. An example of this is the pride one feels when their "imagined community" competes in large sporting events such as the World Cup. When we apply this to Mauritius and La Réunion, this ideal begins to get complicated. The community is not uniform. This makes the national project a difficult task. Unifying countries in which people speak multiple languages is difficult enough\(^\text{19}\), let alone a nation whose citizens come from a myriad of different countries, and practice different religions.

Mauritius has two national languages, English and French. But, in day-to-day life on the street, and in homes, one will rarely hear those languages spoken. Instead, the majority of the population speaks Mauritian creole. There used to be three different types of creole that were the most prominent, each one deeply rooted in slavery. Today there is one which is more or less

\(^{19}\) Take, for example, Catalonia in Spain.
standardized over the island. This creole developed out of necessity so that the different nationalities who were enslaved at the time could effectively communicate among one another.

In government, though, this language is not officially recognized. The Mauritian government instead claims that their citizens speak French and English, failing to acknowledge the presence of any version of creole. Mauritian creole is the lower standard language and is therefore not given any recognition on a professional level. It is a language reserved for families and informal situations. This can lead to the sentiment of it being perceived as inferior.

In La Réunion the two most spoken languages are Réunionnais creole and French. French is recognized as the official language, as La Réunion is a department of mainland France. Similar to Mauritius, their creole is not recognized as an official language of the country. It is instead seen as the language of informal day-to-day life, a lower-standard language. Among families, in small supermarkets, and in most small informal interactions, creole is the language of choice.

Due to the fact the La Réunion is a department of France, creole as a language does not hold much esteem. If one wants to be perceived as high class or well-educated, they actively avoid speaking in creole. This trend of avoiding creole and moving towards the higher-standard language, French, has become more common in recent years. People who have the means will go so far as to send their children to mainland France so they can perfect their accent in order not to be perceived as Creole. This also serves to gain them more respect from their peers.

The perception of creole as an inferior language has been around since it was first developed and for the most part, these stereotypes and judgements have remained unchanged. There have been many academics throughout history from Western nations who perceive creole languages as inferior to their colonialist counterparts. DeGraaf, a Haitian linguist who works at
MIT in the department of Linguistics and Philosophy reinforces this when referencing the famous American linguist Leonard Bloomfield. DeGraaf says,

Creole languages result from the adaptation of a language, especially some Indo-European language, to the (so to speak) phonetic and grammatical genius of a race that is linguistically inferior. The resulting language is composite, truly mixed in its vocabulary, but its grammar remains essentially Indo-European, albeit extremely simplified. For Leonard Bloomfield (1933, 472), “The creolized language has the status of an inferior dialect of the 'masters' speech.” (DeGraaf 233-34)

Several linguists, such as Bloomfield, have little respect for the creole language, writing it off as overly simplistic, lower class, or underdeveloped. From this, one could infer that if a person is to accept Creole as their identity, they will have a lower social status. This could be one reason why many Mauritians still choose to cling to their root identities rather than adopt Creole as their identity. Many Mauritians whose families have been in Mauritius for centuries identify as Indian first instead of embracing the title of Creole, even if they have a mixed racial makeup.

In addition to Bloomfield, linguists Saint-Quentin and Reinecke also have strong biases against all Creoles. DeGraaf’s paper highlights Saint Quentin's negative sentiments for creole languages. He claims,

Alfred de Saint-Quentin ([1872]1989, 40) considered it “a property of emerging languages to be naive” and claimed Guyanais Creole as “a spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture.” Similarly, Isle de France Creole was considered “an infantile language for an infantile race (Reinecke 1980, 11). (DeGraaf 234)
Through this quote one can see the extent to which Saint-Quentin looks down on Creole people and the creole language. He considers creole as a language for people who are decidedly lesser and underdeveloped. In his eyes all Creole people come from uncivilized societies and have a lower intellectual capability. These opinions are still present today and Creole peoples and languages face discrimination and are often associated with negative stereotypes.

The Creole identity is often under fire and is linked with a myriad of racist slurs, especially in Mauritius. *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* articulates this racism and the complicated history of the mixing of ethnic groups on the island. Rosabelle Boswell, the author, is a social anthropologist and a professor of Anthropology and Executive Dean of Arts at Nelson Mandela University. Her book grapples with a lot of the issues currently present among different groups in Mauritius. She speaks to the shockingly high rate of colorism that happens on the island, specifically from the *gens de couleur*, or mixed race people. She explains the history of this racism, pinpointing the root of when it may have begun.

[...] the descendants of the gens de couleur were generally liberated before 1835\(^\text{20}\). As a result, they had a longer period during which to mingle socially and physically with the European population in Mauritius. Closer to the Europeans in phenotypical and social terms, they systematically dissociated themselves from those who appeared to be African.

\(^{20}\) This is the year that slavery was abolished in Mauritius.
Their subsequent associations and dissociations from the Creoles\textsuperscript{21} in the 1990s depend, largely on micro-social relations (family position, affluent friendships) and macro-political needs (votes, social support). (Boswell 56)

Boswell's argument is essentially that people who were mixed race consistently felt the need to disassociate themselves from their African side. This manifests itself in a marginally easier life for these mixed race people than their full Creole counterparts, but it also breeds hatred between groups. Boswell highlights this racism in the form of racial slurs one might hear on the island.

The \textit{Créole Morisyen}\textsuperscript{22} sometimes refer to the \textit{gens de couleur} as \textit{Créole fer blanc} (wannabe whites), emphasizing the Francophile nature and racism of the \textit{gens de couleur}.

On the other hand, the \textit{gens de couleur} sometimes refer to the \textit{Créole Morisyen} and \textit{Rodriguais} as \textit{Mazambiks} (Mozambicans) or refer to black Creole men as \textit{noir chiolos} (black vagabonds), emphasizing their Africanity and savagery. Colour consciousness is also apparent among Creole islanders coming from [...] La Réunion. [...] In La Réunion, black Creoles are often referred to as \textit{caffres} (kaffirs). (Boswell 56)

Colorism is rampant on Mauritius. Historically and in present day, many people on the island are very concerned about what racial category you would fall into. The whiter the skin, the better they will likely treat the person. The darker, the more problems they will likely encounter. But, the issues do not stop there. In general, people like categories. Placing people into easy boxes to classify them is common across cultures. It dates back to the time of cavemen where one would need to quickly identify friend or foe. Many people categorize others by their melanin. But, in order to determine confidently which box a person falls into, Mauritians do not rely on skin color

\textsuperscript{21} When Boswell uses the term Creole she is referring to people of primarily African descent who have African characteristics

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Créole Morisyen} refers to a person who is Mauritian Creole.
alone. Instead, they look at a person's characteristics, their bone structure, and especially their hair.

The term Creole is presently identified with those who exhibit negroid phenotypes. Attempts to reify the Africanness of Creole identity are also evident in the current trend among young Creole activists, who profess the need to publish their African ancestry, by growing dreadlocks or not straightening their hair. The fact that hair can be changed, or that it cannot be used as an ethnic marker, poses a serious problem for the often racist, visual identification of Creoles. (Boswell 58)

Hair is a large indicator for Creole people in Mauritius. In fact, both Creoles and non-Creoles in Mauritius refer to Creoles as *ti sevè*, meaning they are Creoles with “small hair.” If one's hair is curly or has the texture of traditionally black hair, and they have dark skin and more "negroid" features, they will likely face discrimination for it, namely in the form of prejudicial treatment and abuse in public. But, with the introduction in the late 1900s of hair relaxers and straighteners, racists in Mauritius were posed with a dilemma. They could no longer identify people based solely on their hair texture.

Boswell explains that the possession of certain physical features is often associated with particular stereotypical behavior. For example, women who possess African features are perceived as being sexually available. This makes them more likely to suffer harassment. These stereotypes are so powerful that women often change their physical characteristics to avoid being categorized as Creole. Due to this, "Creole women in Mauritius often say 'Hair matters!' the reason for this being that Mauritians often perceive hair texture as a potential asset for social mobilisation" (57). Expensive hair relaxers and straighteners were introduced to Mauritius in the
1970s. Since then, Creole women who could afford it, regularly undergo painful treatments to "relax" their hair to give it a more straight look. Thanks to the manipulation of their ethnic markers, "many of the ti sevè have been transformed socially and politically. No longer perceived as people who clearly occupy a stigmatised and Africanised identity, they are treated as evolués, those who have 'evolved' in physical and cultural terms" (58). These women who can afford to go to the salon regularly prefer subjecting themselves to the painful treatment to the daily discrimination and abuse they'd otherwise face. Appearance in Mauritius is of paramount importance. Women spend inordinately large sums of money and endure pain to ensure that they not be categorized as Creole.

    To reiterate, to be Creole in Mauritius is not something that is desirable. Colorism is a huge issue and the current solution seems only to manipulate one's appearance so that one does not run the risk of being labeled Creole. Besides the activists who fight for equal treatment and rights, many people seem to want to deny their Créolité to adopt an easier, more desirable identity. But what makes one person's identity lesser than anybody else's? Racism stems from the time of colonization. White colonizers would repeatedly tell their darker skinned slaves that whiteness was superior, and somehow that rhetoric remains alive and more or less commonplace. The fact that people still to this day will spend a lot of money to alter their appearance to look more like white Westerners is surprising to see in Mauritius and more or less globally.
2.3 Positive perceptions about Creole Identity

Not everybody sees Creole people and creole languages in this negative light. There are also many linguists and Creole peoples who lie on the opposite side of the spectrum. Instead of disparaging or discrediting creole and the Creole identity, these people see it as something to be celebrated. In response to the citizens who strive to have a fully homogeneous community within their own countries, some scholars are fighting back in favor of diversity and more “mixed” populations. Dufort states, “Derrière cette définition se cache le mythe de l'homogénéité, non applicable aux sociétés actuelles. Elle ne tient pas compte de révolution de la société et des différents types d'identité” (Dufort 79). In this quote, we see Dufort arguing that societies will never conform to a perfectly unified utopia where everyone is the same and speaks the same language. Real life is messier, and that is part of the beauty of diversity. Societies should not only conform to one standard, but instead allow those who have different identities space to thrive.

This is a much more liberal sentiment and conforms more with the current situation in Mauritius. In response to Creoles identifying as Indian or Chinese, Dufort, as well as Martiniquais poets Patrick Chamoiseau, and Edouard Glissant, argue that diversity and mixity should be celebrated. Chamoiseau and Glissant are two famous French (and Antillean) writers who are known for their work regarding Creole identity. Together, they wrote a famous poem called “Les murs.” In this poem they address the concept of the “Other” in a very straightforward manner. They say that,

La notion même d'identité a longtemps servi de muraille : faire le compte de ce qui est à

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23 Translation: Behind this definition lies the myth of homogeneity, which is not applicable to today's societies. It does not take into account the revolution in society and the different types of identity.
soi, le distinguer de ce qui tient de l'Autre, qu'on érige alors en menace illisible, empreinte
de barbaric. Le mur identitaire a donné les éternelles confrontations de peuples, les
dynasties, les expansions coloniales, la Traite des nègres, les atrocités de l'esclavage
américain et tous les génocides. Le côté mur de l'identité a existé, existe encore, dans
toutes les cultures, tous les peuples, mais c'est en Occident qu'il s'est avère le plus
dévastateur sous l’amplification des sciences et des technologies. (Chamoiseau et Glissant,
« Les murs »)²⁴

Here we see that these authors fight the notion of identity as a static entity, similar to what we saw
with Dufort. These poets strive for a broader definition and they see the concept of “othering” as
damaging to the population of post-colonial worlds and societies. They use the metaphor of a wall
that works to keep the in-group in, which defines exactly who the out-group is. The in and out
groups are physically separated by this wall. This separation has led to atrocities beyond
imagination – slavery, genocides, etc. This wall is the concept of an exclusive identity. Due to a
difference in skin color and culture, especially Western people have been able to justify the
mistreatment of the “Other.”

For centuries, people have let themselves believe that this wall of identity is a necessary
installation, suggesting that it is extremely important to distinguish yourself and your in-group
from the Other. The effect of this is that one cannot be both, there is no flexibility within racial or
cultural borders in terms of identity. Looking at La Réunion for example, if a child is born to a

²⁴ Translation: The very notion of identity has long served as a wall: to take into account what is to be oneself, to
distinguish it from what is held by the Other, which is then erected as an unreadable threat, imbued with a barbaric
imprint. The identity wall has given rise to eternal confrontations of peoples, dynasties, colonial expansions, the slave
trade, the atrocities of American slavery and all genocides. The wall side of identity has existed, still exists, in all
cultures, all peoples, but it is in the West that it has proved to be the most devastating under the amplification of
science and technology.
French mother and a Creole father, that child will be faced with a dilemma. Are they French or Creole? Chamoiseau and Glissant argue that these walls which only account for a single identity are arbitrary and do much more harm than good. This child should be allowed to be just as much French as they are Creole.

In the same poem the poets also show how,

Le côté mur de l'identité peut rassurer. Il peut alors servir à une politique raciste, xénophobe ou populiste jusqu'à consternation. Mais, indépendamment de tout vertueux principe, le mur identitaire ne sait plus rien du monde. Il ne protège plus, n'ouvre à rien sinon à l'involution des régressions, à l'asphyxie insidieuse de l'esprit, et à la perte de soi.

(Chamoiseau et Glissant, « Les murs »)

Glissant and Chamoiseau speak about how this construct of a static identity that humans have adopted can be used to manipulate them and turn them against each other. The poem states that this wall does nothing to protect people. Instead it breeds hate, insecurity, and distrust between people. One can see the manifestation of this in America's Jim Crow South or in South Africa's apartheid. Rather than keeping individuals safe, segregation spurred more violence, hatred, and distrust between groups.

The following section will focus on two Indian Ocean poets’ efforts towards starting their own movement. Their work is an extension of this section, in that both Torabully and Marimoutou fight for a more positive perception of the Creole, mixed identity.

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25 Translation: The wall side of identity can be reassuring. It can then be used for racist, xenophobic or populist policies to the point of consternation. But, regardless of any virtuous principle, the identity wall no longer knows anything about the world. It no longer protects, opens to nothing but the involution of regressions, the insidious asphyxiation of the mind, and the loss of self.
Chapter 3. The Poets

Before starting this section, it is important to note the role of poets in a society. Poetry is defined as: “writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm” (Webster). Poetry can serve to provide us with a social commentary about one’s experience. Poets articulate experience. The act of writing poetry is emotional and deeply personal. “Since poetry is focused on relaying experience in a highly salient way, there is great potential for it to be utilized as a means to build empathy and bridge gaps of understanding between people who come from differing backgrounds. In this way poetry can be a vehicle for messages of social justice” (Kemp). Poetry yields understanding and, therefore, advances cultural and intercultural awareness.

In La Réunion and Mauritius there is conflict. These islands are inhabited by people of multiple backgrounds. These different groups do not always understand one another. The role of poets is to reconcile different groups despite their misunderstanding and apprehension. Poetry fosters an understanding of the Other, rather than harboring more fear. This is the work of Torabully and Marimoutou. Through their poetry, they celebrate the mixing of cultures and people.
3.1 Khal Torabully

Khal Torabully is a Mauritian poet who has been fighting towards a more all-encompassing idea of identity. His father was a sailor from Trinidad and his mother is the child of Indian and Malay migrants. He is most well known for coining the concept of Coolitude, which is discussed in 3.1.1. He was born in Port-Louis, Mauritius in August of 1956. He later moved to Lyon in 1976, where he studied comparative literature at l'Université de Lyon. He then got his PhD at l’Université Lumière in the Semiology of Poetics (CARP). Île en île, a website which functions as a database for literature written by people from francophone islands, includes a bio of him written by Véronique Bragard. She speaks of his “colonial hell.” In Torabully’s poetry, he mixes new world views and pushes and manipulates language to reflect this mixing. He mixes sounds, genres, and rhythms so they carry the effect he wishes to portray. His work takes the reader on a voyage, displaying to them the experience of being uprooted.

To reiterate, Coolitude is a literary movement and identity created by Torabully that builds bridges between slaves and indentured laborers and their descendants. It is an identity for them to adopt since they do not know or have a specific link to their past. They live in the absence of
knowledge of where they come from. His words link continents, memories, identities, cultures, sufferings, and hopes through his language and imagery. Using his work, he places poetry at the heart of hard questions these countries are facing today. The result of this is a platform through which people can better understand the experience of a body of people in diverse societies. This allows for many countries, not only Mauritius, to think of the coexistence between different components of their populations.

3.1.1 Coolitude

Similarly to Chamoiseau and Glissant, many poets have critiqued and refused societal norms regarding the mistreatment of certain groups. Some of these poets have done so by taking a word that can be used as a derogatory word towards the group and trying to reclaim it and make it their own. It can be a very powerful practice to reclaim once offensive words and repurpose them to empower a people. One can see the manifestation of this in the literature movement, la Négritude. Poets like Aimé Césaire began a literary revolution. They used the derogatory word, nègre, as the base for the name of this movement, which was an attempt to intentionally invert the system of oppression that is associated with it. Their goal was to use Négritude as an emic form of empowerment.

Khal Torabully intends to do just that with his movement which takes the offensive word, Coolie, and transforms it into a beautiful, fluid identity in his literary movement of Coolitude. Coolie, in the 19th and 20th centuries, referred to an indentured laborer from China, South Asia, or South East Asia. Today, it is seen as a racial slur in Africa, the Caribbean, North America, Oceania, Southeast Asia, and in Europe. It refers, generally speaking, to people from Asia. In
South Africa, calling someone a Coolie is classified as hate speech. It still carries a negative connotation in Mauritius; however it is not widely known or used in La Réunion. Torabully, conscious of all of these connotations, chooses this word very intentionally for his movement. As in Césaire's Négritude, its predecessor, this literary movement uses an offensive word as a form of emic empowerment. He articulates the struggles of a people with his poetry which he writes of and for those whose histories have been lost.

Vaughan writes extensively on the concept of forgetting within the framework of slavery. To survive the trauma and abuse, a lot of victims simply forget what life was like before. Several generations of abuse, forced repression, and forgetting led to a gradual loss of culture for these enslaved individuals. This is intimately linked to Torabully's idea of Coolitude, which is most simply defined as an identity for those descendant of slaves or indentured laborers – that is to say, it is an identity for those whose family histories have been lost. It refers to a postcolonial vision of diversity.

One important version of the history of slavery features the middle passage as a deep dark hole, a rupture, a trauma that caused the erasure of the past, the erasure of origins, the loss of memory and identity. Survival as a slave, in this version, depends absolutely on forgetting, not remembering, but this is an involuntary forgetting, the product of violence, a symptom of trauma. (Vaughan 100)

Certain fragments of the memory of slavery and trauma live on, but a lot of cultures were lost, since slaves could not simply exercise and import culture with them. They did not have the freedom or opportunity to pass on all traditions through generations.
Torabully has created his own identity, the Coolie identity, which he believes to be more inclusive and sustainable than the toxic notions of national identity and socioeconomic status. These toxic classifications serve to pit groups against one another, rather than advancing a more cohesive belonging. This is different, of course, from the current connotation of Coolie, which paints people of Asian descent in the negative light of unskilled laborers. When speaking of his version of Coolitude, Torabully is referencing, “a discourse that takes the theme of the postcolonial recovery of centered cultures from Négritude and Indianité along with the theme of métissage from créolité and reinscribes them in a structural (semiotic) framework rather than a logical, national, ethnic or geographical one.” (Bragard 223). Focusing primarily on its borrowings from Négritude, I wish to show how Torabully embraces a new version of Coolie identity. As a person of mixed heritage himself, he believes it is the only identity he can fully adopt. For him, he sees a Coolie as "the one who is without the text of his/her voyage" (Torabully 8). This is a powerful concept and can apply to many, many people who came to Mauritius in ships to work as menial laborers during the period of colonization. Their voyage was long, treacherous, and they were venturing into the unknown. In the context of slavery, people were forcibly taken from their native countries and made to endure the dangerous route. Anybody whose voyage or story was lost on their trip to the island, is Coolie.
3.1.2 First excerpt from *Cale d'étoiles, Coolitude*

In his famous poem, *Cale d'étoiles, Coolitude*, he states, “Coolitude: parce que je suis créole de mon cordage, je suis indien de mon mât, je suis européen de ma verge, je suis mauricien de ma quête et français de mon exil. Je ne serai toujours ailleurs qu’en moi-même parce que je ne peux qu’imaginer ma terre natale. Mes terres natales?” (Torabully 105). The vocabulary he uses is intimately linked to that of a ship. He references the fact that he is Creole of his rigging, or rope, which represents a portion of the boat that is used to move the mast to catch the most wind to power the boat. He is Indian by his mast. The mast is the large pole that the sails hang from. Torabully says he is European by his "verge". This can be translated several different ways. Within the context of a boat, it is the neck of an anchor.

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26 Translation: Coolitude: for I am Creole by my rigging, an Indian by my mast, a European by my foreyard, a Mauritian by my quest and French by my exile. I will always be elsewhere than in my own self. I can but imagine my native land. My native lands? (Coolitude, Torabully 218).
Reading beyond these metaphors, we may interpret the rope as something that runs along all elements of the ship. It can be untied, re-tied, and moved to the captain's desire. This is significant because this rope goes all the way up the mast, along the boom, and into the hands of the sailor who needs to move them in order to harness the wind. The mast is an integral piece of the boat's skeleton. It is fixed, static, and strong. The verge, the neck of the ship's anchor, has another meaning. It refers to a man's sexual organ, the phallus. Torabully is stating that he is European by his anchor, referring to the colonial conquest in which colonizers reproduced and spread their civilization based on where they decided to anchor their ships. This may also refer to colonizers and slave owners who were known to have had sexual relations by way of rape or otherwise with their slaves. He is writing over this history of sexual conquest with a focus on spreading and establishing new ideas of civilization.

Torabully is Mauritian by his quest. Quest is defined as the act or an instance of seeking or pursuing something; a search. Torabully’s Mauritian identity is not steadfast, rooted in genealogy. Instead it is more abstract, an identity that is decidedly less concrete. It is a constant struggle to define a post-colonial identity for the métisses27, as their cultures have developed from the culmination and mixing of a multitude of different countries and peoples. This brings us back to the concept of his Mauritian identity being a broader quest. It is a pursuit of a national identity and a transcendence of the nation-state at the same time, something that the country has struggled with since its inception.

Lastly, Torabully states that he is French by his exile. Exile is defined as the state or a period of forced absence from one's country or home. As colonizers, the French were responsible

27 Métisse is the French word for someone of mixed race. It is used interchangeably with Creole in La Réunion.
for the mass displacement of peoples from their home countries as they were sold into slavery or indentured labor. This part of his identity is also not a physical part of him. He is not French by his DNA as he is not Mauritian by his DNA. These French and Mauritian elements of his identity are not a physical part of his ship/body, but are nevertheless a part of who he is. That is not to say he so much as chooses them but they make up a large portion of his experience. He finishes the poem by saying, "I will always be elsewhere than in my own self. I can but imagine my native land. My native lands?" Torabully does not have a land or identity which is fully his. He straddles all of these different aspects of his identity. This poem showcases a beautiful metaphor of how he views his own identity. He shows his experience as a Coolie.

Torabully’s definition of Coolitude shows the necessity that exists for a more complex attitude towards identity and culture, especially in countries like Mauritius and La Réunion. His definition of Coolie is very inclusive. It is a powerful reconciliation with postcolonial powers. It gives people an identity within a structural framework that is different from an ethnic one.

Torabully frequently uses the ocean as a vessel through which people connect with one another, and as a place from which all cultures originate from. One experience that links the history of all those who arrived in La Réunion and Mauritius was the fact that they had to do so by crossing the ocean. In that way, for Torabully, all who have made this voyage are connected. They are no longer exclusively French, Indian, or Mauritian, while on the water, instead their identity is fluid. The big difference here between white French colonizers making this journey, is that for the large part, they remember what happened. There are written records of their voyages and they were treated humanely. The same cannot be said for many people of color who crossed the ocean (some by their own volition, most others not) to be slaves or indentured laborers.
Therefore, for people of color still living on the island, there is a hole caused by forgetting which engulfs their past.

Bragard draws on a similar theme of the ocean being a point of connection for all people. "Torabully’s work echoes a theme articulated by Benitez-Rojo, who suggests that the seascape unites people across cultural boundaries, as well as Brathwaite’s famous quote that ‘the unity is submarine.’ However, the sea, in this context, also brings the poet back to his native island and its lack of unity" (Bragard 228). Nobody possesses the ocean. There is no real territory to claim or property to be fought over when one is at sea. Instead, there is only the ship on which one makes the voyage and the people with whom they travel. One cannot have a solid, static identity if one is of the ocean. Identity can be tied so intimately with territory. However, this raises the question of what happens when one grows up in one physical place but is exposed to multiple different cultures? For example, their mother is from one country, their father another, and they live in another country entirely. This is where plural identities come into play.

3.1.3. Second excerpt from *Cale d’étoiles, Coolitude*

In Khal Torabully’s reclamation of the term Coolie, he simultaneously assigned it to the fostering of plural identities. He has extended the definition of the Coolie to the one who is without the text of his/her voyage’, the one who needs to write the story of his/her passage/crossing: En disant coolie, je dis aussi tout navigateur sans registre de bord: je dis tout homme parti vers l’horizon de son rêve, quel que soit le bateau qu’il

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28 A Cuban novelist, essayist, and short story writer. Considered one of the most influential voices of his time.
29 A Barbadian poet and academic, widely considered one of the major voices in the Caribbean literary canon.
accosta ou dût accoster. Car quand on franchit l’océan pour naître ailleurs, le marin d’un voyage sans retour aime replonger dans ses histoires, ses légendes, et ses rêves. Le temps d’une absence de mémoire. (Torabully, *Cale d’étoiles coolitude*, p. 89)

Based on the Coolie as the in-between, Torabully’s work is a call for diversity and its acknowledgement. The Coolie becomes the migrant, the one in cross-cultural relations with his multiple heritages and selves. The challenge is not to choose from among them but to accept the diversity and chaotic identity that they signify. Coolies are human beings striving to find a place of their own in the world. The sea’s fluidity and eternal fluctuation metaphorically participate in the assertion of an unfixed identity interweaving numerous heritages, values, and imaginaries.

Coolie, for the purpose of this thesis, will follow the definition Torabully provides in his poem, in *Cale d’Étoiles Coolitude*,

En disant coolie, je dis aussi tout navigateur sans registre de bord ; je dis tout homme parti vers l’horizon de son rêve, que soit le bateau qu’il accosta ou dût accoster.

Car quand on franchit l’océan pour naître ailleurs, le marin d’un voyage sans retour aime replonger dans ses histoires, ses légendes, et ses rêves.

Le temps d’une absence de mémoire.

(Torabully, *Cale d’Étoiles, Coolitude* 89)^30

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^30 I included this translation next to the poem so one who may not understand French can read the translation line by line. It is not displayed this way in the text. The translation included is his translation, but it is in a footnote section of the book.
Torabully, as he states in his poem that was previously quoted, sees himself as a ship. He is Creole by his ropes, Indian by his mast, European by his anchor, Mauritian by his quest, and French by his exile. In this poem, he speaks for other ships besides his own. He attempts to qualify the Coolie identity. Coolie is an identity for every navigator without a map. It is for every man who has sailed towards the horizons of his dreams, regardless of the ship he boarded or had to board. This line references the indentured laborers and slaves, Indians and Africans, who were forced into boats to take them to Mauritius. When one crosses the ocean to be born elsewhere, Torabully says, the sailor of the one-way voyage likes to plunge back into his history, his legends, and his dreams. When one is far from their home in a foreign land, they crave familiarity.

The sailors of this Coolie ship have been born elsewhere, far from what their parents call home. They are in a new, different country from the one of their parents. Yet though they are not born in that "home" country, it is still a large part of them. They yearn to delve into the history, legends, and dreams of their ancestors, even generations after the time of slavery. Torabully finishes this poem with the line "Le temps d'une absence de mémoire." History books are written by the oppressors. Memories of oppressed masses are lost as time marches on. Family histories are lost with the routine silencing of workers and slaves. They are broken and the memory of their experience is lost. The absence of memory becomes part of the family’s history. It becomes part of the experience of being descendant of slaves.

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31 Additionally, in the case of Indian slaves in Mauritius, a few were freed. These freed slaves were only allowed their freedom if they went to India to tell other Indians about how great Mauritius was. They were to sell it as an island paradise where they would work and gather money to send home to their families. These "freed" Indians only gained freedom by tricking their people into willingly and ignorantly becoming slaves.

32 Translation: The time of an absence of memory.
This poem beautifully demonstrates the vastness of who could be considered Coolie. People reading it can relate to and begin to understand the idea that identity is not only a concrete – it is deeply emotional and intersectional, as well. Circling back to the importance of poetry in a society, Torabully yields understanding with this definition and, with this, identification. There is a forgiveness that lies within it, and empathy one does not see with essentialist identities. This poem is broad enough it could speak to anybody, while still remaining personal enough to evoke emotion from the reader. Yet it communicates the poet’s particular experience as someone who is colored and descendent from migrant laborers in a racially diverse, post-colonial society.
3.2 Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou

Carpanin Marimoutou is a Reunionnais poet. He articulates the experience of the intersection of worlds and cultures in La Réunion through his poetry. He works as a professor at the Université de La Réunion in the literature department. He was born in Saint-Denis, La Réunion in December of 1956. Though he is a university professor, sociolinguist, poet, and cultural activist, Marimoutou identifies primarily as a Réunionnais intellectual. He grew up and spent most of his adolescent life in Saint-Benoît on the east coast of La Réunion. Here, he grew up surrounded by people from a large variety of different backgrounds. In his TED Talk he references this, stating and restating how lucky he was to have the upbringing that he did. He says, "J’ai grandi là dedans. Entre le créole, le français, le tamoul, le malgache, le moka, le makondé, mais aussi des sons de shingazidja, de shimaore, et de temps en temps, la cloche, l’appel à la prière du muezzin depuis la ville, ou la cloche de l’église. Voilà. Ça, c’est ma chance

33 While his full name is Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou, he generally goes by Carpanin Marimoutou.
extraordinaire" (TED Talk). This world he grew up in which was in itself a mixing of languages, culture, and people, was his reality. The experience of having lived in such a culturally diverse environment spurred his interest in literature.

High school was difficult for him. Not academically speaking, but culturally. At the time when he was a student, the French were implementing "la mission civilisatrice." This meant that in school, Réunionnais students were continually told that créole is not a "real" language. Their culture is not "real." This is because there is only one true world and that world is French. Marimoutou’s high school teachers continually belittled all other cultures that existed on the island beyond that which is French.

In his TED Talk, Marimoutou gives an interesting anecdote. He had the assignment of describing what happens on Christmas night. So, he did just that. He wrote of his experience in Saint-Benoît – of the lychees, the flamboyants, the sun, and of the Malbar people who prepare to walk over fire. He wrote of cabaret services, and the sounds of the Muezzin. His teacher read it, and wrote "hors sujet." The professor continued to correct the paper, informing Marimoutou that Christmas is not what he wrote of. Instead, it is snow, Father Christmas, and turkey.

This was Marimoutou’s high school experience; "J’étais perdu pour l’école. Perdu, parce que pour moi, la littérature, ça a toujours été une histoire de mondes qui se mêlent. Une histoire de langues qui se mélangent. Une histoire d’imaginaires qui s’entre-croisent, qui se disputent parfois, qui se négocient, qui s’affrontent, mais qui sont là, présent" (Ted Talk). This history of the crossing of stories, languages, and experiences is where his literature stems from. His work gives voice to this mixing that characterized his childhood experience.

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34 Translation: Off topic.
Marimoutou and Torabully are inherently different in their goals for their poetry. Torabully is unsatisfied with the current options he has for his identity, so chooses to invent his own, more all encompassing, Coolitude. Additionally, Torabully speaks not solely to the Mauritian population. His writings can be taken and applied to many island nations that have suffered colonisation and slavery, i.e., the Antilles or other Indian Ocean islands.

Marimoutou does not subscribe to this same philosophy. He is much more nationalistic in his writings. He wants to understand La Réunion and its people. While he does speak to the concept of creolization, which could be applied to other countries, he does so with great care to link it to the physical space of La Réunion. This is also shown in the fact that Marimoutou chooses to write a good number of his poems in Réunionnais creole (the rest of which are written in French). The act of writing a poem in one's native language is a less formal and more personal experience. It speaks directly to his own people. Due to the lack of knowledge of Réunionnais creole out of the island, he speaks only to Réunionnais people. This means he has written these poems mainly for those who are from the island. This is powerful. He is writing to and of his people.

Creole people and the creole language suffer discrimination in La Réunion. This discrimination is not as overt as in Mauritius, but that is not to say it does not exist. There is still significant social stratification in La Réunion. "The socio-economic structure of La Réunion is still 'colonized': whiteness places the subject at the top, and blackness places the subject at the bottom of the socio-economic scale" (Médéa 59). It is also important to note that, "This renewed
ethnic stratification goes against the popular cultural trend towards métissage: research has shown that whereas older people regard their ethnic origins as important, the youth refer to themselves as Creole or Réunionnais (Italics by Médéa) (Médéa 59). Young people who identify as Creole in La Réunion are generally at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. They suffer high rates of unemployment, almost all prisoners on the island are Creole or Réunionnais people, and they generally live in lower income housing developments or shanties (Médéa).

Creole people face regular discrimination and Marimoutou is voicing this frustration for his people. As a Creole man writing in creole, he speaks directly to Réunionnais Creole people. In La Réunion, there are high rates of unemployment and alcoholism. In 2014, unemployment was at 30% (Labour Market Information - Réunion). People struggle to find and keep jobs. As a result, there are a lot of people living in poverty across the island. La Réunion has the second highest beverage-specific adult per capita consumption for spirits globally (World Health Organization 2004). The island produces a lot of rum. Réunionnais people, men specifically, are known to drink excessively. The stereotype on the island, is that men who have had too much rum to drink become aggressive. This drunken aggression can lead to domestic violence.

Arracher : cinquante mille signes by Marimoutou is one of his most famous books of poetry. He speaks of the hardships on the island while also honoring the raw beauty of La Réunion. The vast majority of this book is written in French – except for the last poem included in this work which is in creole, located on the absolute last page of the book. It is in a bigger font than the rest of the book, capturing the eye of the reader. There is no translation included for this poem. It is as if this book on the whole was written for the general public, but in this page he addresses his people directly.
This poem speaks to the poverty that plagues the island. The frustration and anger of people who have nothing. He speaks to the issues and troubles of Réunionnais people. A major theme of this poem is anger. The anger of those in poverty. The anger Creole people feel against the neocolonial power, France. Marimoutou articulates the Creole peoples' frustration, stating that their anger is not a drunk anger or a childish anger, but real, true anger.

35 "Zanfan bon dié" (translation: les enfants du bon dieu) references the children who are lucky or well off.
36 This drunkenness is in direct relation to alcohol abuse problem Creole men in La Réunion are said to have.
37 This poem was translated by Marilyn Lucas. It was not included in the text. There was no French translation offered by Marimoutou.
La Réunion is dependent on metropolitan France, the colonial power, and that leads to a power imbalance. There is a dichotomy based on this power relationship that places Creole people below their French (predominantly white) counterparts. He chooses to write this poem in Creole to exclude the French. He speaks to the injustice of this power imbalance. Marimoutou’s poetry engages within this binary structure without doing away with it.

Marimoutou uses the word "larak." This word carries weight. While it directly translates to "drunk" or "drunken", it has a deeper connotation. "Larak" makes a reference to the tendency of rum to make people aggressive and to make them lose control. Rum has an interesting reputation on the island. It is a source of pride, as the rum in La Réunion is some of the best in the world and lots of families have their secrets for how to make the best. However, it is dangerous. Domestic abuse and drama are regularly blamed on rum and it is the source of many tragedies. When Marimoutou uses it within the context of this poem, it functions as a revolt against French people who may blame the high unemployment rates on the fact that Réunionnais peoples are drunks and therefore place the blame on them. This anger against blatant discrimination is exactly what Marimoutou is articulating.

Maloya is a tradition in La Réunion of music. The songs traditionally speak to slavery and poverty. Its origin and instruments are primarily African mixed with some Indian influences. This form of music serves as a medium for social and political protest from many Creole people all across the island. This poem is Maloya and those who are singing, are those Réunionnais people who are suffering or those who have suffered. They are singing for their past and their ancestors who worked as slaves. They are singing for themselves, their neighbors, and their families and the poverty they face. They are singing their anger.
Music is emotional and singing and dancing is cathartic. This poem is a perfect example of this. When one's fear, anger, and frustration is perfectly articulated into something that can be shared, one feels heard. This is of utmost importance for the Réunionnais people who have grown used to feeling neglected by France. Marimoutou succeeds in uniting his people through their common frustrations and anger.

3.2.2 French Poem by Marimoutou

Marimoutou’s poem written in creole stands in contrast to his other poems written in French. Instead of speaking directly to Réunionnais people, he decides to write in French, the language of their ex-colonizer. In his article, "Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations" that he wrote with Vergès, he speaks to the presence of the creole and French languages present in La Réunion, "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” (Vergès and Marimoutou 3). Rather than overtly reject the language of their ex-oppressor, he acknowledges the adaptation of the imperialist language while still preserving their own. However, his use of the word imperialist does pass judgement, as it is still a word that holds weight and many negative connotations.
The poem chosen is from the same book as its creole counterpart, *Arracher : cinquante mille signes*. This poem is also untitled.

l'eau rose de leurs crimes  
le ciel jaune de leurs armes  
le soleil bleu de larmes  
les phantasmes de nos morts  
les yeux troués de nos enfants  
nos rêves au fil du sang  
la reptation séculaire  
les coups de pieds reçus  
à l'aube de ma mémoire  
l'encens jeté aux vents  
la route formée vers l'espoir  
la lune cassée en deux  
et l'ombre filet  
le paille en queue  
s'effondre dans l'océan noirci  
dans les rochers secrètent des algues armées  
et les crabes de leurs doigts  
déchirent les entrailles de mon non-passé  
le soleil se fait les ongles  
il n'y a pas d'oubli  
et les sourires étranges  
découvrent les sommeils fermés  
où les oiseaux dévorent des os  
avant de rougir les terres blanches  
de leurs cadavres qui dansent

(Marimoutou, *Arracher : cinquante mille signes* 20)

This poem is very particular to La Réunion. The vocabulary he uses and his descriptions are strongly linked to the island. He chooses to use possessive pronouns, "nos" ³⁴⁰ and "mon" ³⁴¹, and contrasts these with "leurs." ³⁴² He speaks of "their crimes", "their weapons" and contrasts them

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³⁴⁰ Translation: Our.
³⁴¹ Translation: My.
³⁴² Translation: Their.
³⁴³ The Paille en queue is the national bird of La Réunion. When one sees one, one gets to make a wish.
³⁴⁴ This poem does not appear on the page like this with both translations. I added the translation so an English speaker could follow line-by-line with the French.
with "our dead", "our children", and "our dreams." When using the pronoun "leurs," he is referencing the French. They, in the context of this poem, are the out-group. They are the perpetrators. Even his poems he decides to write in French, he continues to write from the perspective of his Creole reality. Near the end of the poem, he references "mon non-passé." The use of the possessive pronoun "my" explicitly places Marimoutou into this framework of the absence of memory. This serves to make his work personal, invoking a stronger response from his audience. He moves the poem from the abstract into the tangible. Suddenly this "non-passé" is no longer an abstract concept, it is his reality. Finally, he speaks of "leurs cadavres"; the bodies could be in reference to the birds, the dead paille en queues, dancing. However, "their bodies" could also be in reference to those who died at sea crossing the ocean as slaves, yet, their corpses continue to dance. This shows their resilience and can be directly linked to themes of Négritude.

Marimoutou makes references to slavery, the unknown past (referencing the countless people whose pasts and stories were lost in times of slavery) and the simultaneous inability to forget. The fact that the island is stuck with their not-knowing. There is a hole where their past should be. This is a theme he touches on in his article, "Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations", which he wrote with Vergès.

Color is ever present in this poem. Marimoutou uses it to paint a full, colorful image of La Réunion for his readers. The same colors that add vibrance to the features of the island, contributing to the beautiful landscape he describes, each hold weight of a past wrongdoing. This is evident in the first three lines. The yellow, pink, and blue are more than spectacular colors. Each one holds injustices – weapons, crimes, and tears. Simply accepting these marvels at face

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43 Translation: My non-past.
44 Translation: Their corpses.
value is to overlook the terrors the place has witnessed. Marimoutou is forcing a consciousness and acknowledgement of past injustices with this poem.

The paille en queue is the national bird of La Réunion. They are a source of national pride. When one sees a paille en queue, one gets to make a wish. This bird is so beautiful and loved, which makes it all the more shocking and symbolic when a "shadow net" rips it out of the sky. It falls into the black sea and its body is torn to shreds by crabs. The paille en queue is a metaphor for the Creole people. The bird in this poem is like a phoenix. It rises from the ashes and comes back as a zombie to haunt those who harm it. Creole people who have been hurt by their past are rising from the ashes of colonialism. Marimoutou also uses the paille en queue as a metaphor for the island's "non-past," from the perspective of Creoles. They do not know exactly the happenings from the time of slavery, but they know that they were wronged. Generations were lost and their stories went with them. Family histories were beaten out of them, their ancestors knocked down, kicked, eventually collapsing, like the bird, into the black sea. The birds become slaves by the end of the poem. They are eating bones and they stain the white earth with the blood of their dancing corpses. This is a direct reference to the slavery that took place on the island. Marimoutou is forcing an acknowledgment of the past. He speaks of the necessity to remember. Simply because atrocities are not remembered or immortalized in history books does
not mean they did not happen. Marimoutou is giving a voice to those who suffered and those who continue to suffer. In this way, he is referencing the absence of memory found in Torabully’s idea of Coolitude.

This is the reason poetry exists. Poetry gives a voice to that which is too difficult for most to put into words. It articulates an experience and speaks of history in a way that reflects emotion. He articulates what it means to be Réunionnais without embellishment. He admires the beauty of the culture, languages, and people of the island all without neglecting to speak of its troubled past. La Réunion is not a utopia. It is not a perfect island where all races and cultures exist in harmony. There is conflict. There is poverty. This is where Marimoutou’s work lies – in communicating exactly what it means to be Réunionnais.
Chapter 4. Post-Coloniality in a Creole World

4.1 The Rise of Nationalism

Marimoutou’s poetry lends itself to a reflection on tribalism. It is an inclusive tribalism, however, distinct from the nationalism one sees in Europe and the United States, for instance. Nationalism is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as "loyalty and devotion to a nation. Especially: a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups" (MWEB2) These trends have been increasingly more dramatic in recent years. This is due in part to the rise of terrorist attacks and the increase in refugee populations.

The final question I wish to ask is, what do these two poets tells us about national identity in La Réunion, which is a department of France and therefore still European, and in Mauritius, an independent nation? There is an increasingly large group of people who are xenophobic entering politics in the West – Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders, etc.. These people are gaining popularity for a reason. In predominantly white, Western European countries, there are more people of color immigrating to these once homogeneous places. This is causing a rift in societies around the globe. "France for the French; Netherlands for the Dutch, etc." Instead of celebrating new cultures and people who immigrate, they are met by resistance and hatred. This is a classic in-group vs. out-group dilemma.
In the case of the Netherlands, though, language is adapting to the influx of Moroccan people who are making up an increasing percentage of the population. Marokkaanse Dutch is a new emerging dialect. It is Dutch spoken with a Moroccan accent with code-switching to add Moroccan words. What is surprising, is that while this language holds a lower status than Dutch, it is what is considered cool or tough, especially among young adolescent boys. For the first time in Dutch history, one can be in a small town in the east that is completely homogenous that has no immigrants, and hear young Dutch boys speaking with thick Moroccan accents, code-switching with words that they've heard used in rap songs. The implications of this are huge. While there is still xenophobia towards Moroccan people in politics, in the media, and among communities, their language is beginning to be adopted. This is the first step towards being more widely accepted in the Netherlands.

Language plays a big role in culture and identity. Language can bind people and serve as a link between people. One can see this in South Africa, for example. There are eleven official languages and thirty-five indigenous languages spoken. In Trevor Noah's book, Born a Crime, he speaks of his own experience where his ability to speak someone else's language saved his life. He recounts one experience from his adolescent life, where he was followed by a group of Zulu men. Mixed race people like Trevor Noah

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45 Marokkaanse simply means Moroccan
46 This is similar to what can be observed in the US with Ebonics [African American vernacular in English]. There is a trend of white Americans (generally young boys) who implement their slang and accents to make themselves sound cool or tough.
are not expected to know the tribal languages in South Africa. But his mother always stressed the importance of learning as many languages as possible, so he learned Zulu from living in a predominantly black Zulu community in his childhood. The men behind him were talking about how they were going to mug him and steal his money in Zulu. Noah turned around, addressing the men and responded in Zulu saying, "Hey guys, that sounds fun and all, but I'm also in the mood to mug someone. Do you think we could do it together?" Immediately the men apologized, saying they did not realize that Noah was "one of them." This was one example of many from his book where the powerful bonding effects of language saved him from trouble.

This is all to say that with the introduction of Marokkaanse Dutch and with the knowledge of one's native language, people are brought together. Language binds. France knows this better than any country. The French ruthlessly eradicated other languages or dialects from being spoken to ensure cohesion within their own country. This has interesting implications when one observes Mauritius, a former colony that was later colonized by the British, and La Réunion, a department of France. The French as colonizers do their best to ensure everybody speaks French. The British, however, who were the last colonizers of Mauritius, were not nearly as rigid in their eradication of non-English languages on the island (Médéa 5).

In order to consider the consequence of these different language

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Temple in Chemin Grenier in Mauritius
Photo taken by Brooklyn Stam
policies, the Indians who immigrated to these islands offer an instructive example. In Mauritius they were largely allowed to continue speaking their traditional Indian languages. Today, most all Indians living in Mauritius speak one or two of their original Indian languages – Hindi, Urdu, Bhojpuri, and some Tamil and Bengali. Additionally, their religion and style of dress have largely remained the same. In La Réunion, however, Indians who immigrated were forced to learn French. They worked and lived alongside emancipated slaves, with whom they had no common language. This meant that creole had to serve as a lingua franca, or common language, between them. Due to their close relationship with the Creole people who were mostly Christian, many Hindus converted to Christianity. This led to more cohesion within Réunionnais society (Médéa 35). Today, one can easily observe the cohesion that exists within La Réunion as opposed to the more exaggerated stratification that exists in Mauritius.

Torabully recognizes that Mauritius is a country that is in need of unification within the island itself and in the world. He speaks of, “the divided society of Mauritius but an act of reconnection, an attempt at a specific rapprochement between the ethnic groups of his island, a rapprochement which is to seek in the very waters, memories and insults that have haunted the community” (Bragard 228). Torabully’s work is a call to action for the Mauritian people. He’s attempting to unify them, and to eradicate the divisions that exist between different root identities, in hope of fostering a more fluidly coherent society.

He is not calling for the eradication of the other identities that people have, but instead the embrace of them all in harmony. Bragard discusses how, “The Coolie becomes the migrant, the one in cross-cultural relation with his multiple heritages and selves. The challenge is not to choose from among them but to accept the diversity and chaotic identity that they signify”
(Bragard 229). He acknowledges the complexity that lies within having multiple identities. But, he urges people to embrace the métissage. He wants people to be less nostalgic and does not want them to dwell on a “loss” of individual cultures. Instead, he wants Coolie people to focus on the possibilities that lie within the exchange of cultures.

The differences between the two islands in regard to stratification are also easily observed when comparing Marimoutou's and Torabully’s poems. Instead of searching for an all-encompassing identity, Marimoutou speaks to the shared experiences of Creoles. In his interviews and appearances, he praises his childhood in Saint-Benoît where he was lucky enough to experience a multitude of different cultures, traditions, and languages. Torabully's work, on the other hand, is more of a call to unify through the collective transcendence of physical and linguistic walls. His metaphor for coral is the perfect example of this. He urges people to appreciate and celebrate diversity. Coral is fragile, and due to climate change and the warming of the oceans, it is dying. The rise of nationalism in response to globalization is having the same detrimental effects.
4.2 Coral and Cultural Globalization

Coral is an animal that has gotten a lot of press in recent years. It is a beautiful organism which supports 25% of marine creatures. While it covers less than 1% of ocean floors, it is an invaluable resource to our earth. Animals live in it and eat it, and humans use the organism itself for medicine, food, jewelry, etc.. The animal is colorful thanks to the algae that lives on it, and when healthy it creates a gorgeous, rainbow-like, heavily pigmented effect. Coral provides a beautiful display of biodiversity. It houses a large variety of organisms and thanks to its diversity, grows in size and is more resilient. With so many different species of coral living together in harmony, coral are more resistant to disease and extinction. The idea is that if one variety starts to die out because of an environmental stress, hopefully one variety will be resilient to this. Also each different species has its own role within the reef. As a result, it has benefited the ocean’s ecosystem over hundreds of thousands of years.

Torabully’s metaphor of coral is one that serves to celebrate diversity. Coral is an embodiment of this diversity that is so necessary in Mauritius and La Réunion. Torabully speaks of coral in his article “Quand les Indes rencontrent les imaginaires du monde.” He states,

Le corail est observable dans son habitat vivant, à la différence du rhizome, qui est souterrain. En plus, il me permet de développer une connectivité agglutinante, bâtissant par couches, par concrétion, par sédimentation, un peu comme un palimpseste, et non pas seulement une connectivité errante, tout en conservant l’aspect égalitaire de la connexion, étant ouvert à tous les courants. Le corail est hybride dans son être même, car il est né de la symbiose d’un phytoplancton et d’un zooplancton. On ne fait pas mieux en termes de
métaphore de la diversité. Il est racine, polype et plature, protéiforme, souple et dur, et de différentes couleurs. Tout en étant enraciné, il libère la plus grande migration sur terre, celle du plancton, visible depuis la Lune, tout comme la Grande barrière de corail, classée au patrimoine mondial de l'humanité par l’Unesco. Cet archipel corallien est tout simplement la sculpture vivante la plus étendue sur terre. (70–71)\textsuperscript{47}


Coral is diversity. Up to two million species inhabit coral reefs. It embodies migration while being static. This is a fact that cannot be overstated. While a person may have spent their entire life in one physical space, that does not diminish the fact that they embody a migration marked by their sheer existence. A person born in Mauritius who spends their entire life there is Mauritian.

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\textsuperscript{47} Otmar Ette’s translation: As opposed to the rhizome, which is in the earth, the coral may be observed alive in its natural habitat. Also, it allows me to develop an agglutinating form of being together, consisting of stratification, densification, sedimentation, not unlike the palimpsest, instead of an erratic form of being together. It maintains the egalitarian aspect of being together but is open to all currents. The coral is an essentially hybrid being, for it is born out of the symbiosis of phytoplankton and zooplankton. It is a wonderful metaphor for diversity. It is root, polyp and flattening, it is a changing form, warm and hard and even colourful. Even though it is rooted, it unleashes the greatest migration on Earth, the migration of plankton, visible from the Moon, just like the Great Barrier Reef, a UNESCO world heritage natural site. This archipelago of corals is simply the largest sculpture on Earth, alive and growing, and one can make it out from the Moon.
But if their mom is Chinese and their father Indian, they are raised not only Mauritian. There is a plurality within them. Like coral, they represent migration, even if they spend their life living in one country.

Coral is a rainbow of colors. It is in itself a hybrid organism. It is alive and vibrant and historical in nature. Coral are like trees – they have rings in their bodies. If one does a cross section of coral they can find the conditions of the oceans dating back tens of thousands of years. People who are Coolies, by Torabully’s definition, represent this history and bond to the world of their ancestors and the history they made. Coral’s existence as a metaphor of diversity for people in a pluricultural society is a beautiful celebration of this history and of mixing.

In an article by Ette, a German scholar who specializes in Romance language literature, he references a line from one of Torabully’s poem, Chair Corail, Fragments Coolie. “Dans ma mémoire sont des langues aussi / Ma coolitude n’est pas une pierre non plus, / elle est corail” (82). This quote is saying that in his memories there are languages. His Coolitude is not a rock, it is coral. Coral is a living creature (DIVE). His Coolitude is not something static. It can be best qualified as organic and malleable. It is ever changing and evolving. Languages can be found in the rings of history that live within the coral, within the Coolies. While immersed in water, in between bodies of land, coral is alive. While it is rooted onto the ocean floor, it can move. It even has the appearance of dancing when the waves are strong. However, when it is removed from its home, it dies, bleaching to a bland white color, and turning into a hard, static entity. The rings that document the coral’s past are lost. When people are yanked from their homes, their stories can get lost. They can lose large parts of what makes them themselves. When Torabully refers to his

48Ottmar Ette’s translation: In my memories there are also tongues/my coolitude is not a stone./ it is coral.
Coolitude as coral, this is because it can adapt. It might not know its history, but it now lives and thrives somewhere else. Its roots are not always known, but that does not diminish from the beauty of their existence or the importance of their presence in that environment.

Mauritius is home to people of a large variety of different shades. Due to varying melanin levels, the island is a rainbow of diversity. It is of genetic benefit to reproduce with someone who has a very different genetic makeup than one's own. This leads to fewer genetic mutations, and more resilience in a person, scientifically speaking. Torabully highlights the importance of this diversity. Not only in race, but in history and backgrounds. Instead of glorifying only racial mixing, he speaks to the importance of cultural diversity.

By contrast, arguments of nationalist politicians feed off the fear that someone with different skin color, religion, and traditions than the dominant society will lead to the destruction of the current status quo -- that a large influx of Mexican immigrants, for example, would corrupt Anglo-American society. The Other is demonized and is seen as a threat. Torabully challenges
this concept. Diversity among cultures does not stand to threaten the dominant group. Instead, everybody stands to benefit from this diversity.

His metaphor seems apt, and even more so in view of globalization and the reactionary populism taking hold in countries throughout the world. Climate change, due in part to the environmental impact of globalization, is putting coral's future in danger along with the millions of species that are supported by this coral. With the continued disrespect towards our natural world, our biodiversity is diminishing. Coral species are dying at elevated rates, leading to a loss of diversity, which they represent. Trends of nationalism are having the same effect. To use Torabully’s metaphor, instead of each shade of coral being equal and all coral that has migrated over the course of centuries being equal, there is rejection, violence, and denial of rights, even of the right to live. Fear and the division among parts is weakening the whole organism.

Globalization has also weakened the national bonds analyzed by Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. Cultural globalization is a trend that has been on the rise since the internet became easily accessible to people all over the world. It can be defined as, "a phenomenon by which the experience of everyday life, as influenced by the diffusion of commodities and ideas, reflects a standardization of cultural expressions around the world" (Watson). The facility of communication on a global scale and the lower costs of travel have led to an increase in migration. There are more migrants on a global scale than the world has ever seen before. In fact, “Today, the number of people living outside their country of birth is larger than at any other time in history. International migrants would now constitute the world's fifth most populous country if they all lived in the same place” (Yurto). The implication of this is a rise of nationalism among people who live in the countries where more people continue to migrate, and who, as a result, fear
they will lose their culture and traditions. For many people, this is a scary prospect. What would
the world look like if suddenly people in Morocco were culturally homogenous to those in the
Netherlands?

The world as we know it is changing. Our societies are becoming increasingly complex
and intertwined. This does imply that people risk losing their culture and traditions. Significantly,
Mauritian and Réunionnais societies are models of this uncertain future since they have been
dealing with the complexity of navigating multicultural societies since their origins. Rather than
becoming increasingly closed-bordered, fearing the loss of culture, poets like Torabully and
Marimoutou are urging a paradigm shift. They promote the fact that one stands to gain when one
learns from people who have different backgrounds than one's own. Rather than fearing a loss of
culture, they urge a celebration of the gains of diversity. One can observe this in Torabully's
poetry plainly. He speaks of the value of each different aspect of his identity. In the case of
Marimoutou, we can see in his poetry a warning when we compare his metaphorical paille en
queue to Torabully's coral. The paille en queue is a Réunionnais bird, while coral's home is in the
ocean. Marimoutou is expressly concerned with his own people, and his poetry seeks to empower
a political minority in one of France’s overseas departments. Torabully, on the other hand, has a
broader focus that is more open to the world, both linguistically and conceptually, and the
independent status of his island perhaps provides a platform for his poetry from which he may
address global problems. Finally, Marimoutou's paille en queue, though resilient, comes back
after death, while coral in Torabully’s writings functions as a symbol of life. Yet, as our own
world tells us, coral is susceptible to death in the face of climate change. Bleached coral -- the
casualty of our global economy driven by fossil fuels and consumption -- has lost its colors and appears as forests of zombies of a lost cultural diversity at the bottom of our oceans.

Marimoutou is a Réunionnais poet. He was born and raised on the island reflected in his poetry. He grew up in Saint Benoît on the east coast of the island where he was exposed to a multitude of people from backgrounds who spoke languages and had traditions different from his own. He writes in both Creole and French, outlining the beauty and necessity in celebrating the diversity that makes La Réunion unique. His poetry in Creole expresses an angst he feels on the island. He speaks of the poverty in which some people on the island live. He speaks of the sociopolitical issues the island faces. Most of all, he articulates the frustrations and anxieties of the “native” Réunionnais people, the Creoles. His voice is powerful. In his poems written in French it is raw, but his tone shifts. Instead of speaking solely towards his fellow Creoles, he also speaks to the former colonizers. He calls for an acknowledgement of the past in order to fortify and restore Creole identity within French territory.

Through their poetry and writings, Torabully and Marimoutou are articulating deeply emotional accounts of what it means to be Mauritian and Réunionnais. They embrace the difficulty and frustration that comes with conflict on these islands, and effectively make something beautiful out of it. Their work is unifying in that it seeks understanding and can be appreciated by anyone from these islands (or those from farther away). The world is changing. Furthermore, as it becomes increasingly global, this fact is terrifying for some. However, the current mixing of languages, cultures, and peoples is not a new phenomenon. La Réunion and Mauritius are microcosms of this pluriculturality. For centuries these islands have been navigating
the existence of a multitude of different cultures. While neither of these islands is perfect, there is much we could stand to learn from them.

It is imperative that a paradigm shift take place in order for fears regarding the Other to cease. Poets like Marimoutou and Torabully are at the forefront of this paradigm shift. Rather than live in a state of fear of losing one’s culture, they urge a dialogue across differences. But their poetry also serves a larger purpose. It gives a voice to those who are not generally heard.
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