

**DISPLACEMENT AND/AS NATIONALISM:  
THE SEA AS A REPARATIVE SPACE**

by

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Submitted by Harsha Thakoor in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the ways in which memories of displacement interact with and forge national landscapes as well as national subjects. In this thesis, Amal Sewtohul's novel *Made in Mauritius* (2012), as well as selected poems from Khal Torabully's *Cale d'étoiles-Coolitude* (1992) and *Chair corail: fragments coolies* (1999), are used as a terrain of analysis. I analyse mobility of the national subject, and perennial movement situated at the crux of these texts as resistance to rootedness hence capsizing national authority. Displaced bodies are unable to fully root themselves in their homeland as they hold on to the memory of their ancestral land. The sea is presented as a reparative tool—movement moored in its essence—cutting across time and space to bind together narrative, histories and lands. The space of the sea is retrieved, and terra-analysis is forsaken. Roots—singular and crystalized—as utilized in nationalist discourses—are disrupted when it is joined to routes. To make displacement and mobility the essence of one's existence is to overcome the traumatic wounds of spatiotemporal separation that the nation inflicts on national bodies that inhabit its borders by urging them to belong. Ultimately, this thesis seeks a re-reading of the national landscape via vocabularies of the sea.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis seeks an alternative to nationalism as a dominant reading strategy for postcolonial literatures. By focusing on the island nation of Mauritius—a young post-colonial nation nestled in the Indian Ocean—and its understudied literature, I hope to forge new tools enabling a re-thinking of nationalism that takes island geographies as its object of analysis. This maneuver re-calibrates the focus of discourses on nationalism by shifting focus to microscale island nations rather than vast continental geographies and (land) border control and secondly, to the global south (Indian ocean) of oceanic studies as opposed to the hegemonic anglophone North-Atlantic studies.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author Harsha Thakoor.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Lay Summary .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1. Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Nations, Myths, and Exile.....	2
1.3 Coolie, Coolitude, and the Emergence of a New Nation.....	8
1.4 Sea-Logics and Counter-Terra Analysis.....	16
<b>2. Making Mauritius.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Seeking Residence in Resistance.....	22
2.3 Bricolage Nationalism.....	34
<b>3. Sea and Water in/as Theory.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	42
3.2 Water and/as the City.....	43
<b>4. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>54</b>

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# 1. Theoretical Framework

## 1.1. Introduction

This first chapter aims at establishing and discussing the theoretical context that frames this thesis: forging new tools via sea-logics enabling a re-thinking of nationalism that takes island geographies—focusing on the post-colonial island nation of Mauritius—as its object of analysis. This maneuver re-calibrates the focus of discourses on nationalism by shifting focus to microscale island nations rather than vast continental geographies and (land) border control and secondly, to the global south (Indian ocean) of oceanic studies as opposed to the hegemonic anglophone North-Atlantic studies. Firstly, I set out the definition of the word ‘Nation,’ positioning exile as its axis. Exile, I argue, is an important epistemological tool that disrupts rigid discourses of Nationalism and belonging. The island, surrounded by a cluster of water, is an exiled nation. It is exiled from the center of discourses when it is made invisible—appearing as just a dot on the world map. I frame exile around the logics of displacement, rather than banishment, working opposite—but not against—the logics of crystallization and ideological effigies. Secondly, *Coolitude* is joined to this thesis using exile as a rope. In the second part of this chapter, I lay out the definitions of *Coolitude*—its germination and implications, along with the ways in which it interacts with existing theories such as *Négritude* and *Créolité*. Discussed by Carted as a ‘universal’ theoretical tool, I do not discard *Coolitude*’s proximity with *Indianité*. I dive in these entanglements, in an attempt at resisting erasure of the coolie’s body under the weight of ‘universalism’ and/or ‘cosmopolitanism.’ The body of the Indian and Indo-Mauritian is retrieved, making him or her visible. *Coolitude* is deployed in the epistemological terrain of nation-analysis as a supplement to its other mobile theoretical counterparts such as ethnicity, hybridity, creolization and belongingness. In the third part of this chapter, exile and *Coolitude*

converge to fulfil the primary aim of this thesis—turning to the logics of the sea in an attempt to subvert Nationalist terra-analysis. *Coolitude* takes the sea—a non-static, ever-moving body of water—as its center, and in doing so refuses to crystalize its discourse. Perennial movement generated by the sea, I argue, is central to re-thinking the nation and terra-analysis. This maneuver engenders an analytical recovery of a maritime space which, like the national territorial space, is equally militarized and politicized. The sea operates not as the apotheosis of rootlessness and freedom, but as possibilities of non-national, national and post-national spaces where aqueous fluidity and, economic and political territorial interests overlap.

## **1.2. Nations, Myths, and Exile**

Nations, as articulated by Ernest Renan, “are fairly new terms,” their construct being “a recent invention of history” (Renan 9). In the same vein, Timothy Brennan delineates the nation as “an abstraction,” “an allegory,” “a myth,” that does not correspond “to a reality that can be scientifically defined” (Brennan 49). Both Renan and Brennan frame the genesis of the nation in, and around, the lexis of fabrication. The nation is firstly invented; it is an edifice carefully crafted to embody the social reality of the *Volk*—the people—domiciled within the political and terrestrial boundaries of the national state. Secondly, it is propelled into an abstract reality where it exists as an allegory, an emblem, a myth that vehicles bodies. There is hence a double movement that constructs the nation. The nation is in essence crafted, to and as a, mirror of the national subject’s social reality. Landscapes, faces, distinct historico-political events, mottos, beliefs, and desire are all infused and crystalized in the making of the nation. The national state is in this sense, pre-nation. Its inception germinates before the establishment of a state sovereignty. Once the mythical nation comes to be established, in a second required motion, its

mythical powers work to mould its people forging the soul of the *volk*, weaving national bodies together through a singular thread of shared memory and history. Landscapes and effigies are transformed into national monuments, and bodies are recast as national subjects. National authority is diluted and masqueraded, in and as, cultural narratives. Renan delineates the nation as a “soul, a spiritual principle,” anchored in the history and the “rich legacy memories” it has to offer, thriving in the present as “the desire to live together” (Renan 19). Customs, traditions, sacrifices, and shared memory and history turn the socio-political national battlefield into a sacred sanctified arena. The nation as a sacred myth overpowers the national subject nestled in an essentially complex inegalitarian society.

The convoluted social reality of the *volk* is one which can never be fully be articulated in a grand narrative. The *volk*, as delineated by Bhabha, is the “[nation] living [in] the present,” (Bhabha 1), while nation—as a myth—is etched in the past. The nation, in its abstract mythical existence, is therefore an articulation of “common glories of the past,” and “common will [to forge a unified future] in the present” (Renan 19). In an attempt to forge a symbolical unity, the nation erases difference, inequality and injustices that make up the social ethos of the *volk*, for the political unity of the country subsists on a perennial erasure of its plural modern space, bounded in an ironic twist, by difference. The myth of the nation, therefore, is the way that “various governments invent traditions to give performance and solidarity to a transient political form” (Brennan 47). Myths as described by Brennan, can mean three things: myths as distortions and lies, myths as mythologies presented in legends and oral traditions, and myths as literature (Brennan 44). In the same link, myth as per Malinowki cited in Brennan, acts as a “present day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of social values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and

prestige by trading it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events” (Brennan 45). Drawing from Malinowski, it can be understood that myths operate in a backwards motion; it is the quality of being simultaneously lost (in the past) and present (preserved through the *volk*) that make national myths so powerful. Its timelessness articulates a muted power—the spirit of the nation does not and cannot wither away; the nation and its spirit represent and guarantee eternal life and future. The concerns of the subject; his or her hardships and injustices are trite in the face of the greater spiritual duty of the nation and the latter’s ideological counterpart—nationalism. The national subject sacrifices his or her particularity for the greater timeless solidarity of the nation. The national subject endures his or her harsh reality, and sacrifices himself or herself for the nation, and as a reward, is allowed to be part of the myths that make up the nation and the hymns he or she grows up listening to. The national subject’s ultimate sacrifice is when he or she abandons his or her social reality—not caving to its demands and commands—to join the imagined community of the nation.

How does the nation achieve such grand veneration despite its philosophical poverty? In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson explicates, the 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” (Anderson 6). The takeaway word is ‘communion—’ which is more than mere togetherness or kinship. Communion evokes harmony and unity; it has a spiritual facet—it entails empathy, sympathy and accord. The national subject is not part of a nation due to solely his or her birthright. The national subject *is* the nation; he or she belongs to and makes up the soul of the nation, and if he or she were to be stripped of his or her national identity, then he or she would belong to nowhere. Belongingness and shared

communities are what make the nation significant. National myths set off a cogwheel where, in the words of Derrida, a constellation of concepts is “embodied, represented, and localized” (Cheah, 4) in the subjects, who in turn elect domicile in these concepts and myths. In these ways, nationalism becomes a trope “for things such as belonging, bordering and commitment” (Brennan 47). In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Said delineates nationalism as “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage it affirms the home created by a community of language and culture [...] it fends off exile” (Said 176). In the same vein, Raymond Williams writes “This form of primary and placeable bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation state is entirely artificial” (Raymond Williams, 9). Both Said and Williams situate the primary manifestation of belongingness as anchored in place. National belongingness “fends off exile” (Said 176), it promotes bonding and attachment by providing a pre-constructed artificial national discourse that binds the *volk* together masking distorted and reconfigured memories as shared memories. In my thesis I analyze experiences of displacement through the lenses of exile—a literary and theoretical tool that ironically amplifies the inescapability of belonging.

Exile, I argue, is anchored in the crux of nationalist discourses that are framed in and around a dichotomy of exile and belonging. National myths and narrations are fabricated to bind people together to a place, a land they pledge to defend and protect under the label of patriotism. Simply put, in the nationalist rationale of the world, to belong one must become part of a nation. The national subject chooses to belong because he or she cannot bear the weight of non-belongingness. In their book *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging*, Butler and Spivak write: “And if the state binds in the name of nation, conjuring a certain a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not, powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes.”

(Butler & Spivak, 5). The nation state is ultimately an apparatus of power that—through fabricated myths—exercises power through the trope of belongingness. The nation’s exercise of power depends “on barriers and prisons, and so, in the mode of a certain containment” (Butler & Spivak, 5).

What does it mean to be contained by and in a national state? To be contained within its borders, its culture, and its languages—its discourses? Once the coolie migrates to a plantation economy, he or she contains within himself or herself his or her language, culture, and religion that he or she tries to preserve in an attempt to remain bounded to his or her homeland. This migration comes with a double-edged freedom. While the migrated national subject carries the homeland and preserves it in his or her memory and habits, he or she is also no longer contained by the national landscape’s authority—at least, not in its entirety. I analyze the Afro-, Indo- and Sino- population not as bodies banished from the homeland, but as bodies who without the cultural authority of the homeland—in the face of a discontinuity of traditions—find themselves confronted to the loss of their homeland. In my thesis, exile is employed not as a state’s power to banish people but is understood as “a condition of terminal loss” as delineated by Said. (Said 173). Indian indentured laborers and the enslaved are in this sense exiled, as they experience a terminal loss. The Afro-Mauritian, and Indo-Mauritian never go back to their homeland. Exile, Said writes, “is a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them” (Said 177). Said highlights an important characteristic of exile in his quote—the exiled’s discontinuous state of being. There is a traumatic uprooting that it is sudden and chasmic. The exiled—in this thesis, the indentured laborer and the enslaved—find themselves entirely removed from their land and its histories, expedited to a foreign and alien land. The destinies of

both intersect in the course of British colonization. While the Afro and Indo population seek to reconstruct their broken lives, they also want to preserve the freedom that the Mauritian—albeit colonial—soil grants. Afro-Mauritians now no longer enslaved by colonial master wants to preserve their newfound liberty while Indo-Mauritians want to safeguard the new political power. Discussing exile, Torabully and Carter write:

Emmanuel Juste and Edouard J Maunick, developing the theme of the richness of the Mauritian cultural *métissage*, proclaimed that the descendants of immigrants—as all mauritians are—had a mission to propagate the notion of ‘exile’ within the mother country: ‘Nos aïeux venaient tous de quelque part; nous avons pour mission de continuer leur exil dans un lieu devenu pays natal. [Our forefathers all come from somewhere; our mission is to continue their exile in a place which has become our motherland]’ [author’s translation] (Toorabully and Carter 6).

What is striking in Juste and Maunick’s declaration is the continuity of exile. The Mauritian, regardless of his or her ancestry, is primarily an exiled body inasmuch as he or she cannot return to an ancestral homeland—experiencing terminal loss. Their exile, however, does not end with the establishment of a Mauritian nation—it was not meant to end. The next generation has the responsibility to carry exile within their hearts. Hence, can the exiled belong to a land other than the ancestral land? Can the exiled ever belong? The exiled only stops being exiled when a return to the ancestral land is effectuated. The exiled, in perpetual movement is on a journey. In the case of Mauritius, the exiled decides to establish a nation in the land to which he or she was exiled to. What does this move entail? I argue that placing exile at the center of the nation sheds

the latter of its authority. Exile, I argue, does not inhibit belongingness, it rather attenuates patriotism which is nationalism militarized.

### 1.3. Coolie, Coolitude, and the Emergence of a New Nation

At the heart of this thesis lies *Coolitude*—a poetic tool theorized by Mauritian poet Khal Toorabully—as opposed to *Creolité*, to re-think the nation. Despite its proximity to India and *indianité* [indianisms] [my translation] and its genesis in the experiences of the Indian indentured laborer, *Coolitude*—unlike *Négritude* which took Africa and the whole of the African diaspora as its territory—does not take India as its nexus. Toorabully’s *Coolitude* does not center its theoretical framework exclusively around the body and experiences of the Indian indentured laborer, nor is it an attempt to move away from existing discourses such *Négritude* and *Créolité*. On the contrary, *Coolitude* works within these very frameworks all while bringing the coolie who was an alien in creole societies into the picture. Like *Négritude* and *Créolité*, *Coolitude* finds its origin in the need to reclaim a formerly shamed identity, and the desire to transform shame and rejection into a positive affect—that of reconciliation. Unlike *Négritude*, however, *Coolitude* does not attempt to plunge into what Carter and Torabully label a “theory of distinctiveness” (Carter & Torabully 2). Germinating in the francophone world around 1934 following the launch of *L’Étudiant Noir*, *Négritude* as a movement, Carter and Torabully argue that *Négritude* attempted to “extend perceptions of the negro as possessing a distinctive personality into all spheres of life, intellectual, emotional and physical.” It was in this sense, “both essentialist and nativist” (Carter & Torabully 2). I turn to *Coolitude* and *Créolité* to analyse the Mauritian nation as both are more ethnically inclusive poetic and literary tools that burgeoned to give voice to métis bodies that could no articulate their discourse through

*Négritude*. In *Créolité*, “complexity—and not clarity—was key” (Carter and Torabully 9). Echoing this statement is Françoise Lionnet’s emphasis on the plurality of Creoleness. In *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* she explains “in the effort to recover their unrecorded past, contemporary writers and critics have come to the realization that opacity and obscurity are necessarily the ingredients of all authentic communication” (Lionnet 4). I explore how bodies of slaves, indentured laborers, and even the bodies of their colonial master are essentially travelling bodies. These bodies are unfixed, uncertain, unsettled, in limbo and to a certain extent unknown. Here I understand opacity as complexity; an opaque history or narrative is not impenetrable. Opacity requires a pause—a moment of examination—to make sense of entanglements. I analyze obscurity as the unknown. It evokes the image of a well, or a tunnel profound and exhaustive with an extremity that can never be seen. Hence, opacity and obscurity as do not seek to erect barriers—these epistemological tools do not seek to shelter creole bodies within a discourse that cannot be readily accessed or read by an outsider. I argue that opacity and obscurity are central to the narration of creole nations and societies as they urge cautiousness and attentiveness—they urge readers to seek residence in resistance. *Coolitude*, is in this thesis, the conduit via which obscurity and opacity of the nation is analyzed. I choose *Coolitude* in lieu of *Créolité* as the latter is deeply rooted in the French Creole Caribbean heritage, and hence largely excluded the Indian Ocean in its discourses. *Créolité*, as delineated by Carter and Torabully is an “interpretation of creolization that blends diverse sources and is essentially an unfinished process by which human groups blend their histories and *imaginaires* [imaginaries] [my translation]” (Carter & Torabully 11). In similar ways, Torabully crafts *Coolitude* as an unfinished process in his poems. It is for the him a structure—as opposed to a system—open by nature and able to enter into contact with other structures.

While not central, the figure of the coolie does remain essential to the articulation of *Coolitude*. I wish here to make a distinction between *Coolitude* and *Indianité*. The latter is described by Naz Sir V, cited in Carter and Torabully, as the attempts of the Indian elite who wished to “rediscover their Indian identity” (Carter & Torabully 12). The word ‘rediscover’ already suggests a loss of the mother-form: the motherland and to some extent, the mother tongue. To rediscover, one must not only have lost, but must have lost and forgotten. In tandem with this description, in *Présences de l’Inde dans le monde*, Burton writes, “L’indianité s’inscrit au centre d’une problématique de la *Créolité*, tant à cause des modifications qu’elle a dû subir en milieu Créole que parce qu’elle a pu propager d’elle même en ce même milieu [*Indianité* is situated at the center of one of *Créolité*’s puzzles: it owes its efflorescence to the same milieu that subjected it to undergo certain modifications] [my translation] (Burton 211). What is important in this statement is a pattern recurrent in third spaces. There is loss, followed by realization of said loss, followed by an attempt to reclaim what has been lost. Unlike *Indianité*, *Coolitude* executes a recollection of a lost homeland without ever launching in its recuperation. Torabully explains, “coolitude comprises two main facets: a ‘*remise en perspective*’ (recollection) of the cultural elements of the coolie which were *mis à mal* (stifled) by colonial history, and, the interplay between cultures, mainly African and European, in the embryonic Creole society...” (Carter& Torabully 145). A ‘*remise en perspective*’ which when literally translated means a shift in perspective demonstrates how Torabully’s *Coolitude* is more than mere recollection or retrospection coupled with nostalgia and a desire for return. A ‘*remise en perspective*’ of one’s roots can only be done by acknowledging one’s routes—when the journey one’s taken into consideration. Recollection seems to suggest a reminiscence of the past which occurs in isolation from the present, while a ‘*remise en perspective*’ entails an examination of the

past with complete awareness of the present. It involves injecting the present into the past and vice versa, so that both are one and the same. Torabully seems to suggest that the *mis à mal* that continues in the present can only be resolved with a reconciliation with the past.

As stated in the opening of the previous paragraph, experiences of the coolie are not erased or muffled in the shaping of Torabully's poetical tool, nor are these experiences transformed into a universal and shared feeling via an ad-hoc *bricolage*. *Coolitude*, I argue, is crucial to the analysis of the Mauritian nation and *mauricianisme* as it births from the problematic figure of the coolie who was catapulted in a thorny colonial situation. Firstly, the Indian immigrant arrives in the plantation society "a little too late after slavery to be fully considered a real [creole]" (Carter & Torabully 166). Secondly, the Indian indentured laborer supplanting the formerly enslaved, was perceived as a lackey of capitalism and an ally to plantocracy. In addition, Indian indentured laborers in Mauritius quickly began purchasing land after by saving through their wages. In her article 'Nationalisme, Decolonisation et consociation à l'île Maurice: L'émergence d'un mauricianisme stratégique (1947-1967), Catherine Boudet writes, "[I]e coolie amené comme un esclave dans le champ de canne commença à rêver de pouvoir et de politique. C'est son droit. Il a apporté sa juste contribution à la prospérité de l'île et il est donc également juste qu'il réclame sa part de pouvoir [the coolie, brought in as a slave to work in the plantation colony started to dream of power and of politics. It's his right. He contributed to the colony's economic prosperity and it is only natural that he claims his share of power] [my translation] (Boudet 393). While the enslaved Afro-Mauritian sought to be liberated from the land that imprisoned him or her, the indentured laborer saw prosperity through land by first cultivating it and later owning it. Colonial writer Clément Charoux, documenting his days at the sugar estate, described the Indian sugar estate worker as "[I]'indien type, je me le représente toujours courbé sur cette terre qu'il aime et

qu'il veut, perpétuellement besognant car il sait que le travail seul, incessant, continu, en donne la possession" [The typical Indian, is always seen, bent over this land that he loves and wants, always needy, because he knows that only work, incessant, continuous, will ensure his possession of it] [Carter's translation] (Carter & Torabully 74). The figure of the humble and hardworking 'Malabar<sup>1</sup>' would often be cited in discourses as the reason to the Indo-Mauritian population's social and financial success, directly implicating that the Afro-Mauritian population's poverty is due to lack of hard-work, and not to slavery.

In 'Races et classes dans les romans mauriciens des années 30,' Hookoomsingh describes the emergence of the Indian worker as

une nouvelle bourgeoisie terrienne et professionnelle réclamant une prise sur le cours de l'histoire bousculait les fondements du vieil ordre colonial, menaçait la pérennité de la suprémacie blanche, seule garante des privilèges dont jouissait aussi le groupe de couleur [a neo-bourgeois land owner and professional claiming a share of history disrupting the bedrock of the old colonial order, threatening the perpetuation of white supremacy which was in turn guaranteed privileges to the *gens de couleurs*<sup>2</sup>] [my translation] (Hookoomsingh 26).

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Malabar* is a derogatory term used in Mauritius to describe North Indian Hindus. *Lascar* and *Madrasse* being used to describe Muslims and South Indians respectively.

<sup>2</sup> *Gens de couleur*, literal translation: people of color, did not refer to all non-whites. The *gens de couleurs* referred to only the portion of the plantation colony's mixed population who had a white colonial ancestor. "When a Creole moves upwards, he or she has traditionally been re-defined as a *gens de couleur*, in other words as someone aspiring to European or Franco-Mauritian values" (Waters 3). They would hence enjoy privileges like access to education and would consequently come to occupy important positions within the colonial hierarchy. *Les gens de couleurs* would later become spokespeople to the Afro-Mauritian population only to be lost to pre-independence mass migration to Australia.

The Indian coolie claimed a share of history hence power, that was eventually secured and cemented during and after the struggle for independence. Decolonization period, taking place between 1947 to 1967 pitted the then dominant minority of the country—the Franco-Mauritian community—against the dominant Hindu majority on the political scene with the former advocating an ethnic and “revivalist” conception of the nation while the latter favored an assimilationist form of the nation. The aspirations of the Indo-Mauritian came to later be framed around “le pérille Hindoue,” the Hindu peril [my translation], a contention generated by Noël Marrier D’Unienville, escalating the fear of an eventual annexation to India (Boudet 391).

What decolonization ultimately achieved in Mauritius’ third space is the politicization of ethnicity. The Mauritian transcultural process was, as delineated by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and transculturation*, a social space “where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in a highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 4). This grappling process works two ways, both are reciprocal and mutually constituting. D’Unienville’s discourse, as argued by Catherine Boudet, sought to bound ethnic minorities—Franco-Mauritians, Tamilians, Afro-Mauritians, and *gens de couleurs*—together in an attempt to ward off a ‘Mauritian Hindu hegemony.’ What *Coolitude* offers is a new reading of a neo-slave transformed into a neo-bourgeois capitalist, cultural and political threat. Torabully adds nuance to this problematic figure and writes:

The coolie was never the passive instrument of the colonialist imagination or the historian’s pen. The coolie was not forever condemned to be famine victim, dully toiling with the hoe, helpless to eradicate the burden of a momentary hunger. The indenture experience was not static, and the coolie’s adjustments and aspirations carried

a first-generation of migrants forward, beyond the indenture contract, towards the hopes of prosperity, ownership and return. For many years, however ‘coolie’ was a symbol of economic degradation and social submissiveness, and the descendants of coolies felt themselves to be equally stigmatized, exoticized and ostracized. The reclamation of the ‘coolie’ and the transformation of the indenture heritage is an ongoing process (Carter & Torabully 117).

Torabully’s focus is on the coolie who refused to be “the passive instrument of the colonialist’s imagination.” What is interesting here is Mauritius’s transition to independence. The Hindu Indo-Mauritian comes to obtain power by staying and working within the structures of indenture. The white colonialist master is eventually toppled and independence—instead of setting him free from the land—guarantees him control over the land, placing him at the top of a new hegemony. Can this be considered an act of ‘home-making?’ Identical to the Caribbean, the Indo-Mauritian is afflicted by the loss of India and the absence of home. In his book *Reworlding: The literature of the Indian Diaspora*, Emmanuel Nelson discusses the dilemma of the Indian indenture laborer vacillating between the desire for cultural separation and the desire to assimilate into the greater Creole society. However, “often unable to negotiate the dilemma,” he writes, “the diasporic Indians in the Caribbean remain perpetual travelers” (Nelson xiii). *Coolitude* reiterates this ideology of continuing exile. The Hindu occupies a cemented position in society as he is a member of a caste and village. He loses membership to these social institutions when he leaves India to emigrate to another part of the world. Crooke a British-Indian, as cited in Carter and Torabully, describes the Hindu as having “little migratory instinct,” painting a picture of the Indian migrant “dying in exile who would be forced to wander through the ages a starving,

suffering, malignant ghost, because his obsequies have not been duly performed” (Carter & Torabully 50).

In my thesis, I argue how the Mauritian infuses his experience of exile into the struggle for independence. This in turn creates a *mauricianisme* that refuses to ground and crystalize the nation; it infuses a sense of travel and movement in its making. The Mauritian nation was not birthed out of an urgent desire of homemaking. Having no indigenous population, the history of Mauritius commences with colonialism as the “fact of its origins” (Aumeerally 107), and is sustained through centuries Dutch, French, and British colonialism until its independence in 1968. The Indo, Afro, and Sino population did not topple the colonial master in an attempt of making Mauritius their home, independence was sought in an attempt of making social progress. For Torabully, the coolie “symbolizes in its broader definition, the possibility of building a composite identity to ease the pain and enrich culturally the lands in which he/she settled” (Carter & Torabully 144). The coolie and therefore, *Coolitude*, it would seem, does not seek to appease its guilt of crossing the *Kaala Pani*<sup>3</sup> through the act of homemaking or nation making. Torabully analyzes the crossing of the *Kaala Pani* as a symbolic trauma. The soul of the Hindu who leaves the land where the Ganges sits is cut off from the cycle of reincarnation and is thus damned to wander perpetually. *Coolitude* infuses in its theoretical craft the pain of exile and the symbolic trauma of being cut off from India and crossing the *Kaala Pani*, framing it around the aesthetics of transformation characterized by *vagabondage* (Carter 161). While *Marronnage* entailed death, either physical or social—the slave runs away from the plantation field and remains a perpetual criminal in hiding, Khal’s *vagabondage* posits the figure of the coolie as a

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<sup>3</sup> *Kaala Pani*, translating to dark (therefore impure) waters refers to a taboo: the prohibition of leaving the land where the Holy Ganges flows to cross the Ocean. Brinda Mehta writes “according to Hindu belief, the traversing of large expanses of water was associated with contamination and cultural defilement as it led to the dispersal of tradition, family, class and caste classifications and to the general loss of a “purified” Hindu essence” (Mehta 5).

*vagabond*. The *vagabond* is both a wanderer (of sorts) as well as a rebel. While the *vagabond* does, most of the time, have a home or premise to which he returns to, he is not attached to his dwelling. In *Made in Mauritius*, I analyze how the protagonist responds to the trauma of exile and displacement by putting on the garb of a vagabond—a wanderer. *Vagabondage* manifests choice, and hence deflects trauma by slowly relinquishing the symbolical and spiritual presence of the ancestral land, amplifying instead experiences of visiting a new land. *Coolitude* as a framework germinating from the experiences and body of the coolie, is therefore one of perpetual travel; it is non-static and cannot be captured and crystalized as either a moment in history or theory. *Coolitude* is a discourse of voyage, cutting through time, space, and histories; it is a discourse of the individual and hence of pluralities.

#### **1.4. Sea Logics and Counter-Terra Analysis**

Torabully discusses how it is “impossible to understand the essence of *Coolitude* without charting the coolie’s voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude” (Torabully 13). The sea, through *coolitude*, is joined to this analysis in the moment of a perennial deferral of the nation and its narration. Residence is sought in this moment of resistance, where discourse refuses to join chronology. My thesis weaves in its patchwork the theoretical movement and moment of “turning to the sea,” engaging with the “seaness of the sea” (Bystorm and Hofmeyr 3) opening up terra-nationalist discourse to an alternative. This maneuver generates an analytical recovery of a maritime space which, like the national territorial space, is militarized and politicized. *Coolitude* is deployed in the epistemological terrain of my thesis as a supplement to other mobile theoretical counterparts such as ethnicity, hybridity, creolization and belongingness. The sea

operates not as the apotheosis of rootlessness and freedom, but as possibilities of non-national, national and post-national spaces where aqueous fluidity and, economic and political territorial interests overlap.

Translated societies like Mauritius, according to Hall, have “multiple modalities” (Hall 16). They have, to borrow James Clifford’s term, a ‘traveling’ notion of culture. The cultural space of the nation, hence, comes to be framed by a narrative of movement. It urges transformation rather than roots or return. Routes and not roots, forge the history as well as the destiny of bodies inhabiting translated societies. To counter terra-analysis I explore not only oceanic routes but merge the vocabulary and rationale of the sea with terra-nationalist discourses. The term ‘ocean’ is forsaken, and the word sea is used as the subject of my analysis. In *Oceanic Routes: (Post-It) Notes on Hydrocolonialism*, Bystorm and Hofmeyr map out the implications of the word ‘ocean’ as both a term and a text. Both locate its registers in “imperial ambitions of labelling oceans” and express the need to “textualize the Indian Ocean and the post-humanist aspiration to understand the sea as an actant not reducible to its human appropriations” (Bystorm and Hofmeyr 1). Bystorm and Hofmeyr try to unclasp the sea from the hold of history and discourse, almost as if they want the sea to claim freedom and autonomy, I argue otherwise. To free the sea from its human appropriations also means freeing it from narratives of enslavement, movement and mixing, all of which are part of history. In my thesis, I analyze the sea and its expanse, as an illusion—a site of fantasy. It is an illusion of success and prosperity to the Chinese and Indian coolie who are promised gold<sup>4</sup> but are instead rewarded with a new form of enslavement. It is an illusion when the enslaved—his feet chained together; his body forced to

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<sup>4</sup> There is a popular floating myth about Indian indentured laborers who were coned into sailing to plantation colonies by English officials under the promise that they would find gold—if they dug hard enough—under rocks. More than a story of the Englishman conning the colored ‘Other,’ it is a story mocking the naivety and lack of intelligence of the Indian coolie.

cross the sea from East Africa—seeks to find freedom in the depths of the sea in the form of death, only to be robbed of the freedom to die as soon as the ship docks the land of the plantation colony. It is an illusion when this thesis attempts to turn towards the sea in an attempt to liberate the man from sovereign discourses of the land, only to recognize that the sea is as equally militarized and politicized.

When it comes to island landscapes however, the sea and the land are not two separate entities. The sea can always be seen from the land; it is part of the island's landscape. The land is birthed from the sea's craters, rocks carried by waves and joined together. When it comes to island nations, land *is* sea and sea *is* land. What I do in this thesis is thus an attempt at reconciling discourses of the sea and the land—allowing the sea to wash over the land. I attempt to move away from an analysis of Oceanic routes, as the enslaved body crossing the sea is dispossessed of the sea as soon as he or she sets foot on the land. So as not to crystalize the sea as either merely an aesthetic or a politicized space, it is important to understand that the “sea operates in different moments and for different actors as non-national, national, or post-national spaces, both aqueous and territorial” (Bystorm and Hofmeyr 2). ‘Sea-logics’ would in this thesis be an aqueous rationale that does not seek to overwrite militarization, history or the human. It seeks to push one to think like the sea—thoughts as waves.

To think like the sea, I argue, allows us to frame aesthetics and politics of belongingness as highly mobile theoretical approaches—in the same ways *Coolitude* does. Mauritians, owing to transculturation and their roots, have multiple belongingness. They do not, because they cannot, belong to only one spatiotemporal space—that of the Mauritian nation. Waters reads the journey of Mauritians categorized by a “state of rootlessness and nomadic mobility” (Waters 27), I argue otherwise. Mauritians’ multiple belongingness and allegiances every so often translates to a

vague feeling of not belonging anywhere, as it is entangled with temporalities of belongingness. To say that the Afro-Mauritian does not belong to Africa is false; to say that the Indo-Mauritian does not belong to India is false; to say that the Sino-Mauritian does not belong to China is as equally false. But to say that each—presently—belong to their respective ancestral lands would also be false. They physically belong to their respective ancestral land up to a certain point in history. But if one were to scrape temporalities, then they all still belong to their ancestral land—linguistic, religious, and cultural shards as evidence. Rootless, I argue, becomes a vocabulary via which the body of the Mauritian is described due to a missing link—that of the sea. The sea is read as what not only separates chunks of land floating on water, but also what discontinues and separates history. The sea should not be read as what links two nation states; the sea and the land should be read as a single landscape, only then can space reconcile with time. Only then can the Mauritian belong.

To escape from the holds of what Bragard Véronique calls ‘limbo consciousness’ in her book *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures*, I attempt to use the sea as a link and not as an actor which severs. Three things are at the crux of ‘limbo consciousness:’ a state of uncertainty, distancing from the homeland, and displacement (Bragard 18). Limbo consciousness thus occurs both on ship and on the plantation colony. It occurs in the body of the enslaved birth on Mauritian soil as soon as he takes awareness of his roots and routes. To be in a limbo-consciousness would mean that one is in vacuum. It implies that the existence of bodies that travel is next to non-existence; it implies that the soul of the migrant can never be whole, and that his or her journey is forever deferred in an oblivion. Being in ‘limbo,’ ‘between here and elsewhere,’ and even discourses around multiple—therefore different—identities, tally, I argue, with colonialist agendas. It means that the body of the ‘other’ can only

be one thing, and when it is subjected to forces of colonialism—displacement and mixing—it can only break under these circumstances. The pluralities of the Mauritian’s roots and memories can never converge into one. Bragard delineates the coolie as “the ‘one who is without the text of his/her voyage,’ the one who needs to write a story of his/her crossing or passage” (Bragard 40). The discourse of the nation, and hence bodies that inhabit the borders of the nation, have a rigid discourse. The particular cannot rewrite the pages of History. By turning to the sea and *Coolitude*, the sovereignty of the colonizer’s pen is subverted which in turn allows the Mauritian national to extend—and not rewrite—his/her story and history/histories.

## 2. Making Mauritius

### 2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, Amal Sewtohul's novel *Made in Mauritius* (2012) is used as a terrain of analysis. The novel set during Mauritius's pre-independence unrest, explores the island's journey to independence and its aftermath through its protagonist Laval—a Sino-Mauritian. He is born in Chinatown nestled in the capital of Mauritius—Port-Louis, to parents who emigrated from Hong-Kong in the year 1950. The novel harbors a second protagonist—more phantom than human—present throughout the text haunting Laval and the readers: a freight container. The yellow freight container, 'GWRJ1410751 TransAmerica Line' (Sewtohul 12) imprinted on its top left corner, is an absurd symbol North-Atlantic imperialism; a fragment of American hegemony stranded on an island of no more than 2,014 square kilometers in the Indian Ocean. The novel starts and ends with the freight container sailing the sea carrying cargo. Originally bought in Hong-Kong by Laval's father Lee Kim Chan, *le conteneur* ends up travelling from Hong-Kong to Mauritius, and during the course of the novel, to Australia. By the end of the novel, Feisal—Laval's friend—sets off with the container on a new journey. The freight container which has been on a journey prior to reaching Hong-Kong and being bought by Lee Kim Chan still sails the Ocean (with Feisal) by the end of Laval's journey after the latter's subsequent demise in Australia. The freight container is in perpetual movement and suggests that Laval's story is merely a strand of its history. It unsettles the rigidity of this text's narrative and invites readers to think towards politics of movement. The first section of this chapter examines the belongingness as experienced by Laval. It recognizes resistance in Laval's attempt of rooting

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<sup>5</sup> *Le conteneur*, translates to 'the (freight) container' in English. I choose to use the French version instead as it is present throughout the novel as a character, referred to as "le conteneur."

himself in a moving vessel—the container—hence subverting the politics of a rooted, mono and crystalized national belonging. In the second section, I analyze the Mauritian space, as created in Laval’s artwork as a post-national space. Interwoven throughout this analysis is selected poems from Khal Torabully’s work. The word ‘text’ after all, finds its roots in the Latin word *textus* meaning ‘tissue’ and the verb *texere* meaning ‘woven.’ To separate both would mean to stray away from the essence of texts.

## 2.2. Seeking Residence in Resistance

*Coolitude: m’enraciner. Je plie ma résistance en refus*

*de me faire offrande*

(Torabully, *Cale d’Étoiles-coolitude* 25)

Coolitude: to lay down my roots. I show my resistance in refusing

to make an offering of myself.

[Carter’s translation] (Carter 224).

In this section movement—through water and the freight container—is tracked and analyzed. Each movement, of either migration or for change, I argue, is a moment where resistance is also birthed. In *The Mauritian Novel: Fictions of Belonging*, Waters discusses the ways in which Mauritian literature articulates, “the universal *longing* to belong” as a “*problem* of belonging” [my emphasis] (Waters 1). For Waters, belonging is first, universal—desired and experienced by everyone, and second, inescapable and natural. To belong to a nation is to have your destiny be determined by it. It means to allow one’s life be framed and engineered by its laws and resources. Once born in a particular nation, its laws govern one’s existence until that

bond is severed—either by death, banishment, or by giving up one’s citizenship. We hence continue to belong, ruled by and under the surveillance of, a national jurisdiction even when our body is physically absent from the national space. Belonging, it would seem is just a polite euphemism for ownership. To belong to a nation, means that one is in the possession of a nation. The nation holds its citizens captive—bounded by authority—and turns the national subject into a hostage. The fear of punishment and banishment shadows the national subject like the sword of Damocles. To maintain sovereignty over the national subject, it is important that the latter only belongs to one nation—and one nation only. Multiple national allegiances endanger national authority, as banishment and exile cannot not entail the political death of a national subject. To function effectively, belonging has to be a simple two-way traffic between a nation and a national subject.

Beyond national belongingness, the human belongs to a family structure, cultures, a religion, a community and so forth. Hence, movement—via migration—works against the rationale of belonging as it unsettles the national subject nestled in habitus. Coolie migration uproots and inflicts trauma upon the psyche of the individual. It is therefore natural for the social individual to seek to resist the forces of migration. In a literal action, to deracinate the individual from his or her natural environment means to extract his or her roots from the soil so as to implant them in a foreign and possibly hostile soil. Opening this chapter, Torabully’s poem, highlights the conundrums of migration. He captures the moment of *enracinement*—implantation/rooting—and frames it within the discourse of resistance, refusal, and sacrifice. The choice of words here are significantly important. Torabully “*plie [sa] résistance en refus*” [folds/turns [his] resistance into refusal] [my translation]. There is in this moment an unwillingness to completely implant one’s roots in a foreign soil, wholly offering one’s body and

soul to the nation one is asked to belong to or assimilate in. There occurs in this moment, loss. Loss of an old homeland—its values and culture. The dilemma of migration and belonging is clearly articulated: it is primarily a clash between political and spiritual belonging. Politically, the national subject has to forego his or her motherland, completely implanting his or her roots in the country he or she comes to belong to. Spiritually, however, the motherland is never renounced. Even when the national subject can no longer inhabit his or her motherland physically, the motherland lives through his or her body in form of cultural habits and memory. The mother-form—motherland and mother tongue—continues to inhabit the national vessel albeit in fragments. To the migrant, abandoning his or her motherland entails the surrender and loss of his or her own being. The migrant hence resists this moment of spiritual and historical death by refusing to surrender to the migrated land as “*un offrande*” [sacrifice] [my translation]. Hence, there is always a moment of resistance in movement as migration sets off a cogwheel of loss (of the homeland), recuperation (of mother-tongue, values and cultural habits), and transformation (moment of mixing in a transcultural space). What I attempt of doing in this thesis is encouraging one to seek residence in this mo(ve)ment of resistance.

How is belonging articulated in Sewtohul’s *Made in Mauritius*? Upon meeting the father of his love interest Ayesha—an Indo-Mauritian, Laval is asked, “Hé, mais comment est-il arrivé ici, ce petit Chinois?” [Hey, but how did the little Chinese get here?] [my translation] (Sewtohul, 174). Laval is made to feel out of place, his alien hyper-visible body refusing to blend with the landscape. This hostile remark unsettles Laval, as he continues to hear the voice of Ayesha’s father ricocheting in his mind until adulthood. He observes:

*...la question qu'il avait posée [...] prit une étrange ampleur, comme un caillou lancé dans une mare, qui provoques des ondulations concentriques, et je me suis senti hypnotisé par cette question, qui semblait s'enfoncer toujours plus profondément en moi: 'Oui, c'est vrai, comment suis-je arrive ici? Pas seulement dans ce campement, mais dans ce pays, dans cette famille, dans ce monde? Qui suis-je, en fait?*

[...the question he had asked...took a strange magnitude, like ripples generated from a rock hitting a lake, I felt hypnotized by that question that kept sinking deeper and deeper in me: 'Yes, indeed, how did I get here? Not only to this bungalow, but to this country, to this family, in this world? Who am I?'] [my translation] (Sewtohul, 175).

In Sewtohul's novel, Lee Kim Chan, Laval's father is not Hong-Kong born. He undergoes a land voyage before even setting off to Mauritius. Born in Long Tang village in Guang Dong, he is illegally transferred to Hong Kong "dans une nuit sans lune" [in a moonless night] [my translation] (Sewtohul 13). He meets Laval's mother in Hong Kong, and they set off to Mauritius<sup>6</sup> when the latter is impregnated. Laval's belongingness is hence articulated as a conundrum. The question he is asked is unsettling: 'How did he get [here]?' This question immediately acknowledges movement as part of one's history and identity. Laval is not questioned on his Mauritian traits: his ability to speak both French and Mauritian Kreol, and his inability to speak his ancestral tongue, common occurrences in the Sino-Mauritian community. While Laval's body is immediately delineated as being foreign, this maneuver does not—in the same motion—establish the Indo-Mauritians body as being local. This statement is a subtle

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<sup>6</sup> Both set off to Mauritius as the Lee Kim Chan's uncle were amongst the first Chinese coolies to arrive. Chinese coolies were brought to Mauritius to work in plantation fields. This experimental migration was later discarded in favor of Indian coolies who were stereotyped as being more hardworking and less ambitious compared to the first wave of Chinese coolie migration.

acknowledgement of the fact that at the end of the day every Mauritian once belonged to another land and is therefore, foreign.

Laval's inner peace is shaken when he translates the question of Ayesha's father to an existentialist one. He moors his existence to national belonging, binding his history to the land he walks on. To be rooted means to stretch out one's roots in the soil, rendering one's body immobile which consequently means that movement and uprooting can be fatal. Roots—like ancestral lineage—hence expand vertically. In Laval's case however, due to migration his ancestral lineage does not dig the soil, rooting him in one place. Movement and memory, or rather, the memory of displacement (movement) of his family is one which “like ripples” are centrifugal. It is a force that ripples in an outward motion from the subject's center. This motion inhibits Laval's inability to root himself to one particular history, time, or place. The inability to root is so unsettling it probes the question “Who am I?” Roots, belonging, and being are hence articulated by Laval as mutually shaping and constituting. The absence of one element only results in incompleteness of the other two.

Belonging and existence are here intrinsically tied to one another. Does the inability to root, however, mean that one is out of place? In her book *The Politics of Belonging*, Yuval-Davis describes belonging as an emotional and ontological attachment about feeling “at home” (Yuval-Davis 12). Which probes the question, what indeed is home? Where is home? Is home fixed, or is it transient and travelling? Do we inhabit a home, or does ‘home’ vehicle in the depths of our bodies—capturing our psyche, crystalizing and grounding it in one particular moment? Upon asking his father about the night during which the latter decided to leave his country, Laval notes that “Il a toujours été un peu évasif sur son aventure cette nuit-là, peut-être parce que au fil des années il a dû se rendre compte qu'on ne quitte jamais entièrement le pays où on est né” [He had

always been evasive when questioned about his escapade of that particular night, certainly because as the years went by he must have realized that one never entirely leaves his or her country of birth] [my translation] (Sewtohul 20-21). Belonging is here, fragmentary. It is not a linear, porous, and uninterrupted phenomena. ‘Home,’ it would seem, is spiritual, which does not tally with the logics of attachment and rooting where both seek to ground the body in place. One’s emotional and spiritual attachment with ‘home’ inhabits the mind of the subject which perpetually travels with him or her. In common parlance however, home symbolizes something physical and immobile—a house, a nation, a community. Laval resists this form of belonging by claiming the freight container as his home, infusing life in the “*boîte en metal*” [box of steel] [my translation] (Sewtohul 250) turning it into a character—*le conteneur*.

Laval subverts the rationale of belonging not by resisting the act “*d’enracinement*” [of rooting] [my translation] (Torabully 25), but by rooting himself and attaching his being to a moving vessel.

*...partir est s’enraciner*

*dans une autre terre*

*Parler pour ne pas oublier*

*qu’est-ce sinon le vrai don des langues?*

(Torabully, *Cale d’Étoiles-coolitude*, 70)

[...to leave is to embed oneself

In another land

Speak so as not to forget

Is this not the real gift of language?]

[Carter's translation] (Carter 131).

For Torabully, movement and migration inherently entail two essential maneuvers: first comes the uprooting of oneself from one land, followed by an act of rooting oneself in the land of destination, then only can the journey in between be called migration. Without the double action of uprooting and rooting, migration is exile—perennial movement. Remembering the homeland or ancestral land, hence “speak[ing] so as not to forget” (Carter 131) is an essential part of migration—if one was to forget his or her home/ancestral land, then one's migration and voyage is erased. Laval hacks this logic by resisting the forces of terra-belongingness.

For Lee Kim Chan, Laval's father, the freight container was only a means to launch his business and hence, his life, in Mauritius. He loads the freight container with various “*brics-à-bracs*” (Sewtohul 224) intending to sell them on the island to make a living, hence escaping from the clasps of colonial servitude. In an extract where Kim Chan suggests getting rid of the container along with its *brics-à-bracs*, Laval protests:

*...il ne fallait pas se débarasser du conteneur et du stock, parce que...parce que c'était le conteneur. J'étais né dedans, j'avais grandi sous le regard des statuettes et des poupées, avais souvent passé un après-midi tranquille, loin des querelles de mes parents, roulé en boule dans une boîte en carton pleine de craies pour tableau noir. C'était ma matrice et mon monde tout à la fois.*

[...we should not be getting rid of the container and the supplies it contains, because...because it was *le conteneur*<sup>7</sup>. I was born in it, I grew up under the watch of status and dolls, and had often spent quiet afternoons, away from my parents' quarrels, curled in ball, hiding in a carton box containing chalk to be used on blackboards. It was my matrix and my entire world, all at once] [my translation] (Sewtohul 109).

Laval does not associate his birth to a country or to a body—that of his mother—he instead associates his birth to a perennially moving vessel. *Le conteneur* operates in Laval's psyche as both phantasy and fantasy<sup>8</sup>. It a womb-space that Laval never or rather, refuses to, leave. The womb space of the container is for the protagonist a place of refuge and safety. He however, does not designate *le conteneur* as being his nor does he claim ownership over it in the same ways one would claim a parent to be his or her's. *Le conteneur* is a God-like figure and vessel that creates, protects, and shelters, but which also—like God—transcends human bonds and is not bound by attachments, space or time. Laval shares this womb-space with various “*brics-à-bracs*” that watch over him, witnessing his daily life like sacred totems. *Le conteneur* transcends time and space—its history timeless and irretraceable. Its existence stretches beyond Laval's existence, continuing its journey even after Laval's passing. When nearing his demise in Australia, Laval mutters, “*Je veux retourner dans le conteneur. C'est la seule chose qui me reste. Rien de moi restera dans ce fichu pays. Même mon nom...*” [I want to return to the container. It's the only thing I have left. Nothing of me is going to remain behind in this god forsaken country. Not even my name...] [my translation] (Sewtohul 270). Ironically, the freight

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<sup>7</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>8</sup> I use phantasy here—as described in Klein's 'Unconscious Phantasy—' to denote unconscious mental imaginations, as opposed to fantasy which is a conscious phantasy (Klein, 4).

container, which is forever in movement, never grounded in one place, is the only constant of Laval's life. Having lost his only son after a divorce, Laval finds it eerie that he is not going to leave an imprint behind, neither his name, nor a lineage—no legacy of any sorts. Left to die without the hope of having lineage, he feels lost, in and to, history and hence desires the return to a mother-space; he seeks a return to the womb.

Laval's resistance to belonging is passive. He refuses to adhere to the rules of national and hence, terra-belongingness. He does not seem to be reliant on language and speech to ease the pain of migration as his journey—from Mauritius to Australia—does not involve the sacrifice of a 'home.' His home, the container, is both spiritual and physical and it does not crumble before the forces of movement. Unlike his parents, he never has had to abandon his 'home,' and hence is not uprooted. As a direct consequence however, it also means that he is never rooted. Laval seeks residence in continuous motion and unsettles the logics of belonging. For Laval, “[c]ette boîte en métal faisait partie de moi depuis si longtemps, avait été pendant toute ma vie le symbole de ma pauvreté, de mon manque de racines...” [this steel box had been part of me for so long, it has been the symbol of my poverty and lack of roots throughout my life] [my translation] (Sewtohul 251). The freight container is here analogous to the journey of the enslaved and coolies—both Indian and Chinese. Like a slave ship, it travels the sea. Like a slave ship, it transports objects and/as bodies. Like a slave ship, it is merely a vessel. Like the Indian coolie, Laval parents dreamt of a plentiful future in Mauritius, and like the Indian coolie, they were met with disappointment and poverty. And like the slave ship, the freight container loses its essence without a voyage and perennial movement. In his book *Queer nations: marginal sexualities in the Maghreb* Jarrod Hayes discusses the problematic nature of roots and their relationship with nationalist discourses. He states “[w]hen post-independence official discourses attempt to fix a

single source of national identity and legislate a people's roots, they also marginalize, exclude, and even exterminate those who cannot trace their history to these roots in order to consolidate the power of the new elite" (Hayes 25). In the case of Mauritius, however, those who cannot trace back their roots to a particular caste, village or family are not erased. On the contrary, the inability to trace their roots back to their ancestral land grants them the possibility of making Mauritius their homeland as they can no longer swear allegiance to another country, its language, landscape or culture. India for the Indo-Mauritian, and Africa for the Afro-Mauritian, become alien landscapes. Forgetting and amnesia are in this case a blessing. What is often articulated as trauma becomes, in the case of Mauritius, a gift. Laval, unlike most of the Mauritian population, can trace back his roots. His story is not erased as his father lives to tell the tale of his village and voyage. It is ironically his ability to remember, and therefore live, the journey of his parents through words and mementos—the freight container and *brics-à-bracs* that his father preserves—that pushes Laval to experience a “manques de raciness” [lack of roots] [my translation].

Laval resists the urge of planting his roots in a national identity by choosing not to forget. Laval's *conteneur* is filled with objects that were bought in China as well as items belonging to the landscape of Mauritius—like the picture of *Chacha* Ramgoolam<sup>9</sup> he hangs above his bed frame. These items accompany him to Australia making it incapable of forgetting his family's journey. Bragard terms the dilemma of remembering displacement as ‘rupture.’ She writes, “imaginary voyages connect with crucial questions about the sense of the past, which narrators and authors wish to both remember and forget...what do I want to forget? How much do I want to remember? What do I want to keep?” (Bragard 84). Laval does not experience rupture as

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<sup>9</sup> Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, father of the Mauritian nation and first Prime Minister of Mauritius, also affectionately referred to as ‘*Chacha*—’ meaning paternal uncle in Hindi.

described by Bragard insofar that the former does not struggle to remember shards of memory from a distant past. Rupture is ambivalent—it is shame and delight and, regret and privilege, all at once. Rupture can hence be reparative in trauma literature when authors chose to forget a piece of history consequently making space to etch a new page in the book of History. To seek residence in resistance is to make rupture one’s domicile, to resist the urge of remembering everything. Laval becomes fixated on the idea of remembering everything in attempt of compensating for his ‘lack of roots.’ Memories, stories and relics haunt him, and he in turn inhabits the haunted space of *le conteneur*. In a night “*agités par des pensées confuses qui s’entre-choquaient dans [sa] tête*” [disturbed by bewildering ideas clashing in [his] head] [my translation], Laval starts crafting his art (Sewtohul 223). His artwork which he names ‘Made in Mauritius,’ is an attempt at representing, therefore re-presenting, his *mauricianisme*. Analogous to Laval’s attempt at re-presenting and re-writing his national belonging is Torabully’s poem reading:

Je suis braconnier

j’écris l’histoire d’arracheurs de pages  
de courtiers marrons apposant le codicille  
de ma reddition. . .

(Torabully, Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies, 39)

I am a poacher  
I write the history of those who tore its pages  
Of runaway clerks fixing the seal  
On my surrender. . .

[Carter’s translation] (Carter 120).

Like Laval, Torabully expresses the desire to re-write the pages of history by articulating individual experiences of indenture. Like Laval, he is a '*braconnier*', he chases and hunts fragments of memories, assembling—and binding them together—like a *bricoleur*.

The overwhelming desire to anchor oneself to Mauritius only paradoxically reveals the uprooted-ness and displacement of the first generation. Belonging to Mauritius hence means that one has to surrender to the forces of rupture and subsist in it. And in subsisting, the inscriber *makes* the nation. By choosing to resist belonging and reside in rupture, Torabully and Sewtohul choose to inhabit a post-national site. Laval is presented as a *vagabond*, which is both a wanderer and a rebel. He is a wanderer as he embarks on a never-ending journey and a rebel as he resists the urge to elect domicile in a land. The wanderer does not seek to “fend off exile” (Said 176) by choosing to nestle his body in a community. Like Torabully who presents the act of writing the missing pages of history as a continuous process, the wanderer seeks to be in continuous movement. The journey of the wanderer is self-inflicted hence, he is able to take control of his destiny in the face of exile following the loss of his home and ancestral land. Laval refuses to root himself in fear that the trauma of displacement will overwhelm him. His journey is a self-inflicted wound—a fresher cut deflecting his attention from an old colonial and imperial wound. Laval wears the garb of a *braconnier*, seizing authority of his narrative by choosing not to stay in Mauritius. Unable to formulate an answer to, and frustrated by, Ayesha’s father’s question—'how did the little Chinese get here?'—he undertakes a journey so that like his father, he too, has a story to tell and an answer to give. But like his father, Laval too, never fully leaves his homeland. The latter haunts him, inhabits him, pushes him to create. In Australia, Laval re-crafts

his artwork while living in *le conteneur*. In the next section I analyze how *le conteneur* becomes a site of the post-national, allowing Mauritius to exist beyond its terra-national borders.

### 2.3. Bricolage Nationalism

In ‘National narratives, post-national narrations,’ Donald Pease examines how post-national narratives violate the timelessness of national narratives. He analyzes how the transition to a national community is achieved by national narratives presenting a “scene of emancipation wherein a captive people liberated themselves from tyrannical power” which in turn results in an “utterly equal” and “universally abstract” national subject stripped of any particularity (Pease 4). Post-national narratives debunk the myth of timelessness, in and of, national narratives by making visible “the incoherence, contingency and transitoriness of national narratives” (Ravi 37) revealing a paradoxical space. In an extract where Laval’s freight container is used as the stage on which the flag ceremony takes place, flagpole is erected, puncturing a hole in the container. Laval, Ayesha and Feisal sneak into the container, seeking to witness the celebration of independence from ‘down below.’ The act of the flagpole puncturing a hole in Laval’s container a phallic transgression—resembling rape—violating Laval’s intimate space of refuge. The ceremony is framed as a *banale* event where ‘magic fails to operate.’ Laval, Ayesha and Feisal stay put inside the container, waiting for the magic of independence to take effect, “mais rien ne se passait en nous, nous ne sentions aucun pouvoir magique descendre le long du poteau et se glisser dans nos veines” [ but nothing was happening to [them], [they] could not feel any kind of magical powers trickling down the pole infusing magic into [their] veins] [my translation] (Sewtohul 125). The symbolic establishment of the Mauritian nation is stripped of all its glory and importance. No narrative of liberation is accommodated in its germination and it fails to bind

the Mauritian population together in a universal mono-narrative. National narrative is not weaved into a coherent ideology, and the Mauritian is left lacking seeking—like Laval—to create ‘magic’ they failed to experience.

In her short Novel *Les Rochers de Poudres d’Or* [The Rocks of Poudre d’Or] [my translation], Nathacha Appanah describes how the coolie was allowed to bring with him personal belongings, “des sacs avec plein de trucs inutiles dedans” [bags filled with unnecessary stuff] [my translation] (Appanah 214). Coolies usually brought holy scriptures—the Bhagavat Gita, the Ramayana, and the Quran—idols, and utensils on their journey to the island, which allowed them to hold on to and propagate ancestral beliefs and religion in their respective communities. Analogous to the coolies’ attempts of hoarding “des trucs inutiles” [unnecessary stuff] in their bags, is Laval’s urge to treasure the freight container’s *bric-à-brac*—unessential items—refusing to let go of them. Torabully, through his poetry, and Sewtohul through the protagonist of his novel, embark in a process of reconstituting cultural memory by making “*des trucs inutiles*” and “*des bric-à-brac*” the pivot of their literary craft.

Laval, however, does not merely treasure “*les bric-à-brac*,” he transforms them into an artwork, actively and continuously re-defining the cultural meaning of items that are brought from one’s ancestral land. Sewtohul draws a parallel between Mauritian bodies and unwanted and non-essential items that fill Laval’s container. He writes,

*Mon père s’était cru très malin de venir liquider son stock de vielleries au Champ-de-Mars, ces rejets devant se trouver à cet endroit précis... Parce que ces rejets, c’était le peuple mauricien. Car qu’étions nous d’autre que des ratés de la grande usine de l’histoire? ... Nous étions les rebuts de l’humanité. . .*

[My father thought it would be clever to get rid of the junk sitting in the container at Champ-de-Mars. The rejected [items] had to be gathered at one particular place...Because those who were rejected are the Mauritian population. What were we but failed products of History? ...we were the scraps of humanity...] [my translation] (Sewtohul 126).

Muritians are delineated as being mere castoffs operating in the outskirts of society, history and geography. The Mauritian is thrice rejected. First from the ancestral land, second from the grandeur of History's narration, and third from the geographical visibility—its floating body of rocks barely visible on a map. Laval undertakes the responsibility of representing Mauritius and Mauritians in his artwork effectively re-presenting both. Mauritians are not crystalized as rejects in his artwork 'Made in Mauritius.' Rather, the latter becomes an extension, and a physical manifestation of his Mauritian identity which he can craft however he wishes, and re-craft whenever he desires. Throughout the novel, Laval rearranges his artwork re-creating different crafts multiple time. Mauritius and Mauritians, as constructed by Laval, hence undergo perennial change. For the latter, a national Mauritian identity—like his *conteneur*—is not a rooted sentiment or edifice, it is in constant flux. His artwork is transformed into a post-national site that is erected on "*du bric-à-bracs*."

In an extract where Laval is seen re-crafting his artwork, Sewtohul writes,

*...J'ai dessiné sur le sol une araignée. Autour d'elle, j'ai écrit les mots de Feisal: 'Ma boîte, ma vie, la vie d'un homme en boîte.' Cette araignée, me suis-je dit, c'est l'île tapie dans son coin de l'océan Indien. Sur elle j'ai empilé des boîtes en cartons et des*

*sacs en toile ... Près de son sommet, j'ai placé dos à dos la photo de chacha et celle du mariage de mes parents.*

[I drew a spider on the ground. Around it, I wrote Feisal's words 'My box, my life, the life of a man inside a box.' I told myself that this spider is our island tucked in a corner of the Indian Ocean. I stacked cardboard boxes and canvas bags on it...Near the summit, I placed a picture of parents and Chacha back to back.] [My translation] (Sewtohul 223).

Laval, struck by Feisal's words, writes down the words '*la vie d'un homme en boîte*,' [the life of a man in a box] [my translation], a statement which becomes the foundation of his craft. At this point, Laval had just finished his A-levels. The box in which he is trapped is not merely evocative of his container, but strongly hints at the island itself being a box, a trap, a prison. Mauritius is depicted as a prison where the young Mauritian body is trapped in stagnancy within the grounds of a floating island. In *Lenpas Flanbwayan*, Françoise Lionnet discusses the state of *insular regions*—isolated islands like Mauritius, that are dislocated from the reality of the global and metropolitan cities, thus experiencing a slow social progress (Virasawmy ix). In this extract, Laval replicates the insularity of Mauritius by placing it '*dans son coin de l'océan Indien*' [in a corner of the Indian Ocean] [my translation]. The island is first, isolated in the margins of the Indian Ocean and second, limited; it starts and ends with the artwork. Insularity of identity, however, is challenged as Laval becomes an active agent, weaving artefacts, unsold goods, and pictures together like a spider.

The spider drawn on the floor becomes a metaphor of Laval's agency: his ability to actively weave otherwise passive objects together in a narrative. Laval attributes meaning and purpose to

objects by using them to represent Mauritius, his ideas, and emotions. He thus becomes at the centre of creation and consequently at the centre of his craft which represents Mauritius. Unlike the episode where he remains in the container along with Ayesha and Feisal, waiting for the magic of Independence Day to take effect on them here, Laval himself becomes a vessel of Mauritian-hood. By placing the wedding picture of his parents next to *Chacha's* picture, Laval fuses the particularity of his existence with the history of the island's independence. He starts making sense of his Mauritian identity while simultaneously constructing it within the backdrop of his personal experiences, through the negotiation of the container's artefacts that he strings together in a narrative. The 'magic' of feeling Mauritian is therefore something which is in constant action, and not something pre-determined and readily available to national bodies inhabiting the island.

At the heart of the construction of identity is negotiation. Laval re-designs his craft multiple times. He states,

*Des idées me venaient à l'esprit à mesure que je m'activais et, trouvant l'installation trop statique, j'ai alors vidé les boîtes ...J'ai fabriqué tout cela très vite, avec fébrilité, comme hypnotisé par les idées bizarres qui me venait à l'esprit, et je murmurais à la façon d'un mantra: 'Au début du monde il y eut mon père et ma mère. Puis vint le bric-à-brac. Et je fais partie de ce bric-à-brac.*

[Ideas were coming to mind as I was crafting, and upon realizing that the craft was too fixed, I emptied the boxes...I fabricated all of this very quickly overtaken by excitement, as if hypnotized by bizarre ideas that were coming to mind murmuring 'At

the beginning of the world there was my mother and my father. Then came the “*bric-à-bracs*.” And I belong to this “*bric-à-bracs*.”] [My translation] (Sewtohul 223-224).

Laval does not logically assemble objects or artefacts after careful thinking. There is no method, planning or analysis behind the making of his craft. Signs are haphazardly assembled into a bigger surrealist picture by Laval, fabricating his craft like a bricoleur. In *The Savage Mind*, Levi Strauss juxtaposes the bricoleur who is the ‘savage mind,’ to the engineer, who is scientific in his approaches and rationale. The bricoleur uses whichever tools he has at hand, transforming them into structure which does not have any coherence. The structures are thus improvised, operating as an ad hoc response to society. While Laval is not a non-literate and non-technical mind, he still opts to produce a craft which operates as an ad-hoc response to the society he is in. His impromptu performance in the making of his impromptu craft signals that Laval cannot express his vision of Mauritius within the logical structures of either societal organisation or national discourse. He has to be subversive in the ways in which he re-presents Mauritius and generates his Mauritian-hood. Being part of the ‘*bric-à-brac*’ gives Laval, as a *bricoleur*, the power to examine, question, erase, and re-arrange his vision of Mauritius. By qualifying himself as a *bric-à-brac*, Laval thus positions himself in the margins of the Mauritian society. His craft, however, gives him the opportunity to position himself at the centre of representation, redefining the dynamics of power in the Mauritian society.

‘*Bric-à-brac*’ also suggests an unfinished—as opposed to an incomplete product, or an unfinished thought. Hence, when Laval qualifies himself as being part of the *bric-à-brac* Mauritian generation, he is positioning himself as somebody whose identity is yet to be defined. It opens the doors to endless possibilities of re-evaluation, negotiation and re-definition of the

self in different circumstances. In Australia, the craft undergoes a complete transformation. The change in geographical setting pushes both Feisal and Laval to re-arrange the craft, erasing some elements (pictures of *Chacha* and his parents) while simultaneously adding new elements. The craft thus has the power to accommodate new experiences as it remains a *bric-à-brac*. The artwork is at no point frozen in time or space; it instead keeps navigating spaces with Laval, mutating to accommodate new experiences. The fragile floating island is discarded so as to accommodate an exotic representation of the island- orange letters against the backdrop the tropical sea, matching the perspective of the Westerner. Laval's Mauritian identity thus functions in parallel to the spatio-temporality of his being. It is malleable- accommodating and negotiating experiences changing in response to circumstances.

Laval's artwork as a site of the post-national forever defers the 'making' of Mauritius through constant negotiation and evaluation of what it means to be Mauritian and what Mauritius is to him. Mauritius—as crafted inside the freight container—is never 'made,' and is catapulted into a perpetual cycle of making. There is a striking parallel between readers and pre-pubescent Ayesha, Feisal and Laval hiding inside the freight container during Independence Day. All wait for the magic of independence, or rather, the magic of a crystalized national edifice to unfold, but are met with nothing but deferral. Movement here does not only refer to physical movement or displacement, but also means that one needs to resist the stagnancy of timelessness. In Laval's post-national site, to be a Mauritian is to postpone belonging to either a nation or a community. The Mauritian nation is transformed into a soul—spectral and free-floating—therefore allowing another model of belonging to exist, that of individual belonging. Laval's nomadism and vagabondage are not to be confused with statelessness. Making Mauritius and hence,

becoming Mauritian, is to ground oneself not in the universality of belonging, but in the common memory of displacement and ongoing *vagabondage*.

### 3. Sea and Water in/as Theory

#### 3.1. Introduction

So far, belonging, exile, resistance, perpetual movement and, bricolage have been analyzed as elements that work against the rationale of a crystalized nation hence unsettling the dynamics of national belonging. In this chapter, I engage with the “seaness of the sea” not by restricting analysis strictly to the sea, sea-voyages or displacement, but by diving in an aqueous thinking. To think like the sea means to wash over rocks—over crystallized national edifices—and thinking with vocabularies of the sea and water. Torabully’s *Coolitude* “n’est pas une pierre non plus, elle est corail” [is not a rock either, she is coral] [my translation] (Torabully 82). A rock is a foundation upon which edifices are build. Rocks are markers of strength, Earth’s crust on which nations are conquered, lands stolen, and nations built. The island too, is merely a floating volcanic rock seized by humans to build a nation. Rocks as land are unmovable and stagnant, but their history is conjured as if it was estranged from the sea. Rocks are in my thesis, colonial—a symbol of conquering and ruling. Corals on the other hand, while hard, have been softened by waves that wash over them. They are flowing and refuse to be rooted or grounded. Corals invite waves to take them on a journey carrying them to an unknown shore. It is in this way, vulnerable—seeking and inviting change. The sea is loud, it hurls and is turbulent, yet the coral remains unheard and forgotten. The sea threatens with its vastness and depth, but still remains a space where corals thrive. The coral dares the sea to engulf her in its waves slowly transforming her. While rocks birth from violent eruptions, the forces of nature turning it solid from its liquid state, corals are full of life. Corals inhabit life and are hence full of transformative potential. *Made in Mauritius*, opens with a voyage—the parents of the protagonist sailing the Indian Ocean with a freight container migrating from Hong Kong to Mauritius and ends with yet another

voyage—Feisal leaving Australia with Laval’s *conteneur*. Movement, voyages, Laval’s container, the diaspora, and displacement are all connected by a common element—water. In the next section of this chapter, I immerse my analysis in an aqueous vocabulary, in the same ways Torabully presents his *coolitude* through and as metaphor of the coral.

### 3.2. Water and/as the City

In his poem ‘Tears of Exile,’ Khal Torabully pens down the throes of those who sail the sea, by drawing an analogy between sea and tears. He writes:

For the commemoration of lost dreams  
The ship is preceded by unseasoned tears.  
It will deliver its cargo  
Of bodies through a soft incision of the horizon  
Deep in the hold, which eyes  
Can unload despair  
Without leaking water everywhere?

(Torabully, *Cale d’Étoiles-coolitude*, 51).

The sea is turned into a witness of an endless traffic of goods and people, and is transformed into a pool of tears, shed by those on ships embarking on a journey towards exploitation and slavery. In this poem, Torabully presents water in its different forms serving different purposes. Water is firstly a vessel carrying bodies and cargo—items meant to be exploited, used and sold. Secondly, water is also tears shed by those torn by the trauma of displacement. Thirdly, water is also

binding, as it captures tears shed bodies on the ship as it flows into the sea, engulfing the history and pain of the displaced body. Water is also memory, it not only witnesses, but also retains traces—hence memory—of substances previously dissolved in it. Water also acts as a graveyard to those who never make it to the shore, those taken away by maladies, and those who preferred death, therefore liberation, to shackles. The ship also “preceded by unseasoned tears” is also a wake. Wakes are wounds inflicted by ships on the surface of the ocean, splitting and separating the body of the sea into two flows by the symbolic weight of the journey of those being displaced. The sea—a moving body—is further disturbed when it carries another moving body—a ship—wakes being produced as signs of protest. Torabully’s poetry starts with unthreatening tears which trickle into a turbulent downstream fusing with the ship’s wake, to finally explode in frenzy from the eye of the migrant “leaking water everywhere.” Water is here, plural—it is not delineated as a single unifying and universal hydro-body. When unsettled by the disruptive forces of displacement—when the colonial slave ship vehicles the sea—water revolts. Water, unlike land which awaits the human to be etched in History, is unconquered. It unbinds the individual from the land, offering him or her to escape the captivity of national borders. Water is transformative and *transportive* potential.

The incipit of *Made in Mauritius* assaults readers with ambivalence. It opens with Laval’s insecurities, anxieties, and uncertainties. “Laval n’avait jamais été sûr de rien...il ne se souvenait que d’une chose, c’était du tapotement de la pluie sur le conteneur” [Laval had never been certain about anything...the only thing he remembered was the sound of rain hitting the roof of the freight container] [my translation] (Sewtohul 11). Unmenacing rain, soon overwhelms Laval, plunging him in a phantasmagoric frenzy where he imagines the capital of Mauritius becoming

flooded, submerging the land, uprooting the freight container from the soil in a sweeping gesture. Sewtohul writes,

...il entendait sa mère laver avec violence les assiettes, dans la cuvette plastique—et il imaginait toujours que le niveau de l’océan s’élevait, à cause de la pluie, de sorte qu’elle gringnotait maintenant le front de la mer, entrant dans les boutiques de chinatown...et bientôt les bateaux de pêche taïwanais, qui flottaient juste devant le front de mer se détachaient mystérieusement de leurs ancres et se mettaient à naviguer entre les rues du centre de Port Louis...

[he could hear his mother doing the dishes with anger and vehemence—and would always imagine the sea levels rising because of the rain, overflowing the sea front and flooding the shops in Chinatown...and soon Taiwanese fishing boats, formerly anchored to the shore, mysteriously detached themselves from their anchors and sailing the streets of downtown Port Louis] [my translation] (Sewtohul 11).

Upon hearing his parents quarrel, Laval hides in a corner of the container and stays there until morning. His mother’s aggressivity while doing the dishes unsettles him. He hears water hitting the dishes, and as if hypnotized by the sound, he starts imagining the sea engulfing the city. The sea is part of the landscape of Chinatown from where one can always see the port, the dock and boats. The sea is ever present but is also menacing—it invades the city submerging the landscape, its histories and memories. While it might seem as though Laval draws a parallel between his mother’s fury and the wrath of the sea, upon closer analysis, it can be understood that in the phantasmagoric landscape of Laval, the sea rescues him from his parent’s argument by

flooding the city. The flood temporarily suspends reality as it halts everyone in their course of action. In an act of fury—like a mother rescuing her child—the sea reclaims the land by damaging the national landscape.

In this phantasmagoric phantasy, Laval and his family remain unscathed as the container resists the forces of the sea. Unlike buildings destroyed when hit by the sweeping forces of waves, the container resists damage by allowing itself to be carried away by the sea. It resists by not resisting—an act of surrender that grants and guarantees safety to Laval and his family. Soon his dream starts fading in a blur, and he has “une dernière vision” [one last vision] [my translation], “ils étaient en haute mer, remorqués par un des bateaux de pêche taiwanais” [they were in high seas, being towed by one of the Taiwanese fishing boats] [my translation] (Sewtohul 13). Laval’s impulse and pull towards movement is intrinsically linked to water. Water splashing on dishes is what first triggers fantasy. Laval does not seek to travel on land, rather, water is transformed as the ultimate escape route that allows Laval’s roots to be mobile and walking. The freight container is hence always in interaction with water—rain, sea or rivers, as though it loses its essence as a moving vessel without water. Without water, the freight container is only a steel box. Laval too, like the freight container, needs water and seeks to mobile. Water thus operates as a womb space. When a fetus is in the womb, it is essentially located within the amniotic sac surrounded by amniotic fluid—water. The fetus is both fed, protected so that it can grow, live, and be extracted into the world. Water operates in the same way in Laval’s imagination and fantasies. It shelters and protects Laval from the trauma of displacement, by making movement habitual.

In another extract, where Feisal and Laval walk along the shoreline, the latter documents:

*...l'air poissonneux, la mer qui sentait le goudron et le poisson sale, une atmosphère d'ennui et de délabrement écrasant, comme si, le soir c'était toute la ville qui devenait une de ces filles de port, qui attendent toute leur vie le retour de ce marin étranger qui leur a fait un enfant.*

[...the air smelled like fish, and the sea smelled like tar and stockfish, an atmosphere of boredom and overwhelming decay, as if during nighttime the entire city transformed into the harbor girls forever waiting for the foreign sailor who abandoned them with a child] [my translation] (Sewtohul 84).

The city is portrayed as a lover longing to be reunited with the sea, their discourses and histories fusing into one. The soul of city seeks to escape its attachment to the land so as to acquire the freedom that the sea has but fails to do so. For it has been abandoned with a child that it cannot leave behind. The land longs for the sea, the land longs to be set free from national authority. Laval's phantasmagoric episodes are what Bhabha terms as 'dissemi/nation,' counter narratives that continuously evoke and erase the nation's totalizing boundaries (Bhabha 300). In Bhabha's framework, the nation's totalizing boundaries can only be erased through continual displacement of the national subject. The past—History—is transformed into the shadow of the present “vacillating between two temporalities,” hence disrupting the process of identity that is constructed via historical sedimentation (Bhabha 304). Laval, however, is able to erase the nation's totalizing boundaries by inviting the sea to reclaim the land. *Made in Mauritius* forgoes the epistemological framework of double temporalities and chooses instead to work with oceanic echoes. The memory of the sea, which is associated with fear, uncertainties, tears, death and abandon, is re-worked into an active site of (oceanic)memory that binds together the history

of the coolie, the enslaved, and those who sought a better life by engaging in trade (like Laval's parents). The oceanic terrain is transformed into a collective memory, water entwining History—hence destiny—together. In Mauritius, the period of pre-independence decolonization was only able to achieve the politicization of ethnicity owing to “*l'inexistence d'un registre commun de mémoire*” [the inexistence of a common register of memory] (Boudet 395).

Habitually excluded from the nation and its narration, the sea hence becomes a site where universality can be conjured. Through the imaginary, reconciles the site of theoretical equality and practical inequality. The sea, its treasures, its memory, its histories, and its poetic potential can be seized by anyone. It invites erasure through fabrication. In an extract where Laval is asked to write an essay on a day at the seaside, the latter reflects:

*<<Une journée à la plage>>. Nous tous, à l'école, apprenions cette rédaction, qui commençait par <<C'est dimanche, le soleil brille dans le ciel tout bleu>>, puis les enfants normaux entraient dans la voiture de papa, et passaient une journée agréable à la plage, à nager et à jouer au badminton, et ils retournaient à la maison <<fatigués mais contents>>. Même Samir, notre ami, le petit garçon de la rade de Port-Louis qui était toujours sur l'eau mais jamais été à la plage, la connaissait par cœur, et tous les autres enfants aussi, c'était comme une sorte d'hymne national des enfants mauriciens, et parfois je le récite encore, le soir, pour m'endormir.*

[“A day at the seaside.” Everyone at school would learn this essay that always begun with “It’s Sunday, the sun is shining in the blue sky,” and children who had a normal childhood would travel in their father’s car and would spend a wonderful day at the seaside swimming and playing badminton, and would return home “tired but happy.”]

Even Samir, our friend, the little harbor boy of Port-Louis who spent all his time on water, but never at the seaside knew this essay by hear. It was like the national anthem of Mauritian children, and I, too, would sometimes recite it at night as it helped me fall asleep] [My translation] (Sewtohul 202).

The first memory of the sea<sup>10</sup> and the seaside as part of the children's imaginary landscape is thus one of escape—escaping from the routine of life to enjoy 'a day at the seaside.' This extract is a ridicule of the then poverty-stricken migrant Mauritian population—most of them not owning cars and unable to spend Sundays, leisurely, at the seaside. The seaside—the shore—where land meets sea is delineated as an unattainable utopic fantasy. No Mauritian ever experiences the picture-perfect day at the seaside that they are made to write in their early schooling days. Water and the harbor make up the daily reality of the nation while the seaside functions as a discourse manufacturing a collective memory that is never experienced by most Mauritian children. The liminal space of the seaside and its imaginary landscape bind the Mauritian child in a dream that promises bliss—Eden on earth, as if preventing the Mauritian from the crossing the seas to seek happiness in foreign lands. The national body is held captive—like a hostage—within national border, his mind equally captive—a prisoner of myths. Amal Sewtohul erases the space of the seaside and its mythical forces to give space to the sea, freeing Laval from the shackles of the nation's physical borders. Sewtohul's literary manoeuvre is one which is simple—he, at no point, writes-back or overwrites colonial and nationalist discourses. Rather than actively seeking alterity, he amplifies the presence of the sea, unleashing the creative

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<sup>10</sup> 'A day at the seaside,' is an essay every Mauritian knows and has written at some point during the course of his or her early schooling. The same essay would be written with different variations, but the main outline was always uniform.

potential of water which cannot but change the landscape—both imaginary and real, present and future—it is in contact with.

## 4. Conclusion

What I have sought to achieve in this thesis is an attempt to read the logics and edifice of national belonging and discourse under the aegis of movement. Crystallization of discourses, the nation, and discourses on the nation, are analyzed as being antithetical to the highly mobile human body. Land is transformed into the primary physical manifestation of the spiritual nation by erecting borders while the landscape of the sea is turned invisible. The nation, through the immobile land, achieves authority over national bodies by making rootedness the *sine qua non* of their existence. Once born within the borders of a land, the individual is condemned to spend his days trapped within national borders. If one dares to extend his or her existence and roots beyond the boundaries of the nation he or she is struck with ambivalence, trauma, and in some cases, death. Movement entails the death of the national subject. It is slow and gradual, first striking the spirit then the body. In this thesis, I retrieve mobility through theories in and around exile, *Creolité*, *Coolitude*, and the sea, freeing the national subject from the shackles of the nation and terra-analysis.

In the first chapter, I unpacked the term nation and situating it under the aegis of movement by stringing to theories that collide on the Mauritian landscape. I explored mobility as being the start of the journey of the Mauritian subject, birthed within the conundrums of exile. I analyzed terms such *Coolitude*, *Creolité* and *Indianité*, following a singular rope—that of perpetual travel. The mechanics of movement and exile buried in the intricacies of these theories are brought to the surface of my thesis's epistemological terrain so as to allow a consequent merging with theories in and around the sea. *Coolitude* is situated at the conception of my thesis and argument, as the Indo-Mauritian was at the inception of the Mauritian nation, seizing political power at the

momentum of independence. The coolie's aspirations, and spirit are therefore infused in the myths of the Mauritian nation.

My second chapter I analyzed Laval's inability to stay rooted as resistance. Through Laval's pull towards movement, I situate national belonging within the frames of mobility. The limits of terra analysis—physical, literary and mental boundaries—are weakened allowing the national subject to moor his or her existence to the sea, stretching his or her roots beyond the limits of the nation. I have analyzed how the nation's authority is diluted once the national subject undertakes the responsibility of 'making' the nation. By crafting the nation, infusing one's own history in its germination allows not only space to be disrupted, but time too is suspended. In Derridean terms, perpetual *différance* of the nation's completion as a myth and a craft result in *destinerrance*—*errer de son destination*, to divagate from one's destination—of the national subject. Or rather, the nation's *différance* is achieved through the national subject's *destierrance*. The site of the post-national is hence a site of the 'to come' which is mobile.

In the third chapter, I tried to not only retrieve the sea, but analyzed how the sea when considered as part of the land releases a force that binds narrative and histories together disrupting the rigidity of time. When the sea is posited at the nucleus of existence, the rationale of time is overwhelmed and quashed allowing time and space to intersect in the national subject's imaginary landscape. When this intersection happens, the logics of terra-belonging are rendered trite, giving agency and liberty to the national subject who like a bricoleur weaves together a narrative that cuts across time intertwining memory, bodies, and lands therefore repairing rupture.

The primary aim of this thesis was to re-think nationalism deeply rooted in terra-discourses. By turning to Mauritius, I sought out discourses of mobility of Mauritian national subjects who

still inhabit rupture consequently resisting complete rootedness. The Mauritian nation is primarily a nation that was unable to infuse magic in the veins of its inhabitants, over-writing their memory of displacement to implant in its place the feeling of rootedness. By opening up the space of rupture, I have found not wounds, but potential and endless possibilities. I attempted shedding the lens of trauma so as to allow rupture to be read as a site of resistance and hence as a site of a post-national that is not *after* the national, but beyond the temporalities of the national.

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