

Decolonising Dodoland:
from Colonial Anaesthesia to Autopoiesis in Creative Practices on Mainland
Mauritius
(Final submission)

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April 2019

Declaration

I declare the work presented in this thesis to be my own.

Gitanjali Pyndiah

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Shela Sheikh and Emeritus Professor Couze Venn for their commitment to my research. I am grateful to them for their dedication as supervisors and for their meticulous attention to every draft I submitted. I would also like to thank Professor Vikki Bell for accepting to be a transitional supervisor in the second year of my PhD and for introducing me to the work of Saidiya Hartman.

This research has been shaped by conversations with Firoz Ghanty, an artist-intellectual who has, since the 1970s, denounced abuses of power in cultural institutions on mainland Mauritius. I am grateful to language activist Dev Virahsawmy for his sharp response to my questions and to Professor Thomas Eriksen for his generous time to write me reference letters. Nirmal Hurry at the School of Fine Arts, in Mauritius, has inspired me to develop a critical outlook of the arts on the island. I thank Dr. Indrani Gopauloo and Associate Professor Amenah Jahangeer-Chojoo from the Centre for Mauritian Studies for engaging with my first ideas in 2008 and publishing my initial reflections in the *Journal of Mauritian Studies*.

Part of the content of my thesis has been published in articles and journals and developed in talks and presentations that I made during my PhD research (2013-2018). I thank Professor Thomas Eriksen and Dr. Ramola Ramtohul for inviting me to contribute to the book *The Mauritian Paradox: Fifty Years of Development, Diversity and Democracy* to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the independence of Mauritius (University of Mauritius Press, 2018), and editing my article ‘Performative Historiography of the Mother Tongue: Reading “kreol” Outside a Colonial and Nationalist Approach’. It has been exceptionally stimulating to work with Professor Carolyn Cooper and Dr. Leonardo Vidigal for the peer-reviewed article ‘Sonic Landscape of Seggae: Mauritian Sega Rhythm meets Jamaican Roots Reggae’ for *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture* (Intellect books, 2018). The content of the book chapter and the article is partly incorporated in Chapter Five.

I thank Professor Astrid Erll, who hosted me on a COST funded fellowship programme at the NELK, Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at the Goethe University, Frankfurt in 2015, where I presented my work on Indian Ocean Memories. I received constructive feedback on rethinking/rewriting the history of the region by scholars of the AFRASO (Africa’s Asian Options network). I acknowledge Professor Godfrey Baldaccino from Malta University for publishing ‘Decolonizing

Creole on the Mauritius islands: Creative practices in Mauritian Creole' for the journal *Island Studies*, 11(2), 2016. I also thank Baldaccino for the Award of Promising Student's Research, that allowed me to present at the Islands of the World XIV conference 'Niss(i)ology and Utopia: back to the roots of Island Studies', on Lesvos island, Greece in 2016. Last but not least, I thank Dr. Michael Richardson for commissioning the entry 'Malcolm de Chazal: Surrealism in the Indian Ocean', for the *Encyclopaedia of Surrealism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) and Dr. Françoise Lionnet for recommending me to the editors of the anthology *Archipelagic Thinking: Towards New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations* who accepted my piece entitled 'On archipelagic beings' (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2019).

I am indebted to Dr. Maria Kaladeen, Associate Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, for promoting my research and inviting me to present an ECR (Early Career Researcher) keynote at the Indenture Abolition Conference in October 2017. She has also edited my first non-fiction, *Mother Wounds*, published in an anthology on Indenture (SAS Publication and Commonwealth Writers, 2018) under my pen name Gitan Djeli.

My PhD journey has been particularly nurtured by researchers and friends Oana Pârvan and Mijke van der Drift and I am immensely grateful for their irreplaceable intellectual, mental and emotional support. I thank my father, Nicola Dillon, Oana Pârvan, Trevor Morgan and Saradha Soobrayen, with all my heart, for reading and offering feedback. To my sister and brother in arms, Malika and Harry. To the extension of my flesh and blood, Gianni and Darius.

To two people who, in different ways, incarnated 'being human as praxis' (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015) and who are not of my world anymore: Manjoola Appadoo. Kaya. RIP. *Mo mank twa enormeman Manjoola. Kaya mo tristess melanze avek koler kan mo panse kouma lapolis inn bat twa a mor.*

Abstract

This research analyses modes of challenging the authority of colonial aesthetics and historiography in Mauritius through cultural forms such as the visual arts, music and the Creole language. The project was triggered by the conclusion, reached by the national Truth and Justice Commission (published in 2011), that Mauritians know very little about their history due to cultural amnesia. My principal research question is: to what extent is this explanation valid? I argue that the lack of historical knowledge on the part of Mauritians is in fact due to a ‘colonial anaesthesia’: a process of inducing a cultural forgetfulness regarding colonial violence. Drawing from the ‘decolonial option’, expounded by Walter Mignolo, I locate ‘coloniality’ (the residues of colonial structures of representation) in the Mauritian institutional and cultural landscape. Employing ethnography and a discursive analysis, I read a prevailing colonial historiography in the geography of the capital city of Port Louis, the settler narratives of the National Museum of Natural History and the representations of the dodo (a bird brought to extinction on mainland Mauritius in the seventeenth century). Following this diagnosis, the thesis turns towards the propositional and builds from Mignolo’s ‘decolonial aesthetics’. I analyse how the work of Mauritian artists Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry questions and subverts colonial representations and offers an alternative historiography. I subsequently draw from Sylvia Wynter’s conception of ‘autopoiesis’ as a form of self-creation, in this case through the sega: a polymorphous performative art form embodied in dance, music and song in the Creole mother tongue. Here I use Julian Henriques’ methodology of ‘thinking through sound’ to provide a sonic genealogy of Creole and to ‘listen’ attentively to the possibilities offered by sega. Autopoiesis is here understood as a form of creative decolonisation: a building of knowledges that allows for new possibilities of sociality under regimes of oppression.

Keywords: Mauritius, Creole, decolonial, colonial amnesia, dodo, contemporary arts, sega, seggae, sonic landscape, autopoiesis

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Preface

I am of Indo-Mauritian heritage and I have lived on mainland Mauritius for more than thirty years. The history of ‘colonisation’ was not taught in school, except for a few lines on the linear ‘contribution’ of the Portuguese, Dutch, French and English in the making of the island.

Before starting my undergraduate study in 1997, I briefly joined a newspaper as a trainee journalist. I interviewed Dev Virahsawmy, a linguist activist who proposed the Creole language as a denominator for national unity in the 1950s. He informed me that Creole was not a pidgin but a fully-fledged language capable of producing literature as complex as Shakespeare’s work. This first awareness is, in many ways, the foundation of this PhD which has allowed me to further understand the cultural complexity of languages in Mauritius in relation to the history of colonisation.

From 2005–2012, I taught History of Art and Media Theory at the School of Fine Arts in Mauritius and I became interested in the work of Nirmal Hurry, a contemporary artist of Indian origin who writes poetic pieces in Mauritian Creole as a postscript to his art installations. I understood, from the conversations with him over the years, that he used Creole in his art to destigmatise the language and subvert the elitism of the visual arts in Mauritius. I was introduced to postcolonial theory during my Master’s Degree in Arts Management at the University of Southern Queensland University Australia in 2008. It allowed me to make a historical, political and formalist analysis of contemporary art in Mauritius and situate the thematics and styles of painting. In comparison to Hurry’s body of work, I argue that many artists’ works on the island are set in a dominant ‘settler’ aesthetics (by ‘settler’ I mean an aesthetics developed by French settlers who, until Independence, dominated the art scene). In 2010, I wrote an introduction in the catalogue of Hurry’s first solo exhibition. I looked at the political relevance of his Creole poetics. These were my first attempts to analyse the connection between art and language in the Mauritian context.

The second artist I collaborated with for an exhibition catalogue, was activist and artist-intellectual Firoz Ghanty. We met in 2009 during *Ties*, an international workshop on the Indian diaspora, and in 2010 during *Grand-Port 1810–2010*, a visual arts workshop and exhibition organised by the Ministry of Arts and Culture to commemorate the centenary of a French battle on the island. We discussed how colonial history is deeply embedded in institutions of knowledge and that very few Mauritian artists and scholars question established paradigms. I then wrote a critique of the

national commemoration of a colonial event – the victory of the French naval battle at Grand-Port against the British in 1810. This PhD is a continuation of my collaboration with both artists, allowing me to make a discursive analysis of their work in relation to colonial history, language and aesthetics.

My investment in this research project in Cultural Studies was first informed by my expertise in the visual arts and my personal motivation to shed light on colonial history. In that sense, I read the report (four volumes totalling two thousand pages) of the Truth and Justice Commission, when it became available to the public in 2011 which gathered research undertaken on the history of colonisation. I was perplexed at the report's conclusion that Mauritians did not know their history because of cultural amnesia. This initiated my research question about whether art and music, where colonial history has been present as a thematics, were considered in the commission's report.

My five-year absence from the island, during my PhD, gave me the necessary distance to look at Mauritius with new eyes when I returned to carry field work in 2017. As I walked across the capital city, on my way to the museum of natural history for an ethnographic study, with the ethos of an 'anthropologist at home', I observed how the residues of colonisation were visible in the postcolonial architecture and cartography of the island. It is in that sense that I decided to also consider geography as a space of analysis for reading traces of coloniality.

This thesis is a process of questioning existing spatialities, historical narratives, methodologies of enquiry and paradigms of knowledge, and searching for ways in which to reactivate overlooked creative and everyday practices in order to construct spaces for new modes of sociality and propose an alternative histography.

Introduction: Decolonising Dodoland

April 18. This is the only country in the world where the stranger is not asked ‘How do you like this place?’ This is indeed a large distinction. Here the citizen does the talking about the country himself; the stranger is not asked to help. You get all sorts of information. From one citizen, you gather the idea that Mauritius was made first, and then heaven; and that heaven was copied after Mauritius. Another one tells you that this is an exaggeration; that the two chief villages, Port Louis and Curepipe, fall short of heavenly perfection; that nobody lives in Port Louis except upon compulsion, and that Curepipe is the wettest and rainiest place in the world (Twain, 1897, p. 618-619).

This diary entry by Mark Twain, an American satirist who visited the Euro-American colonies in the nineteenth century and travelled from Hawaii to Australia, passing through India, South Africa and the French colony of Mauritius, is an example of a description that is often misquoted in the context of Mauritius. Twain focused on a dichotomy in the representations of the island where Mauritius is seen, on one side, as the original creation of an idyllic location on Earth and, on the other side, a sugar colony and a place that falls ‘short of heavenly perfection’. The popular misquote – which is ‘You gather the idea that Mauritius was made first, and then heaven; and that heaven was copied after Mauritius’ – is a truncated extract of the diary log. It was initially used on the island by liquor producers to promote a popular brand of rum in the 1960s, rum being a by-product of sugarcane production. This misquote promoted an imaginary of the main island as ‘heaven’ and ‘paradise’ and censored the double-sided social commentary of the author, whose work *Following the Equator* (1897) is also known for its satirical criticism of European (Western) colonisation based on an observation of the colonies that Twain visited.

This research was initiated from the field of postcolonial studies, which provided the scholarship to understand how islands have a long history of being conceived and perceived as idyllic locations by nineteenth-century European naturalists, artists, visitors and writers who had access to the colonies (Pratt, 1992; Said, 1970). While the above misquotation is reproduced by commercial corporations and the media, this research demonstrates that national institutions such as museums also harbour similar imaginaries of island paradise that have however been questioned in the visual arts since independence. It is in this sense that this research focuses on the reproduction of colonial representations in contemporary institutions in Mauritius. The problem of representation has been one of the concerns of Cultural Studies and informs the methodology used in this thesis to demonstrate how colonial imaginaries inform a

romanticised history of colonisation in the Mauritian context.

The main question underpinning this research is: do Mauritians know little about their history because of cultural amnesia? This research question was triggered by one of the conclusions reached by the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission (TJC), which was set up in 2009 to ‘make an assessment of the consequences of slavery and indentured labour during the colonial period up to the present’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 1). The TJC, contextualised in Chapter One, deduced that most Mauritians know very little about their history of slavery and indenture (p. 43). The members of the executive team used a trauma discourse to explain that Mauritians have led ‘difficult lives’ (p. 43) and highlight the perpetuation of a ‘cultural amnesia’ (p. 283) in contemporary society. Cultural amnesia, as elaborated in Chapter One, has been described in the field of memory studies as the forgetting, sometimes deliberate, of a traumatic event (like the Holocaust) by a group of people who have a collective experience of it (Erl, 2011; Huyssen, 1995; Radstone and Schwarz, 2010; Winter, 1995).

From this deduction, I started my investigation on the validity of the TJC’s explanation that a lack of historical knowledge was attributed to cultural amnesia. This research proposes to locate coloniality in the Mauritian institutional and cultural landscape through the scholarship that has become accessible since the ‘epistemic decolonial turn’ (Grosfoguel, 2007). Chapter One covers the conceptual framework grouped in five themes: ‘The decolonial option’, ‘Sylvia Wynter (creolisation and indigenisation)’, ‘Critical geography’, ‘History and Memory’, and ‘Thinking through sound’. The second section of this chapter introduces the main secondary literature – ‘The Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission’ and ‘The limitations of the Indian Ocean model’) – before expanding on the ‘Streetwalker theorising and visual ethnography’ as methodology and contextualising ‘The primary source of the research material’.

Considering the fact that the residues of colonisation are everywhere visible in the postcolonial landscape and that the history of colonisation is not discussed in national institutions, I analyse the capital city of Port Louis in Chapter Two and the Natural History of Natural History Museum in Chapter Three. Lastly, I ask whether artists and musicians and intellectuals on the island who have been vocal about the history of colonial oppression since independence were considered in this deduction of the TJC that Mauritians knew very little about their history. This triggered a further question, which I address in Chapters Four and Five: how can a decolonial historiography be enacted through from contemporary Mauritian art and music?

Mauritius is mostly referred to and perceived as a singular island – ‘Ile Maurice’

(‘The island of Mauritius’) in Figure 1.1 – in the collective memory of mainland Mauritians (Collen, 2007). However, the state of Mauritius consists of islands and archipelagos in the Indian Ocean (IO), namely the main island of Mauritius, as well as Rodrigues, Agaléga, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos (commonly known as St Brandon islands) and the Chagos Archipelago. Réunion island, an overseas department and region of France, Mauritius and Rodrigues form part of what has been described as the Mascarene Islands. These islands share a common biogeography and together with the Seychelles islands (an archipelago country in the Indian Ocean) a common history of European colonisation, slavery and indenture, similar to the Caribbean. This is further explained in Chapter One in relation to my decision to transpose Caribbean theories to mainland Mauritius.

Mauritius has an eight-million-year-old biogeography and has remained ecologically un-impacted until European colonisation in the sixteenth century. The islands had no human settlement, in contrast with the Caribbean, before the European colonisation of the IO region. This is despite having been on the routes of Malays, Arab, African, Indian, Chinese and Astronesian explorers and traders before the Portuguese, Dutch, French and English monopolised trade in the region (Alpers, 2014; Vaughan, 2005). Within a century, mainland Mauritius was reduced to a sugar colony. Two exploitative and inhumane systems of labour – slavery and indenture – displaced Malagasy people, Africans and South Asians to work on the islands under Dutch (1638-1710), French (1715-1810) and English (1810-1968) colonisation.

Prior to Europeans in the Indian Ocean, the islands were the homeland of unique species of plants and animals, namely the dodo of Mauritius. The representations of the bird, one of the many animals made extinct during the exploitation and occupation of the islands in the seventeenth century, is used as the main object of analysis in Chapters Three and Four. A large ground-dwelling bird of a meter’s height, with small wings on the sides, thick legs ending in four-toed feet and a large hooked beak, it was brought to fame by the vulgarisation of its extinction by European natural scientists in the nineteenth century (Grove, 1996; Hume, 2006; Van Dooren, 2014).

In Mauritius, the imagery of the bird was used by the colonial government in their coat of arms in 1905 (Jackson, 2001) – Figure 1.2. The animal has since then become a household reference (in rhymes, jokes, storytelling), often represented as an animal of endearment or a symbol of national pride, considering the coat of arms was not changed after independence. It has also been emphatically present within commercial endeavours (see Figure 4.2 in Chapter Four), reiterating the direct connection between

“machineries” [of power] and regimes of representation’ (Hall, 1996, p. 443). ‘Scenarios of representation’, for cultural theorist Stuart Hall, are formative, ‘constitutive’ (in contrast with having a ‘reflexive, after-the-event role’) in the formation of worldviews and determine how meanings are constructed, as economic, political and social processes do not operate outside of cultural conditions. They are not merely expressive spaces in the construction of social and political life (1996, p. 444) and ‘do more than simply describe the world; they inscribe and prescribe its meanings’ (Pratt, 1992 in Hill, 2013).

The illustration in Figure 1.1 demonstrates a representation of an island-paradise in which an anthropomorphic live dodo bird is performing the stereotypical role of either a nonchalant tourist or a laid-back islander. In this regard, the wordplay ‘dodoland’ in the title of this research (*‘dodo’* in the Mauritian Creole language also means ‘sleep’) carries the meaning of the land of the dodo that has fallen asleep, in this case under a metaphorical anaesthesia (a term developed in Chapter Two) induced by coloniality.



Figure 1.1 ‘This is what paradise looks like’ [T-Shirt design template from website], Cafe Press. <http://www.cafepress.co.uk>. Accessed 12 March 2017.



Figure 1.2 Mauritian Coat of Arms [Picture from website], Government of Mauritius. <http://www.govmu.org/English/ExploreMauritius/NationalSymbols/Pages/Coat-of-Arms.aspx>. Accessed 30 January 2018.

Coloniality ‘encompasses the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the reproduction of its effects in contemporary times’ (Dussel, Jáuregui and Moraña, 2008, p. 2). It defines the practices and structures put in place during the European colonisation of the ‘global south’ – regrouping historically, more than geographically, the Atlantic regions, the Americas, Africa, South Asia and the islands of the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and the Pacific Islands – and their reproduction in contemporary structures of power and knowledge. ‘Coloniality of power’ (Quijano, 2008, p. 197) or ‘coloniality of being’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) are terms used to explain the effects of coloniality, such as the mechanism of colonisation, the capitalist plantation economy and the racialised hierarchies of labour, on the formerly colonised. This is elaborated in Chapter One.

The scholarship on coloniality broadened its scope by positioning the specific history of Mauritius and the Indian Ocean as inter-related with the larger history of European exploitation of lands in the fifteenth century, starting from the colonisation of the Americas (Bhambra, 2014). In this context, understanding both coloniality and Caribbean theories is productive for conducting research on the Mascarene islands of the Indian Ocean since both basins share a common history of slavery and indenture. This connection has not been very prominent as scholars of Indian Ocean Studies have focused on the history of the region as encompassing five thousand years of maritime trade and cultural exchanges between the continents bordering the ocean before European colonisation. In Chapter One, I pinpoint the limitations of the Indian Ocean model which does not provide the appropriate tools for analysing the specificity of coloniality on the Mascarene islands whose history of human colonisation follows the same trajectory of the Caribbean islands. In this sense, a rationale is given for using Caribbean thinkers in the particular study of the islands, with the possibility of future research on applying the methodology for the study of the Caribbean islands.

This research looks at colonial symbols, representations, geographies and aesthetics in the Mauritian context. While in mainstream narratives of/on Mauritius, it is generally perceived that decolonisation was achieved after independence, many artists, scholars and activists challenge the coloniality in place without necessarily using the term ‘decolonial’ or ‘decolonisation’. The persistence of a colonial historiography in post-independence nations is not unique to Mauritius and has been articulated and theorised by many writers and scholars whose works fall in the postcolonial and decolonial canon, in reference to similar anti-colonial and supposedly ‘post’-colonial situations (Fanon, 2008, 1963; Grosfoguel, 2011; Guha, 1997, 2002; Mbembe, 2001; Ngũgĩ,

1986; Said, 1978, 1994).

In the Mauritius context, coloniality has been diagnosed from secondary literature. Fifty years after independence and with almost a century of political dismantling of colonial administration, contemporary Mauritius is still embedded in colonial symbols, representations, geographies, historiography and epistemology (Boudet and Peghini, 2008; Collen, 2009; Edensor and Kothari, 2005; Eriksen, 1998; Forest, 2011; Hay and Salverda, 2013; Kothari and Wilkinson, 2010; Selvon, 2001). Critical literature on Mauritius reveals that ‘official national symbolism in Mauritius is still closely linked to the colonial ideology and its symbols’ (Eriksen, 1998, p. 11) and that the term ‘postcolonial’ cannot be applied in any definite way to the Mauritian context ‘with the abiding presence of the French community following the country’s independence’ (Mukherji, 2006, p. 4). Franco-Mauritians, although no longer the only elite, represent the community with the highest socio-economic status and the dominant business class (Salverda, 2015, p. 534). As a small minority, they control about a third of the hundred top companies and five of the ten largest companies and maintain control over large parts of the island’s agricultural land (p. 534).

Furthermore, postcolonial scholarship on Mauritius reveals that the history of colonisation is amplified in romanticised tropes. Edensor and Kothari (2005) analyse the architecture and interior style of a theme resort on the west coast of the island called Sugar Beach, a popular resort for tourists who visit the islands on a restrained budget. They notice that it is built in ‘Mauritian colonial style, a distinct, Creole [meaning ‘colonial’ here] plantation-domain architectural form visible across the island’ (p. 190).¹ The ethnographic description they give of a theatrical piece they witnessed at the resort reveals a ‘sweetening’ (p. 189) of colonial history, sanitised of its features of domination:

To the strains of the recorded ‘colonial overture’, a groom and bride in French nineteenth-century aristocratic costume descend the staircase, and are looked upon by the marquis and marquess of the plantation, clothed in their silken finery. The music continues as the sides of the staircase are lined by smiling waiters and maids in nineteenth-century outfits performing graceful choreographed movements with serving trays and feather dusters, giving a preview of the service that guests can expect ... The inference is clear: that standards of service from the colonial era will be strictly adhered to in attending to the needs and desires of hotel guests. [...] What is remarkable about this display is that the cast, apart from the hotel manager, a white

¹ I add to Edensor and Kothari’s analysis by proposing that the aestheticisation of the word ‘sugar’, in the name of the resort *Sugar Beach*, also implies a banalisation of the system of economic exploitation that sugar plantocracies supported.

South African, are Mauritians of Creole or Indian descent (Edensor and Kothari, 2005, pp. 192-193).

The authors explain how the narratives infer ‘that standards of service from the colonial era will be strictly adhered to in attending to the needs and desires of hotel guests’ (p. 192). Moreover, the performance was amplified by the lack of ‘representation or mention of slavery or indentured labor, the very factors that enabled such estate to prosper’ (p. 192). They add that it further illustrates a setting that is ‘a strikingly dissonant image for those familiar with the inequities of Mauritian colonialism’ (p. 193). In Chapter Four, I return to this evocation of a ‘nostalgic version of Mauritian colonial sugar production’ (p. 192) which I argue promotes a settler aesthetics; I here provide further examples of sweetening colonialism reproduced by national institutions.

In this research, a connection is established between

1. colonisation (the exploitation of ‘virgin’ islands, land and animals which caused the extinction of the dodo);
2. modernity (the reproduction of European scientific knowledge in the colony and the iconisation of the extinct bird as a symbol of extinction);
3. coloniality (traces of colonial representations in the national museum);
4. decolonial processes (which have disrupted European norms since colonial times).

‘Decolonising Dodoland: from Colonial Anaesthesia to Autopoiesis in Creative Practices on Mainland Mauritius’ starts with a critique of the discourse of cultural amnesia used by the Truth and Justice Commission. The research establishes a difference between cultural amnesia (as pathological) and an induced amnesia produced by coloniality. It is argued that the act of ‘not knowing’ can also be induced or actively provoked by the apparatuses of the state, which replicate a colonial history. In this sense, the term ‘colonial anaesthesia’ is developed to describe a process of being induced into being ignorant of – or worse denying the violence of colonisation and its impact in the present.

In response to this, the research reads several cultural objects and ecologies such as architecture, urban landscapes, art, cultural institutions, languages, music and soundscapes and explores how residues of colonisation (what I here refer to as ‘coloniality’) remain present in post-independence Mauritius. I explain, in the first section of Chapter One, how the line of thought associated with ‘coloniality’ is useful to situate colonial narratives and trace practices that challenge dominant aesthetics and

knowledge on a daily basis. It is within this perspective that I analyse the cartography of the capital city of Port Louis and the colonial architecture of an institution such as the Natural History Museum as examples of a geography of violence (Fanon, 1963; Le Billon and Springer, 2016; Mbembe, 2003, Nixon 2011). In Chapter Two, the postcolonial geography is analysed as a remnant of a past of physical violence drawing from the literature in the field of cultural geography.² I argue that structural violence remains in the landscape of plantation postcolonies and that a colonial anaesthesia occurs when this violence is not acknowledged.

Furthermore, in Chapter Three, the thesis sheds light on the Natural History Museum a colonial institution which was nationalised after independence. Here I also problematise the settler narratives of the extinct dodo in the museum narratives that undermine the history of exploitation colonisation which brought the Dutch to deplete the island of its natural forests and introduce exotic species which would destroy the bird's habitat. This contributes to the argument that a colonial history is reproduced as national history. In Chapter Three and Four, a comparative discursive analysis of museum narratives of extinction and the representation of extinction in the visual arts scene opens up avenues for a decolonial historiography. The works of Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry, two visual artists with different aesthetics and ideologies, were selected to demonstrate how contemporary art can be a political tool for subverting official history. Both Ghanty, an activist, intellectual and self-taught artist, and Hurry who works within the state's art institutions denounce mechanisms of power. I discuss their works with the thematic of the dodo as reflective of a 'decolonial aesthetics' or a 'decoloniality of aesthetics', terms developed by the decolonial school set up by the Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo's (TDI +Transnational Decolonial Institute, 2011).

The analysis of contemporary art inquires into the artists' political use of Mauritian Creole, an oral language vilified for its association with slavery and considered a derivative of the French language within a linguistic framework. The Creole language is the mother tongue or first language of seventy percent of people in Mauritius (Asgarally, 2015). This is despite the colonial residue of English as the official language of parliament, law, administration and academia; of French as the first language in

² In this thesis, the term 'postcolonial' has a temporal significance (i.e. the present period in the postcolony).

which most Mauritians acquire literacy and the language mostly used in the media; and of the two dozen Asian languages brought by half a million Indians and a small group of Chinese who came during the Indenture system after the abolition of slavery in 1835.³ Creole is also the main language of communication across the Mauritius islands. The two multilingual artists (who are also fluent in French, English and their ancestral Indian languages, Gujarati/Urdu and Bhojpuri) deliberately use Creole in their works as a technique of subversion, considering that narratives in the visual arts still promote a settler aesthetics, as explained in Chapter Four.

In order to understand how a Creole sonic aesthetics subverts a settler aesthetics, an understanding of the different semantic use of the word Creole (creolisation, Creole language for communication, Creole as mother tongue, Creole people, creole architecture) is necessary. The distinction between the Creole as language of communication (related to creolisation) and Creole as mother tongue (associated with a Creole culture) is elaborated in Chapter One. Relevant to this research is the ethos of *listening* to the Creole mother tongue in contrast to *reading* Creole from the perspective of a literate culture. In this sense, a creative practice in Creole, sega which is rooted in the enslavement of people by the French in the Indian Ocean region is explored in Chapter Five. Here, two contemporary versions of sega are addressed: sega *angaze* (sega of protest), which invigorated political debates around independence; and seggae, which developed in the 1980s from the influence of roots reggae.

The Mauritian sega has been described as a polymorphous performative art form consisting of songs, dance, music, beats, rhythm and storytelling in the Creole mother tongue (Andon and Bastien, 2014; Boswell, 2017; Manuel, 1998; Police, 1998; 2000; 2001). I analyse the sonic dimension of language by drawing from the work of Julian Henriques (2003; 2011; 2016) and ‘thinking through sound’ (2011), which involves ‘working through the *medium* of sound as thought [...] rather than the more commonplace discursive line of thought’ (p. xviii). Henriques reiterates that this thinking through the medium of sound as thought gives rise to a new method of understanding the Jamaican culture. The sound theorist’s work allowed me to look at (or, more precisely, to ‘listen’ to, as a method) the Creole mother tongue. This led me to

³ I use the term ‘mother tongue’ and avoid the words ‘first’, ‘native’ or ‘local’ language’ and to emphasise ‘mother’ and ‘tongue’: 1) the tongue that the speaker mothers (nurtures) as a first language, in addition to its usage as meaning the speaker’s mother’s tongue. And 2) in Chapter Five, I use the wordplay ‘m”other”tongue’ to emphasise the othering of the first language – of indigenous or indigenised people, for example – by Europeans.

the creative practices in the language, namely sega. I also focus on the sound of the music in comparison to looking at (the written form) or analysing lyrics, for example. I was as inspired as Henriques was by Stuart Hall's remark: 'You know [Jamaican culture] is really a *sonic* culture' (2011, p. ix). In Chapter Five, I propose to read/listen to the Creole culture in Mauritius as a sonic culture. In the context of this research, a sonic culture refers to:

- the sega practitioners who had since slavery explored various ways of making sound and creating music from the limited resources around them;
- the sonic element of the Creole mother tongue that binds Mauritians across the world (rhythm of speech, intonations, expressions);
- the sonic registers (beats, rhythm, tempo, meter, pattern) of the sega performance;
- the immersive auditory environment from the pulse of the *ravann*, a percussion instrument of about 60 cm in diameter and 5 cm in thickness, and the *choul*, the rhythmic cry of the singer that elicits the response of dancers and audience to become participative 'sonic bodies' (a term I borrow from Henriques's work in *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (2011)); and
- the contemporary seggae musicians, in particular Kaya, recognised as the founder of seggae, who explore sound technologies to futurise 'folk' music.

I elaborate on the performative history of the sonic bodies of the enslaved people who challenged, resisted and subverted colonial practices.⁴ I further discuss how the sega performances and their endurance in the present – in forms of contemporary adaptations, imageries, sounds and memories – produce a visceral history from the corporeal and affective aspect of the performers' experience. I use the term 'visceral history' to refer to a history built on visceral knowledges; 'viscera' describes the organs of the body, especially the intestine, and is metaphorically used here to define 'that gut feeling' or an embodied/bodily knowledge.⁵

In Chapter Five, I also describe sega and the Creole mother tongue as processes of 'autopoiesis', defined as 'forms of self-inscription or self-instituted genres, with each form/genre being adaptive to its situation' (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). I draw extensively from the work of philosopher Sylvia Wynter who

⁴ In the context of the Indian Ocean, Malagasy people, Africans and South/South-East Asians were enslaved on the island (Teelock, 1998). I discuss the sega practice as embedded in the Black/Creole culture.

⁵ I use the term 'knowledges' (Escobar, 2007; McKittrick, 2006; Mignolo, 2012) to describe the different structures of and approaches to knowledge that exist outside a dominant epistemology.

reflects on coloniality and aesthetics in the Caribbean islands, Jamaica in particular. I observe many similarities between the cultural (musical and sonic) scene of the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and many of the Caribbean islands. According to Wynter, new forms of expression (language, art forms and music) were self-instituted by enslaved Africans in Jamaica to generate possibilities of life and culture under a regime of oppression. Her work on ‘autopoiesis’ allows me to look at how ‘self-instituted genres’ (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015) such as a Creole mother tongue and the performative sega art form, were produced after the oppression of an original culture under enslavement. In this context, creative practices fostered by the enslaved and their Creole descendants are read as self-instituted processes that seek humane alternative modes of sociality under the violence of the French regime. I argue that the Creole culture is rooted in an ‘autopoetic languaging living system’ (Wynter, 2007, p. 17). While in contemporary art, decolonial narratives are made transparent by deliberate messages that challenge dominant paradigms of representation, creative practices in Creole are processes of autopoiesis from colonial times that continues in the colonial present.

‘Decolonising Dodoland: from Colonial Anaesthesia to Autopoiesis in Creative Practices on Mainland Mauritius’ investigates ‘the land of the dodo’, Mauritius, using a decolonial conceptual framework to understand how spaces of meaning are constructed from a physical, visual and sonic landscape marked by colonisation. Following the momentum of what has been called the ‘epistemic decolonial turn’ (Grosfoguel, 2007), this research contributes – from the perspective of the Indian Ocean region – to the movement of ‘decolonising knowledge’ that has been a visible point of concern in academic and cultural institutions in the UK and across continents. This research is presented as a ‘deciphering practice’ (Wynter, 1992), offering a critique of colonial history in the present. It highlights how creative practices deconstruct inherited aesthetics, histories and epistemologies as well as construct autopoetic languaging living systems which provide new forms of sociality.

Chapter Outlines

The five chapters of this research are informed by three principal research questions:

1. To what degree is the proposal made by the national Truth and Justice Commission that Mauritians know very little about their history due to ‘cultural amnesia’ valid?

2. Can this lack of knowledge instead be attributed to what I develop under the term ‘colonial anaesthesia’?
3. In what ways can an alternative historiography be constructed from a decoloniality of aesthetics or a genealogy of Creole?

In **Chapter 1 (Part 1.1: Conceptual Framework: Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor)**, I introduce the relevant concepts developed around the decolonial option as a framework for what follows. I explore the decolonial turn in academia, problematise the term creolisation through Sylvia Wynter’s theorisation of indigenisation and autopoesis, analyse postcolonial cartographies through critical geography, discuss how history intersects with memory and propose Julian Henriques’s thinking though sound as a method of listening to the Creole language. **Part 1.2: Methodology** presents the main secondary literature (on the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission and the limitations of the Indian Ocean model for the Mascarene islands), visual ethnography with streetwalker theorising in mind and the primary source of the research material and rationale.

In **Chapter 2: Colonial Anaesthesia: History and Geography**, I first contextualise this research with a history of colonisation of the Indian Ocean region and situate the cultural context of Mauritius. **Part 2.1: Historical Context: Island exploitation and Settler Colonialism** positions the specific history of Dutch, French and English colonisation of the islands of Mauritius and draws similarities with the history of European colonisation of the Caribbean. This chapter provides a critique of the ‘progressive’ narrative of colonialism – that ‘virginal’ islands enter modernity with European arrival – reproduced by Mauritian national institutions. It associates the history of European contact on the islands with slavery-based merchant capitalism, settler colonialism and exploitative systems of labour.

Part 2.2 Theorising Colonial Anaesthesia highlights the section in the TJC report that discusses the trauma of slavery and a ‘cultural amnesia’ of the history of colonisation in contemporary society. I also refer to the conclusion reached by the chairman of the TJC who explained that some people favour amnesia and choose to forget colonial history. I draw from Ann Laura Stoler’s concept of ‘colonial aphasia’, which emphasises both loss and active dissociation, and propose the metaphor of ‘colonial anaesthesia’ to argue that coloniality can actively ‘induce amnesia’ and constrain people into a paralysing state of anaesthesia. In **Part 2.3: ‘Post’-colonial**

Geographies of Slow Violence, I analyse the postcolonial landscape and bring into play two spatialities of enquiry: the grid-like cartography of the capital city of Port Louis and the leftover monuments. I demonstrate that postcolonial geographies stand as relics of a past of colonial violence and a ‘slow violence’ Nixon (2011) in the present coloniarity. I argue that the national history does not acknowledge this violence and therefore desensitises the formerly colonised from remembering the residues of colonisation.

In **Chapter 3: The Necro-aesthetics World of the Dodo**, the colonial archive (the museum display and the ethnographic collection) becomes central for discussing the epistemological seduction that explicates the strategies of rational/colonial framing of museums. **Part 3.1: Colonial Archive: The Toponomology of the Natural History Museum** focuses on another relic of Empire: the Natural History Museum and the settler aesthetics and epistemology within its narratives. I use the term ‘toponomatology’ (Derrida, 1996) to refer to the authority and place of truth (nomology), prescribed by the physical domicile (topography) of the institutional building that houses the colonial archive. This section prepares the ground for the analysis, in the next chapter, of the representations of the dodo, a bird made iconic in the natural sciences after its extinction on mainland Mauritius in the seventeenth century.

Part 3.2: Epistemological Seduction and Topographies of Death looks into the interior ‘circular epistemology’ (Bal, 2001) derived from the visual narratives of objects inside the galleries and the statist framing of a glorified colonial history. I develop a new lens through which to read the absence of a critique of coloniarity. Analysis of the last exhibition room of the museum is dedicated to the representations of the extinct dodo as signifiers of colonialism (extinction) and coloniarity (the bird iconised by the national Natural History Museum). I then propose the framework of ‘necro-aesthetics’, the politics of aestheticising taxidermist and skeletal specimens, in order to analyse the narratives around extinction, particularly in juxtaposition with the works of Ghanty and Hurry on the bird in the next chapter.

In **Chapter 4: The Anarchive, Part 4.1: Contextualising the Visual Arts** highlights the historical role colonial institutions of knowledge played in forging a memorial framework in the colony and establishes a link between the settler epistemology promoted by colonial institutions, the foundation of a notion of heritage and a colonial memorial framework after independence. I pinpoint dominant paradigms

of representation and the recurrence of a ‘settler’ aesthetics in the visual arts before elaborating on the paradigm shift in the cultural scene around independence. I highlight the cultural boom in the 1970s named the ‘golden era’ (Harmon, 2011) when musicians, visual artists and writers collectivised to challenge colonial paradigms and revitalise culture. I contextualise two contemporary artists, Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry, whose artworks on the extinct dodo are discussed in this chapter.

Part 4.2: ‘I refuse to be nostalgic about Empire’, Firoz Ghanty and Part 4.3: The spectral dump yard dodo: ‘Ti blié coument envolé’, Nirmal Hurry focuses on the dodo as a national symbol and on the artists’ points of contestations, which, as I argue, produce a decoloniality of aesthetics. Their artworks are interpreted as ‘anarchival’ in the sense that they disrupt the official archives and offer a decolonial insight into extinction. Ghanty’s performance and works on the dodo configure a new approach to the national memorialisation of the bird, while Hurry’s poetry in Mauritian Creole acts as one of the multiple layered frames of enunciations of the dodo which represent the ‘silences in the archive’ (Hartman, 2008).

Chapter 5: Autopoiesis: Singing in M‘other’ Tongues looks at creative practices in the Creole mother tongue such as sega, sega *angaze* and seggae. **Part 5.1: On Linguistic Violence and the Creole M‘other’ tongue** addresses another aspect of epistemic colonisation to demonstrate how the Creole mother tongue is othered (the significance of the play of words m‘other’tongue in the title). A decolonial genealogy reveals that a Creole language developed after the suppression, in the form of linguistic violence, of the languages of the enslaved. This section also shows that in the nineteenth century, the language was positivised by francophone writers who produced literary works in Creole. A hierarchy was however created and written literature was given more value than the orality, aurality and sonic dimension of the Creole language. A critique of the linguistic setting of the main island of Mauritius contextualises the discussion of the creative practices in Creole – such as sega, sega *angaze* and seggae – and the relevance of using ‘thinking through sound’ as method in this chapter.

Part 5.2: The Hauntological: Sega and the Possibility of Mourning proposes to disrupt the narrative of death, referring here to the necro-aesthetics located in Chapter Three in the Natural History Museum. It analyses one sega *angaze* and demonstrates how the viscerality of the history of death – here the suicide of the enslaved – is brought forward through music. Drawing from the work of Christina Sharpe, it also raises the issue of how the hauntological experience of slavery is closely associated with

mourning and stands outside the grammar of violence or suffering present in the historiography of slavery.

Part 5.3: Performative Historiography and Autopoiesis brings together the work of Henriques on sonic bodies and Wynter's theorisation of autopoiesis to propose reading Creole as a predominantly sonic culture. I analyse music through the method of thinking through sound (against a linguistic or anthropological lens) and highlight the creative practice of sega and the sonic bodies of the dancers as a 'performative historiography', a history through performance. This section questions the classification of creative practices in the Creole languages as 'folklore', 'ancestral' or 'vulgar'. This sets the scene for the discussion of the self-creation (autopoiesis) of sega as constitutive of Creole origin stories. **Part 5.4: The Struggle of Creole Futurity: Kaya's Seggae** analyses seggae and focuses on Kaya, acclaimed as the founder of the new sub-genre of sega before he lost his life at the hands of the police in 1999. Kaya was influenced by the bass sound and political lyrics of roots reggae and produced seggae in the 1980s from the marginalised community of Roche Bois, a residential area stigmatised for its impoverished Creole community. I draw from the work of McKittrick on poetics embedded in 'black geographies of struggle' and draw a comparison between the sound technologies of roots reggae from downtown Jamaica, arguing that seggae represents a technologising of the sega sound. This allows me to envision the Creole sonic culture as a 'Creole futurity' (Chude-Sokei, 2018).

Conclusion: A practice of Decipherment positions this research as a process of deciphering aesthetics and knowledge. In her article 'Rethinking "Aesthetics": Notes towards a deciphering practice' (1992), Wynter proposes a method of locating and uncovering post-aesthetic creative practices that have at its core 'being human as praxis' (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). Across the five chapters, I bring forward ways of deciphering coloniality and proposing alternate historiographies from the physical, visual and sonic geographies, in the ethos of the 'undecipherable songs' (Hartman, 2008, p. 3) that embody visceral knowledge and rehumanise(d) the colonial and postcolonial landscape. I also discuss certain themes that this research raises, which can contribute to a rethinking of politics with 'being human as praxis'.

Chapter 1. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Introduction

The first section of this chapter elaborates on the theories, concepts and scholarship that inform the conceptual framework used in this research. They are grouped in five themes: The decolonial option, Sylvia Wynter (creolisation and indigenisation), Critical geography, History and Memory, and Thinking through Sound. The second section introduces the initial secondary literature which triggered this research on Mauritius and instigated the framework: The Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission and The limitations of the Indian Ocean model. It then discusses the methodology, Visual ethnography ‘at home’, and contextualises the primary source of the research material.

The decolonial option as a conceptual framework and the methodology developed allowed me to answer the questions about whether Mauritians know very little about their history of slavery and indenture because of cultural amnesia. This research looks at history, geography and memory within a decolonial lens and hence discusses the work of the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) at the intersection of history and memory. Secondly, I inquired whether there are other factors that contribute to the forgetting of three hundred years of colonisation? I develop the term ‘colonial anaesthesia’ by looking at how geography intersects with history and how the lack of engagement with the traces of the colonial landscape induces its inhabitants into a forgetfulness of the violence of a history of colonisation. The conceptual framework and method developed from the work of Wynter and Henriques answer the correlated research questions: how can an alternative (decolonial) historiography be constructed from a genealogy of Creole?

This chapter elaborates on the reason why Black/African/Caribbean scholarship (Hartman, Mbembe, Wynter, Henriques, and others) was more useful than the Indian Ocean model in critically analysing the history of colonisation and coloniality of the Mascarene islands. It then describes the fieldwork undertaken in Mauritius to study the postcolonial geography, elaborates on the distributed methods explored outside an art history and linguistic lens, to analyse art and language in the context of Mauritius and gives a rationale for the primary material used in the thesis.

1.1 Conceptual Framework: Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor

The decolonial option

In their article ‘Decolonisation is not a metaphor’ (2012), indigenous scholars Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and Wayne Yang problematise the misuse and/or overuse of the term ‘decolonisation’, which, they claim, is often used in the academic and art world as a metaphor for decolonising ‘societies, schools and other things’ (p. 1). For Tuck and Yang, whose research develops in the field of urban education and indigenous studies, decolonisation is fundamentally about the ‘repatriation of Indigenous land and life’ (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 1) to communities who have been dispossessed by European settler colonialism for the past five hundred years in the Americas, and who are oppressed by the coloniality of power.

While decolonisation in the context of my research is not about the restitution of Indigenous land and life to Indigenous peoples, I deconstruct, a settler narrative on the Mauritius islands according to which Europeans ‘migrated’ and claimed ‘uninhabited’ islands of the Indian Ocean. This discourse was constructed around the ‘conquest of Nature’ by Europeans (here the Dutch, French and English) in the seventeenth century, depicting the land of endemic animals and Indigenous peoples as *terra nullius* – nobody’s land. I discuss this settler history, in Chapter Two, from the secondary literature which looks at the ‘myth of foundation’ of French settlers, reproduced in private and national institutions (Boudet and Peghini, 2008; Forest, 2011).

Furthermore, indigeneity has also manifested itself as a global discourse, primarily expressed as an attachment to land, when confronted by the agenda of nation-states to undermine the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.⁶ In this sense, it can be argued that I ‘repatriate’ the history of animal species – such as the dodo, which was endemic/‘indigenous’ to mainland Mauritius and brought to extinction in the seventeenth century during colonisation – to the historiography of the islands.

This research on the Indian Ocean islands is founded on both postcolonial and decolonial scholarship in order to challenge a national discourse (in Mauritius) that decolonisation was achieved with independence. This is discussed in the next section. As problematised by the postcolonial thinker Edward Said, author of the seminal text

⁶ The Indigenous protest at Standing Rock in North America in 2017 took place with the aim of protecting the rivers and burial grounds from being polluted and affected by the construction of a pipeline. Tuck and Yang (2017) explain that the protest has ‘generated theory, generating futurities, generating vantage points from which we might engage in by Indigenous peoples’ ideas and one another differently’ (p. 2).

Orientalism (1970), decolonisation can be discussed in three overlapping phases. The first period is one of ‘primary resistance’ (Said, 1993, p. 95), in which anti-colonial movements are considered legitimate tools to resist the violence of colonialism and to recover appropriated territory. The period of secondary resistance is marked by an ideological movement and represents a set of efforts towards the restoration of a sense of humanness, dignity and freedom against oppression under the colonial enterprise, and culminates in self-determination and the implementation of the nation-state. However, as Frantz Fanon pointed out, with the warning against the dangers of the postcolonial ‘national bourgeoisie,’ decolonisation is never complete with nationhood as ‘the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 148). It is in this sense that I draw from the work of Mignolo, a proponent of the decolonial school, who explains that ‘decoloniality is an option, not a mission’ (Gaztambide-Fernández and Mignolo, 2014). It is a proposed framework to examine the colonial matrix of power that determine the world today (2012, 2014).

I discuss the structural residues of colonisation in Mauritius across the thesis and focus on the colonial epistemologies and aesthetics reproduced by national institutions. In this sense, decolonisation is an ongoing process of resistance (the third phase) against the residues of colonialism such as the economic system of capitalism and post-independence coloniality of power. Moreover, it encompasses a set of practices of deconstruction, construction and reconstruction at the level of epistemology, ideology, historiography and ontology.

I first encountered the term ‘decolonial’ in the work of the Transnational Decolonial Institute, which refers to the recent (the last two decades) line of thought which has inspired art practitioners and scholars to bring visibility to ‘the creativity in/from the Non-Western world’ and work ‘towards “living in harmony and in plenitude” in a variety of languages and decolonial histories’ (TDI +Transnational Decolonial Institute, 2011). I initially approached the contemporary artworks of Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry through Mignolo’s development of the decolonial option and the term of ‘decoloniality of aesthetics’, from the terminology ‘decolonial aesthetics’ initially coined by the Colombian intellectual, artist, and activist, Adolfo Albán Achinte in 2003 (TDI +Transnational Decolonial Institute, 2011). With the collaboration of artists, curators and scholars, Mignolo and other intellectuals set up the Transnational Decolonial Institute in 2011 to challenge Western notions of aesthetics. Their mission was to bring together artists producing work outside the global establishment and network of art and aesthetics set up from the dominant Euro-American markets. This

has been, since 2009, a mobilising factor to regroup artists, activists and writers across continents and question the role of aesthetics in the project of building decolonial knowledge practices (Mignolo, 2013).

Their project stipulates that:

A transmodern world has emerged, reconfiguring the past 500 hundred years of coloniality and its aftermath, modernity, postmodernity and altermodernity. A remarkable feature of this transformation is the creativity in/from the Non-Western world and its political consequences – independent thoughts and decolonial freedoms in all spheres of life. Decoloniality of knowledge and being, two concepts that have been introduced by the working group modernity/coloniality/decoloniality, since 1998, are encountering the decoloniality of aesthetics in order to join different genealogies of re-existence in artistic practices all over the world (TDI +Transnational Decolonial Institute, 2011).

The concepts of the ‘coloniality of power’ and ‘decoloniality of knowledge’ emerged from the work of sociologist Anibal Quijano (2008) and philosopher Enrique Dussel (2000) as well as from scholars such as Ramón Grosfoguel (2007), María Lugones (1987, 1992, 2003), Arturo Escobar (2007) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007, 2011).⁷ For Grosfoguel (2011), proponent of the decoloniality of knowledge, the decolonial critique proposes to decolonise the Western canon and epistemology while challenging not only Subaltern Studies but also Postcolonial studies (p. 3). Gurmidher Bhambra, a sociologist who looks at the overlaps and differences of postcolonialism and decoloniality, explains that decoloniality has been neglected in much of the existing literature on postcolonialism, which, she argues, is defined by the binary opposition between imperial interlocutors and the colonial history of specific locations (Bhambra, 2014). It is in this respect that I draw from the work of the decolonial school to understand how the mechanism of control and settler colonialism which determine the European colonisation of the Americas and the Caribbean, from the fifteenth century onwards, are reproduced during the colonisation of the Indian Ocean region in the centuries after.

Mignolo reiterates how the world, around 1500, was polycentric and non-capitalist and that the economic shift to capitalism, which depended on the reproduction of resources indefinitely, is thus closely associated with European colonisation (2007, p.

⁷ They also draw from the work of South American subaltern studies, the research of Caribbean, Black and African scholars, Indigenous scholarship from America to New Zealand as well as the traditions of thought associated with postcolonialism to question the structures of power established by European empires in the Americas. For example, Caribbean intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon (1963, 2008) have, since the 1950s, highlighted the residual structures of power inherited from colonisation and have questioned the temporality of the ‘post-colonial’ (Hall, 1996b).

41). Wynter, on her side, informs us that by 1900, more than half of Asia, ninety-eight percent of Africa as well as most of the ex-slave plantation archipelago islands of the Caribbean (and the Indian Ocean islands) were under direct colonial rule.

Consequently, if from the mid-nineteenth century until 1920, ‘more than 450 million people in Africa and Asia’ had been reduced to being ‘native’ subjects of the West, their reduction to secondary inferiorized Human Other status, had been effected at the same time as ‘some 8.6 million square miles in Africa and Asia had been acquired by Europeans’ (as well as by a post 1898 U.S.) ‘in the name of progress’ (2007, p. 2).

Furthermore, the decolonial scholars also theorise a ‘modernity/coloniality matrix’, which locates the origins of European modernity in the project of the ‘conquest’ of the Americas. European colonialism, the ‘civilisation’ of others and the ‘subalternization of [their] knowledge and cultures’ (Escobar, 2007, p. 184) are read as constitutive of modernity.⁸ They argue that the colonisation of Indigenous peoples of the Americas in the fifteenth century reflects the ‘hidden agenda’ (Mignolo, 2007) of European modernity, which is inseparable from coloniality (Escobar 2007; Bhambra, 2007; 2014).

The MC [modernity-coloniality] project does not fit into a linear history of paradigms or epistemes; to do so would mean to integrate it into the history of modern thought. On the contrary, the MC program should be seen as another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives (Christianity, liberalism, and Marxism); it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric modes of thinking (Escobar, 2007, p. 180).

Moreover, for Mignolo, decolonial thinking presupposes de-linking (epistemically and politically) from imperial knowledge (2011, pp. 18-19). Decolonial knowledge is reactive to a European modernity, which according to Mignolo, is the hidden darker side of coloniality. De-linking, for Mignolo, is not a totalising shift from knowledge acquired but the reframing of knowledge production ‘from the perspective of the colonial difference’ (Escobar, 2007, p. 186).

In this sense, I have found Bhambra (2007) and Mignolo (2003) relevant when discussing the landscape of the visual arts in Mauritius in Chapter Four. They establish a connection between the ideas from the era of the Renaissance period, which I discuss

⁸ I acknowledge the scholarship that has also established and deconstructed the connection between European colonialism and modernity. Several terms, including ‘counter culture of modernity’ (Gilroy, 1993), ‘alternative possibilities of modernities’ (Venn, 2000; 2006) or an ‘occidentalist modernity’ (Venn, 2002), drawn from the work of the Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson or the postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty for example, have been used to describe notions of ‘alter modernities’ that emerged in non-European contexts.

in relation to the conceptualisation of the museum in Chapter Three, and the voyages of discovery that instigated European colonialism. Bhambra demonstrates that the humanists in the Renaissance period demarcated themselves from the ‘ancient’ world based on the rise of a historical consciousness, which defines the beginning of the history of historical ideas and history writing in the wide context of intellectual history. The characterisation of the Renaissance as ‘the birth of the modern’ has rested upon its claim to have rediscovered ancient texts deemed to have been lost during the Middle Ages and its concomitant search for new knowledge (Bhambra, 2007, p. 6).

In Bhambra’s discussion, the notion of modernity originated from a historical consciousness which involved, in the process, ‘a single and individual viewpoint in art transposed into historical scholarship and to cartographical advances’ (p. 84). This allows me to understand how the production of a European canon of art history which takes the aesthetics of the Renaissance as a yardstick, has been normalised in Mauritius and how the postcolonial cartography of the island is glorified in the artistic work produced during colonial times. In Chapter Four, I describe the settler aesthetics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial Mauritius that was developed from the influence of the modern and post-modern art movements occurring in the European cities.

Bhambra also establishes a relationship between Italian artists of the Renaissance, who were often cartographers, and their involvement in the voyages of discovery of the New World, the emergence of Humanism and the ‘seemingly innovative movements in the arts and science’ (2007, p. 84). She explains that

The radical transformation of scientific ideas within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe was further taken to indicate a fundamental rupture from both preceding modes of thought and other cultural groups (2007, p. 9).

A conceptualisation of modernity based on a historical consciousness was then transposed over to the colonies, which explains how Europeans considered other already established civilisations as barbaric, primitive or ancient (Mignolo, 2009).⁹ Furthermore, decoloniality, in this thesis, involves questioning the iconic status of the Renaissance and the notion of art and aesthetics that originated from that era. Decoloniality of knowledge is here proposed as a framework upon to pinpoint

⁹ Discussions of indigenous languages have long fuelled postcolonial and decolonial scholarship in relation to European epistemology, which ascribed indigenous languages and knowledges primitive status (Mignolo, 2009, p. 7).

knowledges which breaks away from European modernity, hence from the experience of coloniality in the Global South – what Mignolo explains as entangled with modernity (2011). I read decoloniality of aesthetics and knowledge as processes of decolonisation that question residues of epistemic colonisation in Chapter Four.

Sylvia Wynter (Creolisation and indigenisation)

While Mignolo is a proponent of the decolonial school, he explains that decoloniality is an option, not a mission (Gaztambide-Fernández and Mignolo, 2014) in the sense that it is not a civilising or modernising mission but a proposed framework to examine the colonial matrix of power that determine the world today (p. 201). While Mignolo was inspired by Wynter's work, a closer look at how she has been received and brought forward in Black Studies, namely by Katherine McKittrick, allowed me to explore the complexity of her work. I draw from her arguments situated in the Caribbean and found them very relevant to my conceptualisation of aesthetics in the context of the music of the islands of the Indian Ocean (Wynter, 1970; 1992; 2003; 2007; McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). Her observation of creative practices in Jamaican culture, her theoretical framework on indigenisation and her intellectual approach to unsettling coloniality by positioning 'being human' as central to the production of knowledge, was a turning point to the way this research was carried forward. Her line of thought stands as the foundational ethos of Chapter Five on the Creole language and sega.

Since the 1970s, Wynter has explored what constitutes the 'human', by looking at three correlated phenomena: the European concept of humanism, the dehumanisation of the enslaved during colonial times and the creative processes of rehumanisation by the colonised to retain their humanity under enslavement. To be human within the perspective of the European, one had to be either 'Man1' 'who has travelled (materially and imaginatively) to the New World for socioreligious exploratory purposes, and the imperialist political human ['Man2'] who has travelled outside Europe for territorial expansion, conquest, wealth' (McKittrick, 2006, p. 124). Wynter demonstrates that European humanism represented the standards according to which one was considered human. These standards were established by the homo religiosus, homo politicus and in the present the homoeconomicus (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 10). Being human entailed 1) being religious Man, according to the theological order of knowledge of pre-Renaissance; 2) being political Man, an invention of the Renaissance; and 3) the economic Man based on the Western bourgeoisie's model of being human (p. 10). In other words, the non-Christian, those in the private sphere (women, children, the disabled or the old), those who do not aspire to the bourgeoisie, the racialised other or

the indigenous people were/are not considered human. In this sense, Wynter argues that this colonial epistemology justified the system of enslaving or exploiting anyone outside Man1 and Man2.

The Jamaican philosopher examines the relationship between the conception of European humanism which she argues was prompted by the exclusion of any other forms of being under the racial order of enslavement in the colonisation of the New World (2003). McKittrick explains that early explorers and religious evangelists ‘had to make sense of the world, and cultures, they had previously considered non-existent; and they could only make sense of the world through their subjective knowledges and positionalities’ (p. 125). Furthermore, an epistemological shift occurred with European colonialism, whose notion of humanness ‘was thrown into crisis by the seeable, ungodly, Indigenous peoples and their land’ (p. 124). Humanness ‘was re-evalued, produced in a classificatory, contextual, ideological manner – theologically/scientifically and then secularly/biologically. And both inventions of Man required a differential production of humanness. That is Man and his human Others came to represent and produce themselves in relation to each other...’ (McKittrick, 2006, p. 124).

Wynter also highlights the process of rehumanisation that was necessary for the enslaved people to survive under a colonial system (Bogues, 2010):

it was ... at the locus of the plantation, and in resistance to the dehumanization imposed on [the enslaved] by the market imperative of capitalism, that the black would rehumanise himself as a native of the [island] (Wynter in Bogues, 2010, p. xii).

These reflections will be relevant in Chapter Five in relation to how creative practices in the Creole mother tongue, such as sega, are carried forward in the present to question coloniality. In this respect, I also draw from the Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe who argues that ‘a person’s humanity is dissolved to the point where it becomes possible to say that the slave’s life is possessed by the master [...] the slave is able to demonstrate the protean capabilities of the human bond through music [and sound] and the very body that was supposedly by another’ (p. 22). It is in this sense that I use Mignolo’s decolonial option (Gaztambide-Fernández and Mignolo, 2014) to unsettle dominant narratives, to locate and uncover practices of resistance as well as to build visceral histories based on Wynter’s ‘being human’, placed at the centre of the production of knowledge.

It is through the notion of ‘being human as praxis’ that Wynter rethinks aesthetics

and develops the term ‘autopoiesis’, which she draws from the work of Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980). They define autopoiesis in terms of the ability to self-organise as a form of systemic resilience. It is a process during which a system produces its own organisation, maintains and constitutes itself in any given space. According to McKittrick,

Wynter reads biological theory to claim that autopoiesis – the consensual circular (not teleological-evolutionary) organization of human life through which we scientifically live and die as a species – draws attention to ‘a new frame of meaning, not only of *natural* history, but also of a newly conceived *cultural* history specific to and unique to our species, because the history of those “forms of life” gives expression to [a] . . . hybridly organic and . . . *languaging* existence’ (2015, p. 145, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015).

Wynter connects the biological human to the cultural history of the human species. She demonstrates ‘that the human – as a physiologically and narratively constituted being – is simultaneously bios (biological) and logos (worded/cultural)’ (Walcott, 2015, p. 190).

Autopoiesis, for Wynter, is related to the fact that the human is not only a languaging being but also a storytelling species or ‘*homo narrans*’ (Wynter, 2015, p. 25, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). This feature manifests itself ‘as the origin of the human as a hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species’ (p. 25). With the concept of autopoiesis placed in relation to the racialised geographies of colonialism and coloniality, Wynter is referring to the capacity of enslaved Africans and Black people to self-generate creative practices which allowed them to remain human, through a process of rehumanisation. Wynter’s hybrid human alludes to the human as a biological mechanism whose origin stories and cosmogonies are the storytelling ground that enable the human to be reborn as *homo narrans*. In Chapter Five, I analyse creative practices in the Creole mother tongue through the lens of autopoiesis to argue that the Creole culture has been created by an ‘auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species’ (p. 25) that rehumanised the colony with the sound of a new language and music.

The second aspect of Wynter’s work, which is relevant to this research on the Creole sonic culture, is her problematisation of the term ‘creolisation’ and her proposal to use ‘indigenisation’ instead. This is particularly relevant in the way that the terms creole and creolisation have been ‘colonised’ in the context of francophone Mauritius, which is further explained in Chapter Five. In the francophone Indian Ocean context, creole means creolisation (process of cultural mixture commonly used as a narrative of nationalism - we are all creole), creolised (mixed, ‘kuizinn kreol’ means cuisine of mixed origins), Creole language for communication (language used to communicate

while the mother tongue, the language spoken at home or language of one's ethnic group is different), Creole as mother tongue (usually the main language of Black/Creole people), Creole people (mainly people of mixed race with prominent African phenotypes), creole architecture (most problematically meaning colonial/settler architecture). The paradox is that this narrative of creolisation undermines the role that Creole practices play in the life of Creole artists to generate new spaces of sociality for themselves. This is where Wynter's notion of indigenisation proved helpful.

Creolisation was coined and defined by Barbadian scholar and poet Kamau Brathwaite (1971; 1995) as the interdependence of and interaction between colonisers and the colonised (both the enslaved and indentured workers) which gave rise to a Creole society. It continues to be used within both the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean basins to mean hybridity, racial and cultural mixture and represents a positive attribute to the creative practices that had emerged from this process of mixing. For example, in the context of Mauritius, both the Creole language and sega were instituted from a space where different African, Malagasy and South Asian languages and practices prevailed. However, I propose to look at the process of creolisation as a process of (re)humanisation under a regime of oppression. Wynter explains that in contrast with creolisation – which represents a ‘false assimilation’ (1970, in Bogues, 2010, p. xxiii) – indigenisation reveals a process of humanisation whereby the enslaved created new livelihoods on colonised lands and self-instituted creative practices.

Brathwaite subsequently reconsiders this definition of creolisation in an article in which he writes about Wynter's work (2011). He refers to the creative practices of the enslaved, which are influenced by African traditions but are reconfigured on colonial lands, as ‘a study in creolisation’ (p. 103). Furthermore, the way Wynter has revisited this concept differs from the reproduction, in European scholarship (Chaudenson and Mufwene, 2001; Stewart, 2007), of a Glissantian discourse of creolisation as ‘cultural creolisation’ – a process of cultural mixture between European and African languages (including the Indigenous languages) of the communities involved in the plantation economy. Martinican writer Édouard Glissant, in his early reflection (1960s-1990s), focuses on the specificity of Caribbean creolisation with an emphasis on the history of repression, resistance, invisibility and survival as well as the history of assimilation and epistemic colonisation of enslaved Africans and their descendants (1989, p. 5), in a similar line of thinking to Wynter's. In his later works however Glissant writes about the Caribbean experience of creolisation as representing a global phenomenon of cultural hybridisation which bring languages and other practices like music or literature

to merge creatively from the premise of cultural differences (1997). I stress that *The Poetics of Relation* (1997) covers wider frames of thought and that the conceptualisation of creolisation had been reproduced and amplified in the European scholarship on creolisation from the field of linguistic, anthropology and history. In the final theme covered in this chapter, I discuss how sound theorists such as Louis Chude-Sokei have been influenced by Glissant's reflection on technology, from *The Poetics of Relation*, to conceptualise the idea of a Creole futurity based on the technologising of sound by Creole musicians.

In this context, I draw from scholars who pinpoint the specificity of colonial violence in the process of creolisation. For Françoise Vergès, scholar of Indian Ocean histories, creolisation 'is not a harmonious process; it involves exclusion and discrimination' (2007, p. 148). Creolisation is a cultural creativity in process or a mix of cultural practices or languages, aspiring at an experience of universality, a-historicity, cosmopolitanism, 'heterogeneity and unpredictability' (Vergès, 2014). Vergès investigates the phenomenon by looking into the conditions of the plantation by which the process of creolisation emerged (p. 149). This perspective reiterates Brathwaite's point of view that creolisation began

with 'seasoning' – a period of one to three years, when the slaves were branded, given a new name and put under apprenticeship to creolized slaves. During this period the slave would learn the rudiments of his new language and be initiated into the work routines that awaited him (1995, p. 203).

Creolisation is geographically and historically located in the systems of slavery (as well as indenture) in the Caribbean, the Americas and the Indian Ocean, and implies the creation of 'mongrel cultural forms' (Gilroy, 1993, p. 3) which entail 'a litany of pollution and impurity' from the view point of ethnic absolutism. In this sense, the scholar Rinaldo Walcott, who writes about Black Canada, explains that creolisation 'takes place in the context of unequal and brutal power arrangements alongside forms of severe cultural dominance' (2015, p. 187). For Wynter,

[w]hilst the 'creolization' process represents [...] a more or less 'false assimilation' in which the dominated people adopt elements from the dominant [...] in order to obtain prestige or status, the 'indigenization' process represents the more secretive process by which the dominated culture survives; and resists (Wynter, 1970, in Bogues, 2010, p. xxiii).

The history of the Caribbean islands is, for Wynter, in large part the history of the indigenisation of the Black people (1970, p. 35), which consequently allowed the enslaved to think of ways of 'being human'. Therefore, being hybirdly human for

Wynter implies a process of autopoiesis and indigenisation, as self-creation, which run against the discourse of creolisation as cultural mixture. For example, Wynter explores the Jonkonnu dance (Wynter, 1970; Brathwaite, 2011), a creative practice brought by Africans to the Caribbean islands and elaborates on the cultural process of indigenisation that the dance practice went through (Walcott, 2015). She argues that cultural history is not found in ‘writing’ – referring to the culture of literature brought by colonization versus the generational knowledge ingrained in the orality of Indigenous peoples displaced Africans during enslavement – but in ‘those “homunculi” who humanize the landscape by peopling it ... with all the rich panoply of man’s imagination’ (Wynter, 1970, in Bogues, 2010, p. xxii).

These practices allowed the enslaved to resist the negation of their being and to foster processes of affirmation (p. xxiv). It is important to note that indigeneity has also been appropriated by former colonised (enslaved and indentured) people who reproduced a settler mentality after independence arguing that their labour in the colonies justified the appropriation of the land on which they worked (Jackson, 2012). The critiques against indigeneity are particularly attentive to the imperial narrative of making the Indigenous peoples of the Americas invisible by Caribbean writers (Newton, 2013).

It is in this sense that I look at the work of Indigenous/Black feminist/queer scholarship – particularly the work of Katherine McKittrick, Saidiya Hartman, Eleonora Fabião, Christina Sharpe, Grada Kilomba, Eve Tuck, Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones and Carolyn Cooper – who use a mix of analytical and literary concepts to pinpoint the viscerality of the violence of coloniality which is often absent in the historiography of colonisation. What these scholars have in common is the theorisation of coloniality through the personal experience of those most affected by a history of colonisation and coloniality. Their scholarship often includes academic and prose writing, performance, non-fiction and essay writing and they produce conceptual frameworks that, as Christina Sharpe explains in her seminal book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) – explains, do not make ‘domination in/visible and not/visceral’ (2016, p. 21). Sharpe looks at ‘Black trauma’ in the United States and establishes a connection between ‘Black death’ (the precarity of Black people’s lives in America, the violence they face due to police brutality, the mourning of the death of close ones and their

survival) and the experience of their ancestors' enslavement.¹⁰ Sharpe presents 'wake work' as an analytic and literary concept to plot, map and collect 'the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death' (2016, p. 13) and track the ways that Black people 'resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially' (p. 13). This approach has prompted me to reflect on how histories of enslavement and indentured labour in Mauritius inform contemporary forms of structural violence.

The writings of the thinkers I have listed above retain an intimate relation to the experience of the people they write about and were particularly essential for the writing of Chapter Five. Their work pushed me to understand the precarious conditions under which Creole artists produce sega and propose the Creole sonic culture as an entrance to thinking of a decolonial historiography. The tragic death of the seggae artist, Kaya, at the hands of the police in 1999 triggered many of the reflections in this research. This is discussed in the next section and in Chapter Five.

Critical geography and slow violence

The concept of the *callejera* (streetwalker) by Argentinian sociologist María Lugones (2003) was an entry point to looking at geography with a critical lens.¹¹ Lugones writes from a Latina (women from Latin America) context about the struggles of indigenous women and was inspired by the work of scholar of Chicana cultural theory, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who built different genealogies and methods of research through her essays, semi-autobiographical writing and poetry as a decolonial practice. Lugones's notion of 'tactical strategies' (2003), defined as 'micromechanisms of power [...] met with creative resistance' (p. 208), is a direct response to sociologist Michel de Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategies in his work on the spatiality and experience of the city (1988). De Certeau's strategist is a representative of an institution of power which, for Lugones, operates the space within the frame of Western/scientific/colonial rationality. The tactician, on the other hand, resists and disrupts the logic of power behind the imposition of a hierarchical management of the space, defined by De Certeau as the 'ruses of the weak'. Lugones's notion of 'tactical strategies' is a critique of De Certeau's 'weak' subjects, whose disruption of the space is

¹⁰ I am aware of the vast literature on trauma from a medical and psychoanalytical lens as well as from the field of memory studies. I elaborate on memory studies in the fourth thematic on historiography in this section. However, for this research, I mainly draw from the concept of 'Black trauma' by Christina Sharpe (2016).

¹¹ Lugones' work centres specifically on how women and Indigenous peoples negotiate the vulnerability and precarity of being on the streets (2003). In this sense, she contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge by bringing notions of class, race/ethnicity/caste, gender, ability and sexuality into dialogue.

read as an absence or a lack of ‘the “proper” mastered by the strategist’ (Lugones, 2003, p. 215). In other words, the rationality of the strategic planner, as the tactician, is unable to acquire the strategist’s mode of operation of the space. Strategies always presuppose a ‘proper’, a place that can provide ‘a certain independence from the variability of circumstances’ (De Certeau, 1988, p. 36).

In this sense, Lugones’s tactical strategies are carriers of ‘epistemologies of resistance/liberation’ (2003, p. 208). Tactical strategic engagement happens when ‘one places, takes up, follows, aids, resistant emancipatory intentions in the midst of active, resisting subjects who are indispensable to each other if their intending is to inform their social reality’ (p. 224) and it

is in this line of vision, street-level, among embodied subjects, with ill-defined ‘edges’, that the tactical strategist lives without myopia, without epistemological/political short-sightedness (p. 207).

Lugones’ *callejera* resists De Certeau’s strategist position and engages with ‘everyday practices of resistance’. The streetwalker theorist, as an active subject (Lugones, 2003, p. 211), develops a tactical strategic position in the production of knowledge. Lugones’ tactical insight also positions flat viewpoints as taken with a distance from the people at ‘below’ street level (p. 215). I explain how this informed my methodology in the next section and is relevant to the critique I build in Chapter Four which discusses the settler aesthetics in the visual arts. A settler aesthetics promotes mainland Mauritius as an ‘uninhabited’ paradise island with what Lugones describes as a ‘distant’ view of the space. Moreover, I analyse, in Chapter Four, Ghanty’s art performance which consists of taking a life-sized mould of the dodo into town and from which Ghanty develops a ‘body-to-body engagement’ (Lugones, 2003, p. 207) with the people on the streets.

Lugones’s work binds in with Wynter’s philosophical configurations about ‘a flesh-and-body worldview implicit to the production of space’ and allow us ‘to consider the ways in which space, place, and poetics are expressing and mapping an ongoing human geography story’ (McKittrick, 2006, p. 122). It is through the work of McKittrick, in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), that I develop the idea of looking at coloniality from the physical cartography of mainland Mauritius in Chapter Two as well as the specific human geography that develops from this marginalised spatiality of Creole artists – what McKittrick articulates as

‘geographies of the black diaspora’ (p. 122).¹² McKittrick writes that ‘geography is always human and [...] humanness is always geographic’ (p. ix). Her reflection on how geography impacts and defines the human and vice versa was an instigating factor to explore the field of critical geography which gave me the tools to analyse the postcolonial grid-like cartography of the capital city of Mauritius, Port Louis, which bears witness to the colonial governing and ordering of the colony. I also locate the racialised demarcation of the city: the space where institutions stand as relics of a colonial epistemology against the periphery of the city which represent cartographies of struggle of the ghettoised Black/Creole people.

Furthermore, the literature on human and cultural geography (Nixon, 2011; Le Billon and Springer, 2016; Lugones, 2003; Stoler, 2013; Weizman, 2014) provided a significant reflection on how postcolonial geographies are embedded in violence from the residues of the imperial occupation, exploitation and urbanization of land, as discussed extensively in Indigenous scholarship (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Critical geographers, architects and theorists of spatial politics have been attentive to the relationship between legacies of empires, infrastructures of segregation, racialised cityscapes and the maintenance of power. Based on this line of research, in Chapter Two, I examine how the cartography of plantations, which Mbembe calls ‘topographies of cruelty’ (2003, p. 40), restage the past of a colonial violence. By looking at the capital city of Mauritius and at the Natural History Museum, I establish a link between the residual violence of the colonial architecture and institutions, marked by what scholar Ann Laura Stoler calls ‘imperial debris’ (Stoler, 2013) and by its relevance in the reproduction of a colonial narrative of progress allegedly brought about by the colonisation of the island.

Moreover, I use the term ‘slow violence’, which I draw from Rob Nixon’s seminal text *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) and the work of Israeli forensic architect Eyal Weizman (2014, 2017). While the scholar Nixon speaks specifically of environmental violence and looks at the threats and impacts of environmental decline on the more disempowered in the global south in particular, I mostly draw from the distinction he draws between spectacular and structural violence:

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as

¹² McKittrick examines the relationship of Black women in the United States and Canada (with a history of captivity, slavery, incarceration, racism and sexism) with the spaciality in which they live.

an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales (2011, p. 2).

Nixon also describes slow violence as being less visible but not passive – similar to psychological oppression which can be more damaging than corporeal violence (p. 16).

Weizman, on his side, explains how complicit peaceful cohabitation around spatialities of violence or with violent geographies that shape daily lives evoke an atmosphere of slow violence (2014, p. 16).

Architecture and the built environment is a kind of a slow violence... buildings are thus not just passive elements, receptive sensors on which events are registered... Rather, built environments are composite assemblies of structures, spaces, infrastructure, services, and technologies with the capacity to act and interact with their surroundings and shape events around them. They structure and condition rather than simply frame human action, they actively – sometimes violently – shape incidents and events (Weizman, 2014, p. 16).

Weizman writes about occupied Palestine and explains that objects, spatialities and buildings ‘speak’, through what he articulates as ‘architectural prosopoeia’, in the sense that they provide evidence and spaces of analysis to understand terrains of violence. Engaging with the spatiality of the streets requires ‘listening’ to the voices of the space and things, what Eyal Weizman articulates as ‘architectural prosopopeia’ – the speech of things as testimony for example (2017). In my context, the racialised spatiality of the colonial city and its residues speak of the residual violence of colonisation.

Both Nixon and Weizman explain that buildings are thus not passive elements but ‘structure and condition rather than simply frame human action, they actively – sometimes violently – shape incidents and events (Weizman, 2014, p. 16) and are ‘delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space’ (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). While for Weizman and Nixon, ‘slow violence’ aggressively shapes incidents and events and frame human action, I discuss the impact of the violence of a settler cartography, postcolonial architecture and of institutions in the context of Mauritius and of its memorial processes. I develop, in Chapter Two, the term ‘colonial anaesthesia’ to show that the nationalisation of colonial institutions and the conservation of colonial buildings and monuments as national heritage anaesthetises the place, by overshadowing the history of physical violence and instigating amnesia in the present.

History and Memory

This aspect takes me to the fourth thematic of this research: memory and history. In

Chapter Two, I reframe a pathological discourse on cultural amnesia used the chairman of the Truth and Justice Commission (contextualised in Section 1.2: Methodology) to explain that most Mauritians do not know their history because they preferred to forget (TJC, vol. 1, p. 7). In order to rethink history writing and the historiography of slavery, I explore the reconfiguration of history as a field of study by first reading the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault on historiography (1969; 1980; 1984). Foucault built a critique on the field of history as a method of analysis based on ‘causal succession’ of events (1969, p. 3) which he describes as interruptions and classifications into stages and phases to create historical periodisation.

The academic field of history has been contested since the 1920s by the Annales School of French historians (namely Fernand Braudel who conducted historical work (1977) on the Indian Ocean) and established the connection between the history of the Indian Ocean and the that of the America in the emergent global capitalist network which arose from the plantation economy). The Annales School problematised the materialist history (based on a Marxist historiography) in favour of a history in the ‘longue durée’ which challenges the historicising of singular events and proposes to look at the permanent structures that remain in place and impact contemporary times and specific geographical locations. Similarly, social history in the work of Raphael Samuel, for example, prospered in West Europe during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Memory studies has further contributed to the reconstruction of national histories across Europe, where various investigations were triggered in the 1980s on issues of public memory (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010). Therefore, my reconfiguration of history in the Mauritian context is a continuation of this line of thought. My introduction to memory studies which is a recent academic field using memory as a tool for remembering the past, has allowed me to understand the work of revising colonial history by the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission from oral testimonies and archival material.

The generation of the late nineteenth century has been described as the generation of memory in a time of on-going boom in oral history, testimony and other memory initiatives across the globe with the ease to record, disseminate and archive memories (Erl, 2011; Huyssen, 1995; Radstone & Schwarz, 2010; Winter, 1995). The study of memory, in the humanities and social sciences as well as in the cognitive sciences, have enriched the field of contemporary history, compelling historians to deal with questions concerning epistemology, power and subjectivity. The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950), whose works influenced memory scholarship, developed his theory of collective

memory in the 1920s and argued that history focuses on single narratives while collective memories are multiple and that specific collective memories are formed upon the experiences of a group which share the memory of an event collectively. Influenced by Halbwachs, Paul Connerton (1989) studies how individuals in a group/societies remember (social memory) and how historians studies social memory to reconstruct history. This explains the work of the Truth and Justice Commission to collect oral testimonies of slavery and indenture in order to reconstruct a national history. In Chapter Two, the work on *Memory, History and Forgetting* by the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (2004), is further used to establish a relationship between the pathological model of amnesia (p. 27) and what I develop as colonial anaesthesia.¹³

Furthermore, the memory scholar Jay Winter describes the generation of the late 19th century as the ‘generation of memory’ (2001, p. 1) in a time of on-going boom in oral history, testimony and other memory initiatives across the globe with the ease to record, disseminate and archive memories. Andreas Huyssen (1995) elaborates on the history of memorial culture from the 1980s where Europe ‘kept building museums and memorials as if haunted by the fear of some imminent traumatic loss’ (p. 5). This explains why the last three decades have witnessed a surge of scholarship in Europe and America around memory and trauma (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010).

Radstone and Schwarz argues that the concept of trauma and the prominence of trauma theory do not provide one general or framing theory by which to approach events like Slavery, the Holocaust for example (p. 8). In the context of the history of slavery in Mauritius, I draw from Black Studies, namely Christina Sharpe’s work on Black trauma. I establish a difference between ‘writing trauma’ and ‘writing about trauma’, a point also raised by the historian Dominick LaCapra (2001) who uses a psychological and psychoanalytical lens to problematise the notion of a ‘collective’ trauma in trauma studies. LaCapra shows that only a small part of a group who collectively experienced a traumatic event suffers from, what has been described in clinical terms as, post-traumatic stress. This is relevant in Chapter Two when I discuss the discourse of trauma and amnesia and in Chapter Five in the discussion on Black trauma.

¹³ Semantic terms such as voluntary and involuntary memory, collective memory, communicative memory, individual memory, competitive memory, travelling memory, post-memory, re-memory, prosthetic memory, multidirectional memory, prospective memory, material memory, globital memory have been elaborated to allow the theorisation of traumatic events.

Furthermore, the historian Wulf Kansteiner further explains that, epistemologically, in ‘memory studies, the social relevance of the historical representations under description is often simply assumed and does not have to be demonstrated by way of an explicit cause and effect model’ (2014, p. 125). The position taken in this research is in line with Kansteiner’s concern on the focus on memory which ‘raises the disturbing question as to whether the study of the memory of events serves the purpose of not having to engage with its history’ (p. 125).

Are we developing sustained curiosity about the acts of (mis)representation of postwar generations in order to avoid a direct encounter with the moral depravity of the perpetrator generation? (p. 125).

This research draws from postcolonial and decolonial theorists and other thinkers from the ‘postcolony’ (Mbembe, 2001) who have been preoccupied by the question of temporality, linearity and discontinuity in the European historiography (Dussel, 2000; Chakrabarty, 1998; Guha, 1977; Ngũgĩ, 1986). In relation to understanding the historiography of the postcolony of Mauritius, I was inspired by the work of the Subaltern Studies group, a collective founded by South Indian scholars in the 1980s who claim that historians educated within a European tradition ‘had learned to accept history as an entirely modern and Western kind of knowledge about the past historicized by writing [...] modernist not in methodology alone but in concept as well’ (Guha, 2002, p. 53). This initial reflection allowed me to conceptualise the writing of visceral histories, in Chapter Five, around the Creole ‘sonic historiography’ – a term I borrow from a musician and music theorist, Kevin Holm-Hudson (2001).

If historiography has to do with the way history is presented or ‘packaged’, sonic historiography is a packaging of [...] history in sound, as sound. (Holm-Hudson, 2001, p. 247).

Holm-Hudson looks at rock music in the 1970s and argues that a sonic historiography is a reflection of a decade when music ‘became increasingly imbued with a sense of its own history’ (p. 248). In this research, I use the term ‘sonic historiography’ to define a study, or listening, of a three-hundred-years history of enslavement which carried forward the sega performance through what I argue a mode of sonic story-telling. This is complemented by the term ‘performative historiography’ (Fabião, 2012) which I use to propose an alternative historiography based on the sonic and embodied aspect of the Creole culture.

It also draws from the work of Saidiya Hartman, a scholar specialising in African American literature and history, who proposes the term ‘critical fabulation’ (2008) to

discuss modes of ‘playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view’ (p. 11). Hartman is preoccupied by the possible narration of stories of ‘the nameless and the forgotten’ (p. 4) from ‘the locus of impossible speech’ (p. 3) and finding ways of ‘deranging the [colonial] archive’ (p. 13). She reflects on the history of the people who are not named in the archive and who are unable to speak anymore, what she calls the ‘silence in the archives’ (p. 3).

How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know? How does one listen for the groans and cries, the undecipherable songs, the crackle of fire in the cane fields, the laments for the dead, and the shouts of victory, and then assign words to all of it? Is it possible to construct a story from ‘the locus of impossible speech’ or resurrect lives from the ruins? (p. 3).

I use Hartman’s reflections as well as Grada Kilomba’s work on the politics of silencing under colonisation (2010), as a starting point in my research to propose a decolonial historiography from the locus of impossible speech and from the silent/silenced voices from the official archives (Hartman, 2008; Kilomba, 2010). Kilomba – a Portuguese interdisciplinary artist and the author of *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (2010) – uses the semiotics of the imagery of the iron collar and facemask imposed on enslaved men and women to prevent them from poisoning themselves, by ‘eating earth’ for example, as a form of suicide. By bringing visibility to archival visual imageries which represent the violence of slavery, she discusses the ‘long history of imposed silence’ (2010, p. 12) and describes it as ‘the brutal mask of speechlessness’ (p. 16), a reminder of the ‘sadistic politics of conquest and its cruel regimes of silencing the so-called “Other”’ (p. 16).

This weaves in with Sharpe’s reading of the hauntological and its connection to the afterlives of slavery, which defines coloniality in the context of the Americas (Sharpe, 2016). In Chapters Four and Five, I draw from Sharpe who uses the metaphor of the slave ship to discuss how the spectre of slavery haunts the contemporary lives of the Creole people. Her reflection is also useful in Chapter Four where I discuss the extinct dodo’s spectral voice through Hurry’s poetry and particularly in Chapter Five where I demonstrate how the music and sound of sega is hauntological and is associated with mourning. Haunting has been a literary trope in European scholarship, inspired by William Shakespeare’s foreboding apparition of the ghost of the murdered king in *Hamlet* in the sixteenth century and Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) where Marx evokes the spectre of communism that is haunting Europe. Furthermore,

Derrida used the concept of hauntology (instead of ontology) as a method of deconstruction in *The Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1993) to explain how the spectres of the past reappear in different temporalities, alluding to the recurrence of historical events and their residues in the present and future. Since then, hauntology has inspired many scholars in the field of visual culture, literary criticism and philosophy. I mainly draw from Sharpe who establishes a relationship between mourning the deceased and producing creative work in which the spectres of the ‘undead’ make themselves present (p. 38).

Furthermore, Hartman reminds us that the colonial archives of slavery could not historicise, represent or enunciate the ancestral, cultural and physical lives of the enslaved (p. 12). On the other hand, the media artist, photographer and scholar Roshini Kempadoo constructs a conceptual frame for a pictorial Caribbean archive – from creole discourses of hybridity and relational thinking – and informs us that archives ‘cannot be considered stable or retroactive, but rather as a generative practice using technologies and forms that are participatory and performative, seamlessly combining history and fiction’ (2016, p. 6). For Kempadoo, the ‘contiguous archive is a manifestation of creolisation’ (p. 5). In relation to the artistic practices which challenge the colonial archive (Chapter Four) and the creative practices in the Creole mother tongue (Chapter Five) – what Kempadoo refers as ‘creole practices’ (p. 28) in the Caribbean context – I use the terminology ‘anarchive’ to discuss contemporary art in Mauritius that looks at how history intersects with memory. I borrow the term from a, now, dated article by the art historian Hal Foster, ‘An Archival Impulse’ (2004). Foster briefly mentions that the ‘anarchival impulse’ might be a more appropriate term to explain the archival impulse of artists who break, re-interpret, rewrite, relive and re-feel the official archive.

In this regard, archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps ‘anarchival impulse’ is the more appropriate phrase), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects – in art and in history alike – that might offer points of departure again (Foster, 2004, p. 5).

Archival artists extract historical information often displaced or misinterpreted, and bring forward a different anarchival visibility (Foster, 2004).

In this sense, I propose to look at a ‘phenomenological sense of history as experience, as active involvement and awareness (all necessarily corporeal), that animates the approximation between historiography and performance art’ (Fabião,

2012, p. 122). For performer and performance theorist, Eleonora Fabião, historiography is a visceral experience of history in writing. Fabião comes from a long history of Brazilian artists who use public arenas for performance and explore the street as a space of social, economic, and political tension from where art can provoke and engage. Fabião explains that a ‘performative historiography’ implies performative art forms and ‘specific modes of acting historiography’ (p. 121).¹⁴

In a corporeal sense, the so-called past is neither gone nor actual, it is neither exactly accumulative nor does it simply vanish – the body intertwines imagination, memory, sensorial perception, and actuality in very sophisticated ways. The body itself moves according to these intertwinements while permanently producing new mnemonic, sensorial, actual, and imaginative connections that generate movement (Fabião, 2012, p. 124).

I draw from Fabião’s argument that the body (in this case the sonic body, as elaborated in Chapter Five) is a receptacle of memorial practices and visceral histories, as *sega* has been performed and transmitted for more than three hundred years. Performative historiography is a process or a series of processes, acts and corporeal engagement – ‘specific modes of acting historiography’ (Fabião, 2012, p. 121) that explore the dichotomy between scientific history and literary history, historiography based on facts and archival documents and the historians’ narrative and interpretation of the archive. Performative historiography investigates and exposes

the inseparability of memory, imagination, sensorial perception, and actuality of which the embodied self is the model, rather than to invest in differentiating ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’ or in stimulating the conflict between the aim of preservation (scientific history) and the impossibility of reconstitution (literary history) (Fabião, 2012, p. 124).

Fabião’s experience and writing as a performance artist is explored further in Chapter Four in relation to a performance by Firoz Ghanty who, I argue, produces decolonial narratives on the extinct dodo bird. In Chapter Five, the term ‘performative historiography’ is also useful when I discuss Creole practices of autopoiesis and the inscription of a visceral sonic history.

Thinking through sound

As a final theme which is relevant to the exploration of a performative and sonic

¹⁴ While performance presupposes an actor/ performer and an expected audience and is based on repetition and recitation (Butler, 1993), performativity consists of a normative and discursive mode of performing, without awareness of being a performer and having an audience (Derrida, 1998; Butler, 1993). For Butler, gender performativity implies that gender ‘is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a “doing” rather than a “being”’ (Butler, 1993, p. 55).

historiography of the Creole culture in Chapter Five, I develop ‘listening’ and ‘thinking through sound’ (Bull, 2016; Chude-Sokei, 2016; Henriques, 2011; Voegelin, 2014) as a decolonial method, while drawing a relationship between the work of Julian Henriques, Carolyn Cooper and Sylvia Wynter who each look at creative practices by enslaved Africans and the Black diaspora developed from the margins of contemporary coloniality of power. For Henriques and Salomé Voegelin, an artist and writer engaged in listening and hearing as a socio-political practice of sound, listening is a method of learning and can offer alternative perspectives:

We have to learn to listen. In fact, listening is little short of a synonym for learning (Henriques, 2011, p. 88).

Listening offers another point of view, an alternative perspective on how things are, producing new ideas on how they could be and how we could live in a sonic possible world, and how we could include sound’s invisible formlessness in a current realization and valuation of what we understand to be the actual world (Voegelin, 2014, pp. 2-3).

Listening as method changed my initial analysis of the Creole language, which I initially approached from a linguistic and anthropological paradigm, that does not prioritise the specificity of practices in the language such as the sega. From listening, I develop an ‘auditory epistemology’ (Henriques, 2011, p. xviii) of the performative, musical, sonic and auditory landscape of the Creole culture. This focuses on analysing the intangible audibility of the music and the sonic registers of the songs in comparison to the literary reading of the lyrics. In this sense, this research is more invested in the musicality and sonority of the Creole language than the music or ‘musicking’ (Small, 1998) which consists of the different elements (participation, listening, performing, dancing, composing) of producing and taking part in music. Although Chapter Five focuses on the sega music, it does so to demonstrate how music is a carrier of the Creole language which is integral to what I describe as a Creole sonic culture.

Henriques draws from observation of the Jamaican sound systems and the dancing body in the reggae dancehall and theorises thinking through sound and the sonic body through the concept of ‘sonic dominance’ (p. xviii), which refers to the predominance of sound that contributes to the crowd’s visceral immersive experience in the dancehall session. He explains:

Thinking sound is thus a matter of working through the *medium* of sound as thought [...] What sound offers is a dynamic model of thinking. This can only be expressed through corporeal practices of thought, rather than the more commonplace discursive line of thought (Henriques, 2011, p. xviii).

The Jamaican auditory sensibility, bass culture, and the sonic bodies and soundscape of Reggae, Dancehall and Sound System inspired Henriques to place sounding at the centre of enquiry.¹⁵ Thinking through sound, what he establishes as ‘sounding’, is distinct from our habitual thinking through images or music and that it is not bound up with language, notation and representation (2011, p. xvii).¹⁶ Sounding, for Henriques, serves to draw ‘a process or event, not a coded representation but medium, not a thought but a feeling’ (p. xvii) and is thus different from the conventional text or image, as object of enquiry.

Thinking through sounding brings to the fore the value of auditory propagation as a mechanical process, as a model of a way of understanding that avoids being entirely bound up with language, notation and representation (2011, p. xvii).

I draw from Henriques’s reflections on the difference between the discipline of music and musicology, and the method of thinking through sound and sounding. Musicology is often concerned with classical and avant-garde traditions and music, as it is notated, carry the presumption of being progressive. Thinking through sounding contradicts the hierarchy in the categorisation of different types of music which allows me to reflect on the categorisation of sega as ‘folk music’, defined through a Western notion of aesthetics.

For Henriques, sounding is ‘a social and cultural practice, not a structure expressed as musical notation, an object or product of any kind’ (p. 38). Henriques considers sounding ‘as more dangerous than music. It asks more questions, has a greater disruptive potential – because it escapes the bars and all the other confines of systems of musical meaning (as it does, of course, visual codes)’ (p. 37). It was through looking at sounding as a social and cultural practice that I discuss sega.

Voegelin recognises the wider context of sound in the cultural practices of a ‘sonic possible world’ (2014, pp. 2–3) which is about conceiving spaces with a sonic sensibility. Her philosophy entails creating a listening engagement with language and concentrating on ‘the heard as well as its own articulation’ outside the words that language. It is through listening to language that I could articulate what Voegelin calls the Creole ‘sonic aesthetics’ (p. 5). Henriques reiterates that the ocularcentric modality of European modernity emphasises the hypervisual to the detriment of sound-making,

¹⁵ Henriques adds that thinking though sound is ‘relevant well beyond the particular example of the Jamaican sound systems’ (2011, p. xxvii).

¹⁶ Henriques draws from the corporeal turn (the auditory connection to embodiment (2011, p. xxvii) and affect theory in cultural studies from the seminal work of Brian Massumi (2002).

listening and hearing. He explains that this

affords a critique of the dichotomies that visual metaphors are often used to promote, which invariably separate technologies from their use, sound-making from listening, production from consumption, transmission from reception and performance from re-performance (Henriques, 2011, p. xxxiv)

Thinking through sound and listening allowed me to analyse the Creole sonic aesthetics in Chapter Five, to move beyond analysing how visual artists use the Creole language as a political tool in their artworks.

I also borrow the term ‘sonic bodies’ from Henriques for an analysis of the sega dance in Chapter Five. Henriques explains that in the sound system culture, sonic bodies are ‘the flesh and blood of sound system crew and “crowd,” as the dancehall audience is known’ (p. xv). Sonic bodies ‘are vocal, as well as musical, with the MC (or DJ) voice booming out across the darkened dancefloor, to elicit the crowd’s response’ (p. xv). I explained in the Introduction that the immersive auditory environment (Bull, 2016) and sonic atmosphere of the sega performance elicit the response of dancers and audience to become participative ‘sonic bodies’. I draw from Henriques’s reading to discuss how the rhythmic cry of the sega singer – the *choul* – increases the tempo of the music as well as the movements of the sega dancers and crowd. The sega is embodied in what Paul Gilroy – author of the seminal works *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987) and *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) – calls the ‘call-and-response ritual’ (1993, p. 138). This ritual accounts for the antiphony effect (in which two sets of voices sing alternately, for example), characteristic of black artistic practices in which the audience responds to a leading voice at systemic intervals (p. 78).

Furthermore, Henriques establishes a relationship between traditional African rhythms (Nyabinghi drumming) and the rhythm beat that turned ska into reggae as a musical form (p. 11). He notes that

interestingly, the musicians themselves are not necessarily aware of the rhythm’s origins as such. In this way, ancient old-world African traditions come ‘up to the time’ [...] with the latest digital technologies (Henriques, 2011, p. 12).

Sonic bodies, according to Henriques, are performative and highly skilled, fine-tuned with the sound, music and atmosphere, and ‘consist of a corpus of knowledge’ (2011, p. xv) handed down through generations of practitioners. They are ‘knowing’ and therefore transmit knowledge.

Sonic bodies produce, experience and make sense of sound. Sound, even as the playing of a recording is always ‘live’ at the point of hearing. Sounding has to be embodied as an event in a particular time and place, as distinct from being ‘frozen’ as a text or image whose embodiment is less immediate (p. xvi-xvii).

Sound differs from vision in its relational qualities and in the placing and spacing of experience (p. 74).

According to Henriques, sonic bodies are ‘immediately’ immersed in the experience. In Carolyn Cooper’s pioneering studies of Jamaican Reggae and Dancehall, on the other hand, the sonic body is the dancer. She speaks of dance ‘as a mode of theatrical self-disclosure’ (2007, p. 1). Following Cooper’s line of thinking, I argue that the female dancer in sega, whose body responds to the vibrating beat of music and becomes one with the sound and does not adhere to conservative social norms and etiquette of the ‘respectable’ body. In other words, the knowing sonic body resists the social (in this case colonial) norms of respectability imposed on it, as discussed in the second section of Chapter Five.

Finally, I draw from the concept of ‘Creole futurity’ (Chude-Sokei, 2016; 2018) to analyse the influence of roots reggae on seggae and the technological transformation of sega in the 1980s.¹⁷ I analyse the innovation brought to sega by the seggae artist, Kaya, who was influenced by the bass sound of roots reggae. I argue in Chapter Five that he technologises sega, the sonic element of which is built on the rhythm and vibration of the *ravann*, a percussion instrument which is the backbone of sega. Seggae on the other hand, is played with a heavy bassline from bass guitar, the drum, the keyboard, the djembe or the trumpet. It is in this sense that I draw from the work of Louis Chude-Sokei – West African, Caribbean, and American literary and cultural studies scholar with a particular focus on sound, technology, and performance – to *listen* to the Creole sonic culture as a technological futurity.

Chude-Sokei draws from Glissant’s notion of creolisation as a ‘Creole futurity [which is] rooted in the experience of merging’. According to Chude-Sokei, Glissant (whose thoughts predated the full advent of digitalisation in the Caribbean) questioned whether technology could be adapted to the cultures of the Caribbean (2018). While, for Glissant culture is subject to historical change, Chude-Sokei argues that it is subject to

¹⁷ Alexander Weheliye, author of *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (2005), adds another dimension to my research on sega and seggae. He draws a genealogy of modern technology and highlights the proliferation of information technologies, in the late nineteenth century, such as the phonograph, telegraph, telephone and cinematograph (p. 4).

technological transformation. Chude-Sokei problematises Glissant's question, which he describes as a hesitation to technology, and argues that the working class in downtown Jamaica, for example, were well tuned to the technologising of the music.

In this sense, thinking music through technology has allowed me to investigate the Creole sonic culture, which I read as disruption to the coloniality-modernity matrix. In this respect, Weheliye – who looks at the sonic topography of popular music and theorises on a sonic Afro-modernity (2005) – adds to this reflection. Weheliye positions Black music and Black culture's engagement with sound technologies as 'both central to and outside of Western modernity' (p. 5). For Weheliye, McKittrick, Wynter and Chude-Sokei, modernity is related to 'being human as praxis', which stands in contrast with colonial modernity. The history of sound technologies in Black cultural production, in the case of my research on Creole, 'represent[s] a crucial signifying locus for the formation of (black) subjectivities throughout the twentieth century' (Weheliye, 2005, p. 13). This aspect frames my discussion of sega in Chapter Five.

Furthermore, I draw from Wynter's post-aesthetic creative practices (1992), developed from spaces of marginalisation, which represent what McKittrick articulates as a poetics that envisions a 'decolonial future' (2013, p. 5). A decolonial outlook recognises that Creole aesthetic practices cannot be categorised as 'folklore', 'local', 'hybrid', 'fusion' or 'mixture'. They are creative practices, regenerated from African, Malagasy and South/South-East Asian ancestral practices, that are technologised into new sub-genres across generations. The third section of Chapter Five analyses seggae, a sub-genre of sega developed in the 1980s from the bass sound of Jamaican roots reggae. Seggae represents post-aesthetic creative practices which emerged from a cartography of Creole struggle. I discuss how seggae technologises sega in an era of music composition made possible by the access to new sonic landscapes and sound technologies. Chapter Five is written from the perspective of reading Creole cultures as a decolonial futurity, discussing both the slaves' sega and seggae as rooted in a technological transformation of the particular time in which they evolve (Chude-Sokei, 2018).

The next section presents the methodology used in this research.

1.2 Methodology

This section presents the methodology used across the next four chapters. The main secondary literature (on the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission and the limitations of the Indian Ocean model for the Mascarene islands) contextualises the scholarship on the Indian Ocean in relation to the specific history of the Mascarene islands, particularly Mauritius. This section also elaborates on the ethnographic work done in Mauritius with streetwalker theorising in mind and presents the sources of research material and the rationale for its selection.

i.a) The Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission

Truth commissions are temporary official bodies that are sanctioned, authorised and empowered by the state to investigate a recent past history of violence, usually committed by the military, armed opposition forces, previous governments and in rare cases the present government (Hayner, 2001). Commissions have been set up in more than forty countries since the early 1970s, in addition to other truth-seeking investigations documented in seventy countries (Kim, 2012).¹⁸ They are usually directed towards proposing measures for transitional justice within the borders of a nation state, such as prosecutions, reparations programs and institutional reforms.

The initial proposal for a Mauritian truth commission was made in 2005, by the leader of *Mouvement Républican* (MR), one of the minor political parties in Mauritius militating for the cause of the Black/Creole people, which joined the elected Labour Party in 2005. The commission was initially proposed to look into police brutality and deaths in detention following the death of Kaya, a reggae artist who was arrested for smoking *gandia*, the local cannabis, at a concert organised by MR to promote the decriminalisation of the use of cannabis (Bhookhun, 2005; Lallah, 2009). Joseph Reginald Topize, known as Kaya, was revered by the Creole community for singing about the condition of Creole people. He was found dead in police custody on the 21

¹⁸ According to Hayner, the Commission of Inquiry into the Disappearances of People in Uganda was the first truth commission set up by President Idi Amin in 1974 to investigate excessive abuse of power and violence on people under his own government (2001).

February 1999, publicised by the police as a suicide.¹⁹ This was discredited by a second autopsy organised by his wife, Veronique Topize, which proved that Kaya was brutalized with thirty-two injuries, two of them fatal on his body. Following a black consciousness-focused mobilisation (Boudet, 2000) which brought the Creole community to denounce police brutality, the setting up of a Truth and Justice Commission was announced in 2005 by the MR, when the party joined the Government, to inquire on the death of Kaya (Lallah, 2009).

However, the Truth and Justice Commission Bill presented in 2008 made no reference to investigations of police violence (Lallah, 2009). Lalit, a party for an alternative political economy, and local newspapers denounced the setting up of the commission as a politically manipulated electoral deal (Ghanty 2012; Lallah, 2009). The commission was spearheaded by *Les Verts Fraternels*, a green political party who had in the past lobbied for individual cash compensation and individual restitution of land to the Creole people with a past of enslavement. With a similar ethos as the Caribbean Reparation Commission, *Les Verts Fraternels* initially proposed that former colonial powers be made accountable of the residues of slavery.²⁰

However, the proposal for individual cash compensation for Creole people was not endorsed by the State. Instead, the government in power (with the complicity of *Les Verts Fraternels*) set up the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) in 2009, to make an assessment of the consequences of slavery and indenture during the colonial period up to the present and determine appropriate reparative measures to be extended to communities still impacted by the residues of colonisation (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 1). The focus was on ‘median long-term, rather than short-term solutions [...] directed towards social justice for all’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 9) and proposed structural improvements to be made at political, legal, social and cultural level.

While the foundation of the TJC is dubious, this research looks at the specificity of the state-blessed Mauritius inquiry. While most Truth commissions in other countries are generally established by states to investigate wrongs committed by their own

¹⁹ The Rastafari reggae artist Berger Agathe and two young adults, Leemul Goostia and Michel Laurent also died after being shot by the police (Pyndiah, 2018). See my article for more information on the life of Kaya.

²⁰ In 2002, *Les Verts Fraternels* laid a private motion asking for a Commission to look into ‘all aspects of damages sustained by slaves and by indentured labourers and their descendants’ and to obtain ‘financial compensation from parties concerned for the prejudice suffered’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 8). They proposed to identify beneficiaries based on the following criteria: born in Mauritius, of slave descent and owner of assets worth less than Rs 2 million, and offer the following compensation: cash of Rs 1 million, ownership of land and house, shares in an enterprise and scholarship training to children of beneficiaries.

governments or by previous administrations, the TJC investigates abuses committed before the formation of the state, by former colonial powers. Moreover, while in most countries where truth commissions were set up, mechanisms of transitional justice were implemented with the intention of strengthening prosecution (Hayner, 2001; Boswell, 2014), the TJC mission was mainly to act as a bridge between a past of untold suffering and practical measures of reparation (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 45), despite the awareness of the commission that many informants voluntarily offered their oral accounts with the hope that justice would follow.²¹

The anthropologist and author of *Le Malaise Creole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* (2006) Rose Boswell deplores the fact that restorative justice is unlikely to happen if the TJC identifies reparative measures to extend to ‘slave and indentured worker descendants’ without acknowledging the ‘dissipation of accountability on the part of slave owner descendants’ and the non-participation of civil society (2014).²² Furthermore, Boswell explains that the literature on transitional justice mechanisms does not address ‘the issue of time, the problem of ancient atrocities (such as slavery and indenture), the challenges to justice in complex societies’ and on the need to look into the correlation between memory, identity and restitution.

The problematisation of the commission does not undermine the work of history and memory undertaken by the TJC to reconstruct national history. Historiography is not normally undertaken by truth commissions. For example, historians ‘were virtually absent’ (Verbuyst, 2013) in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC report explicitly states that ‘it is not the commission’s task to write the history’ of South Africa (TRC, report 5, p. 257). However, a historian, Professor Vijaya Teelock, was appointed as vice-commissioner and the commission published a state-endorsed report of four volumes (three thousand pages overall) within two years based informal interviews and oral testimonies from a section of the population which it claims was more affected the consequences of slavery (1638-1865) and indenture

²¹ For example, the truth commissions in Bolivia and Argentina were exceptionally formulated to involve prosecutions of at least the worst atrocities. The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation was composed of mostly lawyers and law graduates and was concerned with the technicalities of specific individual acts of violence (Grandin, 2005). On the other hand, the South African commission offered amnesty to perpetrators who provided detailed accounts of their abuses.

²² The TJC recommended that funding for reparations is sought from the historical slave trading nations, namely, the United Kingdom and France, for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities and settlements where slave descendants are in the majority’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 402).

(1834-1934) on the plantations.²³ The report, in PDF format, was made available online to the public in 2011.

The TJC historicises more than three hundred years of Dutch, French and British colonisation (1638-1968) and claims to establish ‘the beginning of a new ‘national history’ (p. 43).

The TJC cannot claim to have rewritten the whole history of slavery and indenture, but it has, at least, given a conceptual and structural version of Mauritian history free from political and racial agendas. It is now incumbent on future scholars and community groups to reflect and build on this and continue the work accomplished [...] (TJC, vol. 1, p. 43).

One of the conclusions reached by the executive team is that Mauritians know little about their history of slavery and indenture. The TJC used a trauma discourse to explain that this lack of historical awareness was due to a cultural amnesia because Mauritians have led difficult lives (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 43). This deduction triggered the principal research question in this thesis: to what extent is this explanation valid? and is developed in Chapter Two.

i.b) The limitations of the Indian Ocean model for the Mascarene islands

The conceptual framework proposed in section 1.1 elaborated on many scholars from the Caribbean and from the field of Black Studies. This literature review pinpoints the limitations of the Indian Ocean model in relation to understanding coloniality on the Mascarene islands, particularly Mauritius, which justifies the framework proposed in this research.

The scholarship on the Indian Ocean has often sought to establish its distinctiveness in relation to the Atlantic by highlighting the geographical dimension of the two regions (Hofmeyr, 2007). While the Caribbean islands are defined as part of a large and diverse cultural world, they are situated within physical proximity to each other. On the other hand, the Indian Ocean (IO) region is understood as a broad network of isolated islands connected to the continents of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South East Asia and Australia which border the ocean (Hofmeyr, 2007). This distinction is established in

²³ One of the three areas of research that the Mauritian commission focused on was the revision of history from 1723 to 2009 (slavery, indentured labour, the caste system, post-abolition, land dispossession, religion, etc.) before assessing the consequences of slavery and indentured labour on the society and recommending measures to achieve social justice (TJC, vol. 1, p. 9). Volume One covers a revised history of slavery and indenture and the economic and social structures still in place. It also presents its main findings and makes recommendations. Volume Two covers the land dispossession of the Black/Creole people after the abolition of slavery. Volumes Three and Four consist of technical papers, reports, surveys and studies based on archival materials.

relation to the five-thousand-year history of maritime trade and cultural exchange within the IO and the various major historiographical traditions associated with explorers and traders of the region – Malay, Arab, African, Indian, Chinese and Astronesian. This was before Europeans ‘discovered’ and colonised the region in the fifteenth century when rivalry between emerging mercantilist European powers, namely Portugal, Holland, France and England targeted the region for territorial expansion (Alpers, 2014; Ho and Sheriff, 2014; Vaughan, 2005). The IO has been presented from the lens of a long history of ‘non-violent’ trade (Hofmeyr, 2007, p. 7) that existed since the seventh century between the Arab world, the coasts of North and East Africa and Asia.

The Portuguese, Dutch, and English in the Indian Ocean were strange new traders who brought their state with them. They created militarized trading-post empires in the Indian Ocean, following Venetian and Genoese precedents in the Mediterranean, and were wont to do business at the point of a gun. Hadramis and other non-Europeans - such as Gujaratis, Bohras, Chettiar, Buginese, and Malays - did not. (Ho, 2006, p. xxi)

However, as mentioned in the Introduction, the Mascarene islands together with Seychelles, despite being scattered across 2.3 million square kilometres of the ocean, have a similar temporal history of European colonisation starting in the sixteenth century as the Caribbean. This common history has also been made by Anglo-American historians who established the structural links between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean histories of slavery and indenture (Allen, 2011; Alpers, 2014; Braudel, 1977). While the Spanish landed on the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean in 1492, the Portuguese Crown discovered a naval route to the Indian Ocean through South Africa in 1497 and named many of the Indian Ocean islands on their maps. Mainland Mauritius, for example, was called Cirne on Portuguese maps of the early sixteenth century.

One of the major differences between the islands of the two basins lies in the absence of significant human settlement on the Mascarene islands, in contrast with the Caribbean islands which were inhabited by Indigenous People. However, this research particularly focuses on the extinct dodo to show that European colonisation of the Indian Ocean is not exceptional. It builds a genealogy of the colonial history of the islands of Mauritius from a non-human historicity which takes account the animal species as the first non-human inhabitants. In this sense, I emphasise the existence of the ‘indigenous’ dodo which evolved on the islands for thousands (or millions) of years before being brought to extinction by the European exploitation colonisation of the region. In this sense, the decolonial scholarship from South America on suppression of indigenous life.

Furthermore, while the Portuguese initiated an era of European colonisation in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century, introducing ‘a novel form of state violence to seaborne trade’ (Alpers, 2014, p. 80), the Dutch enterprise has been described as a form of ‘corporate colonialism’ (Banerjee, 2008, p. 1541) or ‘capitalistic colonialism’ (Masselman, 1963, p. 224-225). While George Masselman pinpoints that the Dutch were ‘first to apply the principle of capital investment to overseas ventures’ (p. v), Bobby Banerjee reiterates that the East India Company was probably the world’s first multinational corporation.

In an era of European colonial expansion, the company was engaged in conquering markets, eliminating competition, securing cheap sources of raw material supply, building strategic alliances (p. 1541).

This research positions the commonality between the histories of corporate colonialism of the Caribbean, the Americas and the Indian Ocean on the basis that the dynamics of trade changed with European colonisation. The work of Sylvia Wynter, who comes from a Black radical anti-colonial tradition and who produces ontological work from the Caribbean (Jamaican) experience, refers to the symbolical date of 1492 as representing the beginning of ‘a founding politico-statal mercantilist economic system’ based on racialised power structures of labor (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 46).

Understanding the epistemological shift of the ‘post-1492 New World’ is relevant to a reading of colonialism on the Indian Ocean islands as the strategies of exploitation and settler colonialism were all deployed, since the seventeenth century, to establish sovereignty over ‘virgin’ lands for capitalist exploitation. The history of European contact on the islands of both basins was, thus, started at the inter-related junction of merchant capitalism.

This research was initiated from the premise of postcolonial theory which covers European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and national liberation movement of the sixties and seventies. I draw a connection between the work of the Martinican (Francophone) psychoanalyst and essayist Frantz Fanon and the Anglophone Barbadian scholar and poet Kamau Brathwaite as well as the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter to discuss the specificity of island colonisation, bourgeois nationalism and the formation of Creole cultures. I demonstrate in Chapter Five how the Creole language across the French Caribbean (Dominica Republic and Martinique), from the ethnographic work of the anthropologist Amy Paugh and the reflection of Frantz Fanon, on the suppression of the Creole language in the Antilles follows very similar patterns on the Mascarene islands. I stress the location of the key scholars in this research,

following the philosophy behind ‘I am where I think’, a term coined by Mignolo to describe the re-mapping of the order of knowledge which he argues is born from the common experience of the non-Western world after the European colonisation of the last five hundred years (Mignolo, 2011 in Kempadoo, 2016, p. 193).²⁴ The literature from Indian and African scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), Achille Mbembe (2001, 2003), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1998) and Ranajit Guha (1997, 2002) has enabled me to draw from similar movements of cultural decolonisation around history and language.

Furthermore, Caribbean and Black scholarship such as the work of Édouard Glissant (1989, 1997) and W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), which predates the institutional development of postcolonial studies, were crucial for me to understand the racialised structures that ghettoise the Creole people of the Indian Ocean. The Creole people mostly refer to racially mixed people from Madagascar, Africa and South Asia, commonly articulated as ‘Black people’ in the British and American context, who are marked by a history of enslavement and displacement, and hence represent a ‘Black’ diaspora. While the term ‘B/black’ is not used in Mauritius, the term ‘AfroKreols’ was used in the 1990s (Harmon, 2011) to make a distinction between the generic term Creole used to refer to colonial or creolised (objects or people) and the Black/Creole people who are also of mixed race and ethnicity but who are referred as ‘tikreol’ (little Creole) as a marker of class and race. The Black/Creole people have a long history of oppression and contemporary ghettoisation, criminalisation, and cultural marginalisation (Boswell, 2006). I explain in Chapter One and Chapter Five how the Creole culture in Mauritius also stems from the different dynamics of creolisation which occurred after the abolition of slavery with the indenture system which brought a large number of Indians on the island, Creole sega artists being of different ethnicities in Mauritius. To discuss the creative practices in the Creole sonic culture, the scholarship from the Caribbean was crucial.

The second distinction established by Indian Ocean scholars in relation to the Atlantic looks at the four-thousand-year history of different slave trades (within the African continent and the Arab slave trade) which displaced Africans, Indians and

²⁴ Mignolo is challenging an essential element of Western philosophy: ‘I think, therefore I am’, proposed by the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes who argues that knowledge is situated from the premise of the thinking/reasoning human being. Mignolo builds an argument around locating knowledge from the geographical space in which the human inhabit.

South Asians across the islands and the continents bordering the Indian Ocean (Hofmeyr, 2007; Sheriff and Teelock, 2016).

The rise of plantation economies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Mauritius and Zanzibar further stimulated the trade, along with European involvement from the sixteenth century onwards. The trade was multidirectional with people moving within Africa, from Africa to the Middle East, and from the eighteenth century onwards to the islands, to India and the Americas. Indian slaves were shipped to Indonesia, the islands, Cape Town and the Middle East while Indonesians were moved to South East Asia and Cape Town; and Africans were transported from the Mozambican coastline to Cape Town and the Indian Ocean Islands (Campbell, 2004, in Hofmeyr, 2007).

Scholars promoting an Indian Ocean exceptionalism also note that the slave trade in the region was largely female, involving predominantly household slaves rather than plantation workers (Hofmeyr, 2007, p. 11).

It is at this junction that this research pinpoints that Black Atlantic Studies is essential in understanding that European slavery, whether in the Americas, the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean, was based on the racialised/ethnicised hierarchies of labour on sugar plantations which started in the early seventeenth century on the Mascarene islands. While in the Caribbean, it is estimated that twelve million Africans were enslaved on the different islands by the British, on the Mascarene islands, by the abolition of slavery in 1835, an estimate of 134,000 people were enslaved from Madagascar, 200,000 from East Africa, 13,000 from India and 4,000 from South-East Asia (Sheriff and Teelock, 2016, p. 25) to labour on the plantation (consisting of both the physical plantation and the structures put in place to sustain a plantation economy). In this sense, the difference in the number of people enslaved in the Caribbean has given rise to a richer scholarship on the history of the Black people. This has in turn inspired many scholars who looked at the consequences of slavery in the Indian Ocean region (Harmon, 2011; Boswell, 2006) and who are often dismissed for looking at Caribbean and Black Studies for a framework of analysis.

The other significant difference between the Mascarene islands and the Caribbean islands is the political and economic power in the hands of Indian descendants which changed the ethnic dynamics of mainland Mauritius for example. While Mauritius was the first colony where the British system of indenture was experimented (half a million Indians were recruited to work on the plantations after the abolition of slavery), the dislocation of Indian indentured workers followed across the Caribbean (in particular Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana). In the context of Mauritius, they gained political and economic power after independence and reproduced colonial structures of power which

disempowered the Black/Creole people who were initially rallied against a Hindu hegemony at independence (Eriksen and Ramtohul, 2018; Selvon, 2001). The Indo-Mauritian people also kept ancestral cultural tradition which has brought Mauritius to be described as ‘Little India’ (Eisenlohr, 2006), rather than Creole island (Vaughan, 2005). This is further contextualised in Chapter Two.

Hofmeyr also note that the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean demographics differ in terms of the blurred distinction between free Indian traders and white settlers who both owned capital and enslaved workers on the plantation as well the movement of free Africans on the Indian Ocean islands and the labour class of European workers in the colonies (2007, p. 11). The boundaries between enslaved and free were more blurred than in the Atlantic and ‘the association of race and slavery did not exist in any marked form’ (p. 11). While the contemporary divide is not racially marked as White versus Black or North versus South (p. 15) on mainland Mauritius, this research highlights, in Chapter Two the structures of power that defined the history of land acquirement and capital accumulation on the Mascarene islands. Similar to the Caribbean, these islands were reduced to sugar economies based on imperialist conquest of the land and the setting up of a racialised system of labour, land ownership and capital accumulation.

The Truth and Justice Commission, in this sense, sheds light on land dispossession in the second volume of their report noting how the enslaved (and free) workers were denied land under colonial rule. I argue that the colonial project of enslavement and indentureship follows the same logic as that of the Caribbean and the Americas. They share a common history of residual coloniality - land and power in the hands of the bourgeoisie/white settler (explained in Chapter Two), racialised postcolonial cartographies (Chapter Three) and colonial systems of knowledge (Chapter Four), the trauma of a past of enslavement, social inequalities, exclusion and the deculturisation as well as the indigenisation of a people (explained in Chapter Five).

The argument that ‘the association of race and slavery did not exist in any marked form’ (Hofmeyr, 2007, p. 11) is problematic as European slavery is at the base a racialised form of labour where Black people were chattel slaves across the Caribbean (mainly Africans) and the Indian Ocean (Africans, Malagasy people and South/South-East Asians). The awareness of the legacies of slavery is also more prominent in the Caribbean because of the scholarship from Black scholars since the early twentieth century disseminated in the anglophone world and movements of resistance such as the Haitian revolution and the Black Power movement which had not been documented on the Mascarene islands.

Moreover, Henriques makes a pertinent point about the different cultural orientations associated to individual islands of the Caribbean: the particular orality, ‘or orientation towards the spoken word’ (2011, p. 8), of Jamaican culture, in comparison, Trinidad and Tobago is known for its sophisticated press and Carnival, Haiti for its visual arts scene, and Martinique for its literature and scholarship (p. 8). Drawing a parallel between Henriques’s work on the Caribbean and my research on the Indian Ocean, I argue that while mainland Mauritius is known for its Francophone literature (with internationally recognised authors and a flourishing French-speaking literary scene on the island), the culture of the Creole people from the Mascarene islands of the Indian Ocean region is sonic, which explains why sega was voted the best form of representation of Mauritian cultural heritage in a survey conducted by the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC, 2011). In this sense, a particular set of Caribbean scholarship was helpful in the study of the Creole culture of the Indian Ocean in this research, similarly to how the history of indenture of the two basins have also been established.

ii) Visual ethnography ‘at home’

My research in/on Mauritius was about a particular inquiry on my own relationship to the history, geography and culture. Investigating my own history through the lens of geography led me to become my own informant. It brought me to ask certain questions: How do I negotiate a space that I was so familiar with to find out more about my history? Did a few years away from home (doing research in the UK) contributes to the critique of the space? My aim was to pinpoint coloniality in Mauritius in relation to how I have experienced it in the thirty years that I lived on the island. My inquiry started ten years before the PhD research – as mentioned in the preface – from a study of coloniality in the visual arts scene. This research of historiography and how people remembered or forgot pushed me to confront my own knowledge or lack of knowledge of colonial history.

In the first three years of my research, I have used visual ethnography as a method in the initial years, collecting photographs of artworks, analysing artists’ catalogues, online documentaries and materials on CD-ROMs and pen-drives for Chapter Four as well as screened online photographs and videos of the island to capture the geography of the place for Chapter Two. An anthropologist, Nathalie Bremner, had taken a set of photographs of every room in the museum, focusing on the last gallery on the dodo which was crucial to my comparative study of representations on the island in Chapter

Three and Four.

In 2017, I went to Mauritius after being away for five years to conduct field work and gather the last resources I needed for the writing phase of the PhD. As an ethnographer at home with a background in applied arts and art history, my visual exploration started on a field trip to the Natural History Museum to ‘get a feel’ of the place and observe details that photographs did not permit. This positionality or what Boswell (2006, p. 15) calls anthropology at home, was a useful and productive approach to take in my research, despite the fact that my topic of research does not interact with the precarity of the most vulnerable. Lugones’s works, among others, allowed me to come to consciousness with the vulnerabilities of my own position in pinpointing and questioning dominant colonial structures. In the thirty years of living in Mauritius, I had been to the museum on school trips and as an adult brought foreign visitors to the place. The last visit occurred in 2010 when I took a professor in postcolonial studies, Shukla Sawant, on a tour of the city. She was surprised at the reproduction of colonial narratives in a national museum which triggered the study I make in Chapter Three.

Lugones’ research practice as a streetwalker theoriser was the inspiration behind my field work in the capital city of Port-Louis. I started making field notes of the cityscape with the proximity of the ethnographer at home who navigates the street without needing a map. The research materials I collected are based on my observation of the city’s residual colonial landscape, the architecture, the demarcation of spaces and the location of the building of the museum. The critical analysis grew out of this process of streetwalker theorising what Lugones describes as developed for researchers to become ‘active subjects’ and work at ‘the pedestrian level’ (p. 225-226). McKittrick’s flesh-and-body worldview which allows for ways to look at how space maps an ongoing human geography story (2006, p. 122), and her reflection on how geography impacts and defines the human, also provided the conceptual framework behind the study of the postcolonial geography and architecture of the city.

I started mapping out the city from the print out of a Google satellite plan before experiencing the grid-like cartography (derived from the field of critical geography) of the colonial city. I travelled by bus and walked the city in 2017, in contrast to travelling by car as a middle-class inhabitant when I lived there. This allowed for a pedestrian’s experience of the grids of the city which demarcate the spaces of institutional knowledge from the public areas, such as the busy bus stations, markets and shops. Streetwalker-theorising paradise island made me sensitive to the different interaction of people working on the streets, how the pavements were used as work spaces, how the

price of food and commercial items reflected what the people who lived in the city could afford, in contrast with the touristic halls, and how the noise and smell of the city also changes (the inner city was demarcated by the noise and smells of food coming from individual houses with doors and windows open (radio, TV, interactions between people compared to the bustle of the centre (traffic, hawkers, loud conversations, smell of fuel).

As I walked from the port and followed the smaller roads to the inner city, I noticed less tourists and as I walked further, the grids became less disciplined, the road narrower with houses separated by lanes big enough just for a bike rider. My level of comfort also decreased as I reached the residential suburbs where I was less willing to make notes on the intimacy of everyday life of the inhabitants. Lugones's streetwalker theorising also stands in opposition to the literary flâneur (discussed in Chapter Four) who, despite their proximity to the streets, explored the open and 'safer' spaces of the place. I stayed focused on the planning of the city and the architecture in order to understand the racialised cartography of urbanisation. I noted how China Town was closer to the institutional spaces, the streets occupied by Muslim traders further and the ghettoised spaces, where mostly Black/Creole lived, were on the extreme periphery of the city. This allowed me to situate how architecture and cartography were residues of three hundred years of colonisation which still impacted how people lived fifty years after independence. While Queen Street and Royal Road were the names of the main roads, the adjacent streets and lanes bore names that spoke of the ethnicity, place of origin, language or religion of its inhabitants: Arab Street, Rue Malbar, Calcutta Street, Madras Street, Yolof Street, Ste Marie Street. I was particularly sensitive to what McKittrick describes as cartographies of struggle as I observed, in the periphery of the city, the neglected buildings, the lack of waste collection and the piling of rubbish materials in the wide canals (now dry) built during the French period to direct water to the centre.

Streetwalker theorising, in the case of this research, posits that the decolonial scholar consciously walks away from the safety of dominant narratives and methodologies and embarks on an interdisciplinary research to forego, what Lugones theorises as an 'arrogant perception' (1987, p. 4). For a woman like me in an academic position, arrogant perception entailed the disengagement throughout my whole life with the causes of domination and racial prejudices that came with the privileges of my bourgeois upbringing. It's only through engaging with uncomfortable grounds that I understood how objects and spatialities in the Mauritian postcolonial cartography are

not passive backdrops but speak of a history of racialised spatialities.

As I return to the port, it became clear to me how spaces demarcated for the financial functioning of the city were maintained in the same way it would have been during colonial times. I followed Royal Road until I reached the parliament building which faced the port and the statue of the colonial enslaver who engineered the sugar colony, Mahé de Labourdonnais. I made notes of this postcolonial geography and colonial architecture which stood as relics of the histories (as well as the erasure of certain histories).

Streetwalker theorising also inspired to produce a critical engagement with the ‘concrete’ in both its historical and physical attributes. The Natural History Museum, which I examine in Chapter Three, is located next to a public garden, Jardin de la Compagnie, reputed for being a space used by passersby to relax or hang around, as well as by sex workers. It is found at the junction of two busy streets occupied by hawkers and is also the place where the statue of the French settler Adrien d’Epinay, who negotiated with the British government (in 1833) for cash compensation for enslavers after the abolition of slavery, is located. This is discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, the Jardin de la Compagnie shares the same grid space as the Natural History Museum but has been, ironically, a ground for protests and public demonstrations since colonial times.

As I crossed the hawkers’ lane, I enter the museum yard through one of its two gates. I notice that an entrance and exit routes disallows the space to be contained as a restricted institution within four walls. This lack of containment is for Lugones a necessary element for the streetwalker to engage with ‘a spatiality that does not mythify territorial enclosures’ (p. 220). The compound of the building is itself an ‘open’ space, which can be accessed, and often transited, through from either the hawkers’ street or a main road in the city which connects various agglomeration of busy pedestrians’ spaces (bus station, market, shopping centres and offices). The spatiality itself does not give any sign of a colonial enclave and fits with the definition of the museum, in the nineteenth century, as an open space of instruction for the masses.

However, drawing from the work of Nixon (2011) and Weizman’s (2014) on the slow violence of the environment and the architecture, I observe the streets, landscapes, noises and architecture of the postcolonial city within that lens. This has allowed me to develop the term ‘colonial anaesthesia’ to critique the fact that Mauritians do not know their history because of cultural amnesia. In fact I argue that the hypervisible vestiges of the colonial era in the landscape makes it impossible to forget colonial history. As I

describe in section 1.1, slow violence did not manifest itself in forms of physical oppression and visible violence, but – when preserved without critical reflection as national heritage such as the building of the Natural History Museum - anaesthetises the space of the violence of colonialism and coloniality. The centre of the city bears witness to the colonial governing and ordering of the colony and the racialized demarcation of the space. On one side, institutions like the Natural History Museum and, on the other hand, the periphery of the city occupied by the enslaved/indentured workers and traders for the running of the colony, stand as residues of a colonial spatiality. It reflects the strategies, ‘devised by planners, managers, subjects of will and power from a point of view that is positioned high above the street’ (Lugones, 2003, p. 211).

It is in this sense that, in the Chapter Three, the streetwalker theorist is tactically guided to enter the museum and pause at the last room, the Dodo Gallery, which is the main attraction of the public museum. I explore the ‘circular epistemology’ (Bal, 2001, p. 126) of the exhibition space of the museum in the same way that the visitor is seduced into being a ‘walking learner’ (p. 123) who follows the guided pathway around, in the case here, the Dodo gallery. For the streetwalker theorist and critical ethnographer, the study of the museum space was about experiencing the space of the museum with critical eyes alongside photographing the narratives on the displays for future study. Unfortunately, that year the museum was closed for renovation which left me gutted. Nevertheless, I make notes of the architecture and the exits to the building, photographed the courtyard and memorised the many times I have been to the museum before. Leaving the dodo gallery and exiting the building, was a continuation of concrete engagement with the visuality and knowledges of the ‘street’. I transited though the public yard of the museum before reaching the busy streets of the capital and encountered two randomly placed life size sculptures of the dodo bird in fiber glass in the museum’s compound. One of the birds was acquired by the museum in 2012 and is the work of Firoz Ghanty (Figure 2.4). As discussed in Chapter Four, this became the next stopover for tactically engaging with how representations in contemporary art are informed by colonial institutions. In this sense, one of the methodical approaches of this research is also to walk through each chapter, in the spirit of the streetwalker theorist.

The next stops during my return home was to ‘hang out’ (Lugones, 2003, p. 225-226) with Firoz Ghanty who took me further inland to a busy town, where the artist recounted a dodo ‘performance’, which is analysed in this thesis. Hanging out is a method of research proposed by Lugones to develop solidarity with our subjects’ of study. It is in this perspective that I analyse Ghanty’s art performance which takes a life

size mould of the dodo on the street. By tactically streetwalking the ‘post’-colonial landscapes and reading objects, spatialities and other everyday practices, with the decolonial option in mind, I was also able to develop an insight into the art practice of Firoz Ghanty. In that optic, the concept of a decoloniality of aesthetics was considered as an integral part of my visual ethnographic work.

This next section elaborates on the artistic practices of Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry before presenting the source material for my chapter on creative practices in the Creole language as the everyday practices of resistance, or what Lugones calls resistant activities (2003, p. 219). These are read, in the context of my research, as the everyday speech, writing lyrics and poetry in Creole. The autopoeisis of the streets, of performance and performativity of artistic practices, of everyday objects which are discarded and re-used, as well as the language of the people at home and on the streets, are given prime focus in Chapter Five. The rationale for the source materials is also given in the next section.

iii) The source of the research material and rationale

I focus on the imagery of the dodo as the emblematic representation of the history of colonisation, coloniality and decoloniality of aesthetics on mainland Mauritius, as explained in section 1.1. This is in response to the second research question that asks whether an alternative historiography can be constructed from a decoloniality of aesthetics. In this sense, this research locates colonial representations in the institutional landscape and looks at the Natural History Museum which houses remains of the dodo and the skeleton of bird, as the most visited item in the museum. In Chapter Three, the representations of the bird are pinpointed as cultural signifiers for its highly mediatised presence in contemporary Mauritius and in artistic representations.

I focus on the imagery of the extinct bird because it represents how the history of extinction/colonisation has been erased by institutions of knowledge such as the Natural History Museum and how this imaginary is deconstructed by contemporary artists. In my first year, I screened the visual arts scene in Mauritius to look for narratives in the ethos of a decoloniality of aesthetics. This was the rationale for using the work of Nirmal Hurry and Firoz Ghanty which provided the most critical work on the dodo. As I worked at the School of Fine Arts for seven years (2004-2011), an institution which provided the first platform for artists of all ethnicity to train in the arts and exhibit their works, I was well informed of the works of the contemporary artists on the island.

Furthermore, I brought the only book produced by the school (Ramduth, 2007) with me to the UK, which produced a comprehensive collection of contemporary work in the twentieth century. Friends and family also brought other art books and artists' catalogues published and accessible only in Mauritius. These secondary resources allowed me to analyse the critical shift in paradigm in the visual arts in Chapter Four.

Over the four years researching for the PhD, I collected my primary source material directly from the two artists themselves. As mentioned in the preface, I have followed Nirmal Hurry's work on a daily basis at the school, photographed his work and helped him mount them in various collective exhibitions that I have also contributed. I also engaged in many conversations with him and other artists over the years. For example, the introduction to his work in Chapter Four is based on the notes I took for an essay I wrote during my MA (2008) and a text I wrote in his catalogue produced for his solo exhibition in 2011. I carried this catalogue to the UK and my PhD proposal was initially based on questioning how art intersect with memory and history. Three of the pictures (Figure 4.6, 4.7, 4.14) printed in this research were scanned copies of the catalogue. Hurry also kept me updated with his recent work across my years in the UK and answered any questions through email.

Ghanty provided me with his own personal archive of works and writings that he had carefully collected since the 70s – pamphlets, newspaper cuttings, catalogues, reviews, photographs of his exhibitions – and saved on four CDs in meticulous folders named with chronological and thematic references. We discussed regularly in the last ten years and our conversations have matured throughout my years in the UK with mails, chats and skypes. On my last field work we met every week to discuss political issues on the island and the intersection of our work as well as the broader project of decolonisation in the context of Mauritius. I also organised a talk at Goldsmiths in 2018 and invited Firoz Ghanty to the UK. A series of informal interviews with the two artists were conducted which were complemented with more questions and answers delivered through email. These inform the introductory section in Chapter Four.

My interpretation of the work of both artists on the dodo are of my own and does not represent the artists's position. Their work allowed me to build the argument that critical work contesting colonial historiography were produced on the island but are dismissed by institutions of knowledges – hence that cultural amnesia could not be applied in the context of Mauritius. In this sense, I pinpoint coloniality as well as practise decolonial work at an everyday level – such as maintaining a meaningful, respectful and embodied relationship with the people who provided the material for my

(academic) study, instead of conducting research with an objective detachment from the ‘native informants/objects of study’ as prescribed by a traditional anthropological lens. Building solidarities was one of the approaches prescribed by Lugones who proposes to conduct research with ‘the concreteness of body-to-body engagement’ (2003, p. 207). A decolonial practice necessitates listening, caring and building knowledges with the ‘subjects’ of study in what Lugones calls ‘hangouts [as a space for] the passing of tools of resistance that enable us to see deeply into the social form from the pedestrian level’ (p. 225-226). Many visual artists and sega artists, whom I mention in Chapter Four and Five, are close friends with whom I have discussed their work for the purpose of my research.

When it came to analysing the Creole mother tongue outside a linguistic and literary lens, I decided to listen to the sega as an embodied manifestation of the language. I explain in Chapter Five how sega is the oldest creative practice that has been mentioned in documents from the eighteenth century. Based on Wynter’s work on autopoeisis, described in section 1.1, I decided to look at how the ‘rootsical’ (Cooper, 1993) sega, the slaves’ sega, was a sonic and embodied carrier of language.²⁵

The Mauritian sega is the national music and dance and is performed today by local artists who mix sega with different other musical traditions – jazz, blues, pop, classical or Bhojpuri music for example. It is essentially an important part of the culture of the Black/Creole people and has been valorised since the 1970s and the 1980s with the revitalisation of the Creole language. This is further contextualised in Chapter Five. Sega is played by all radio channels, with an annual Sega of the Year competition, and the rhythmic version of sega is very popular around celebrations such as New Year and in other ceremonies like weddings. The studio recordings of sega for commercial production take place either in Mauritius or in the nearby island Réunion where studio and recording facilities are more accessible. They are distributed across the Indian Ocean region on CDs (initially on cassettes) and the music is now widely accessible on YouTube with video production of sega which has gained popularity in the last decades.

A few examples:

Fanfan, one of the oldest sega artist whose music has been recorded (1930-2018):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLHVcTO6zb8>

²⁵ I employ the term ‘rootsical’ in the way Carolyn Cooper (1993) uses it to describe creative practices rooted in Black experience. For example, she explains how Bob Marley sings in English but with rootsical vibes (p. 5).

Rosemay Nelson, the first woman sega artist to have her music recognised in the 1970s. *La rivier tanier* is considered a classic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aORpoyZWQmg>

Grup Latanier, a popular sega group founded in the 1980s:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A952yDNMT8>

Sky to be, whose song ‘Dodo Baba’ became a national hit in 2018 and whose video has been successful online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg-Czzz1Xik>

As there are no records of the original sega practised in the eighteenth century, I decided to look at two of its post-independence sub-genres, sega *angaze* (sega of protest) and seggae, in contrast with the more commercialised sega. I chose the group Cassiya for sega *angaze* and the artist Kaya for seggae because their lyrics evoke the history on enslavement and denounces social inequalities on the island. In this sense, I could draw a parallel between colonisation and coloniality. While sega *angaze* was invigorated by the cultural and political movements around independence in the 1970s and remained popular until the 1990s, seggae developed in the 1980s from the political, musical and sonic influence of roots reggae. Segga *angaze* was promoted by a political party (Mouvement Militant Mauricien) harbouring a left-wing politics in the 1970s and 1980s and the artists rose in popularity as their music was performed live and disseminated through cassettes which. I explain in Chapter Five how this period has been described as the golden era when cultural militants used Creole to revitalise music (Harmon, 2011).

As reggae music spread across continents through music charts, radio, TV channels and, in the case of Mauritius, records and CDs brought by travelling Mauritians and pirate distribution outlets in the 1980s, it influenced sega artists. For example, Joseph Reginald Topize adopted the name ‘Kaya’ after the audience’s euphoric applause of his adaptation of Bob Marley & the Wailers’s song Kaya (1978). Prior to the death of Bob Marley in 1981 and the monumental promotion of his music on international, regional and local circuits, three musicians in Kaya’s entourage, Ras Rodoman, Ras Natty Baby and Menwar, proved to be influential precursors to the promotion of Rastafari and reggae in Mauritius (Assonne, 2009). Assonne explains how Ras Rodoman, who lived in Chamarel, was one of the first to visit Kingston in the late 1970s while Bob Marley was in Switzerland following cancer treatment. He made connection with the Rastafari movement, supported during this time by the Jamaican Prime Minister, Michael Norman Manley, after a history of exclusionary practices by political parties, before Jamaican independence in 1962. The return of Ras Rodoman to Mauritius, together with

post-independence upheavals, prepared the ground for the evolution of seggae. The trigger of working-class struggles movements a decade after independence in 1968, as well as Bob Marley's hit albums, RASTAMAN VIBRATION (Bob Marley & The Wailers 1976), EXODUS (Bob Marley & The Wailers 1977) and the less militant KAYA (Bob Marley & The Wailers 1978) – which travelled to Mauritius through national broadcast following Marley's death in 1981 – informs the social context in which seggae evolved.

Seggae, like sega, was produced on cassettes and was initially more popular outside Mauritius in the Indian Ocean region. The death of seggae artist Kaya in 1999 contributed to the wide dissemination of seggae across the island and with the advent of the wide access to the internet in the beginning of the century, Kaya's music was made accessible and is now revered and listened widely by the Mauritian diaspora as well. In this sense, I analyse the ethos of resistance to colonialism and coloniality as well as the sonic dimension of both sub-genres to build a decolonial historiography. I am an amateur sega dancer myself and have witnessed many live performances of sega on the beach, at weddings, at private birthday parties and at the hotel. The methods of research at the first stage of writing Chapter Five has been to understand the lyrics of the songs selected and listen to the tracks. The works I refer to in Chapter Five have been listened to from CDs bought in Mauritius or viewed online. The second aspect has been to discuss with sega artist and producers of the music to pinpoint individual sounds of instruments and understand the beats and tempo of both sega and seggae. Members of Grup Lataniers and Kaya's first the music producer, Yip Tong were very helpful in discussing the musical and sonic element of sega and seggae. Informal interviews were conducted over the phone and emails to discuss pre-production (song writing, how to play ravann playing), production (list instruments, mixing in the studio, understand music beats, sound production) and post-production (concert, studio recording, dissemination, sega schools).

I am aware of the gendered selection of material, despite my conceptual framework being predominantly informed by women scholars. In looking for material on the dodo, I could, unfortunately, not situate works by women artists that could help me build my argument. In regard to sega *angaze* and seggae, which I argue embody the rootsical sega, there were more male artists associated to the two subgenres. Nevertheless, it's important to mention that *Grup Soley Ruz*, was the first cultural group (Assonne, 2013, p. 64) to negotiate a decolonial politics, regrouping Afro-Mauritians and Indo-Mauritians who shared Mauritian Creole as mother tongue. Micheline Virahsawmy and

Rosemay Nelson, two women singing in a male-dominated circle, were central figures in the group (also consisting of Bam Cuttayen, Nitish and Ram Joganah and Lelou Menwar). They revolutionised sega with their active militancy, using Mauritian Creole as a language of protest against hegemonic practices on the island. They subverted the colonial appropriation of Mauritian Creole as well as the commercialised sega by reclaiming the element of resistance and autopoiesis inherent in the rootsical sega. In contrast with many pieces of sega – which portrayed women as nagging, controlling, lazy, or objects of desire with highly descriptive sexual connotation to entertain the audience (Assonne, 2013, p. 76) – in the lyrics of *Grup Soley Ruz*'s militant sega, women are called to unify to denounce the patriarchy (Assonne, 2013, pp. 66- 67).²⁶

Conclusion

This chapter established the relevance of the decolonial option as a conceptual framework and proposes a methodology to answer the principal research questions: how to question the trauma discourse, namely cultural amnesia, used by the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) to deduce that Mauritians know very little about their history of slavery and indenture and how to build an alternative historiography. In this sense, this chapter contextualised the focus of the TJC on historiography in comparison with other truth commissions which are usually concerned about transitional justice.

This chapter also discussed the scholarship on critical geography which will be used in Chapter Two to draw the intersection between the postcolonial geography of Mauritius, the history of colonisation and present coloniality. Using the decolonial option as a framework also allows me to propose colonial anaesthesia as an alternative approach to cultural amnesia. Furthermore, the methodology developed in this research acts a toolbox for reading postcolonial geographies and demonstrating how a colonial anaesthesia is in place in the spatiality. This chapter also elaborates on a set of helpful terminologies and critical approaches, such as Eleonora Fabião's term 'performative historiography', Saidiya Hartman's notion of 'critical fabulation' and Julian Henriques's method of 'thinking through sound' which form part of the distributed methodology used in the following chapters which look at how a decolonial

²⁶ The lyrics of 'Fam lespoir' (Women of Hope), for example, subvert the colonial view of sega as entertaining or vulgar (Pyndiah, 2016).

historiography can be written from contemporary art and music?

In this sense, it also expanded on the limitations of the Indian Ocean model to understand colonisation and coloniality on the Mascarene islands, taking Mauritius as a case study. Wynter's reflection on creative practices brought by enslaved Africans to the Caribbean islands – namely Jamaica – and contemporary creative practices was particularly useful in understanding the Creole culture of the Indian Ocean. While Mignolo's decoloniality of aesthetics is proposed to analyse Ghanty and Hurry's artworks, Wynter's work accounts for forms of aesthetics which are perceived as being outside the circuit of creative production. This chapter also problematises the different semantic terms used in the Indian Ocean context around the term creole, bringing Wynter's notion of indigenisation in conversation to position the historical and cultural creativity of what creole or being creole entail. It allows me to focus less on analysing the content level of the language per se, especially considering that Creole languages have already been well studied within the field of literature, linguistics, history and anthropology and propose a decolonial historiography based on the musicality and sonority of the Creole language.

Chapter 2 - Colonial Anaesthesia: History and geography

Introduction

This chapter draws a link between history and geography by looking at how the traces of colonial history can be read from the postcolonial cartography and architecture. It first contextualises the history of the islands of Mauritius from a decolonial lens and draws the historical and cultural similarities between the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. By bringing Caribbean scholarship in conversation, this chapter shows that the history of the colonisation of the Mascarene islands can be read in relationship with how the Caribbean and the Americas were colonised.

Secondly, this research analyses how the Mauritian Truth Commission (TJC), introduced in Chapter One, uses a memory discourse to explain that Mauritians know very little about their history due to cultural amnesia. The chairperson of the TJC explained that some people ‘favoured amnesia’ or preferred to forget the hardship experienced under the colonial regime. This chapter discusses the principal research question and proposes an alternate diagnosis: was the history of colonialism forgotten because of a cultural amnesia or could amnesia be induced by a mechanism of coloniality, what I term ‘colonial anaesthesia’. This terminology was triggered by the term ‘favoured amnesia’, used by the Chairman, which infer that amnesia can be voluntarily produced. It is developed as a critique of the discourse on cultural amnesia and to describe a process of being induced into ‘forgetting’ the history of colonisation.

Finally, the work of Katherine McKittrick on cultural geography and the field of critical geography, introduced in Chapter One, provided the theoretical framework to analyse the relationship between history, memory and geography. Employing ethnography and discursive analysis with the lens of Maria Lugones’ streetwalker theorising allowed me to analyse the capital city of Port Louis in Mauritius.

In section 2.3, I analyse the postcolonial landscape with a focus on the grid-like cartography of the capital city of Port Louis. I discuss the slow violence – a term I borrow from Rob Nixon (2011) – of the geography that stands as relics of a past of colonial violence. I argue that the non-critical engagement with the postcolonial geography provokes a colonial anaesthesia whereby Mauritians are induced into normalising the racialised demarcation of space.

2.1 Historical Context: Island Exploitation and Settler Colonialism

The Mauritius islands were populated by forced labour during the Dutch, French or English colonisation (1638-1968). In the seventeenth century, exploitation colonisation of the uninhabited islands of Mauritius started with the extraction of wood from ebony trees by the Dutch East India Company, which was shipped back to the Netherlands (Alpers, 2014; Allen, 2011; Peerthum, 2012; Teelock, 1998; Selvon, 2001).²⁷ The terms ‘exploitation colonisation’ and ‘settler colonialism’ have been used in the context of the colonisation of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and refers the ‘expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them to – and build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of – the colonizers, who get marked as the first world’ (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 4) – also called ‘external colonialism’ – and how ‘settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain’ (p. 5).²⁸

The islands of Mauritius, which were home to unique endemic animals and plants formed over eight million years, became strategically a port of call for ships and later an export base. The continuous visits of the Dutch on mainland Mauritius (named after the Dutch Prince Mauritz) to colonise the island introduced invasive animal species, such as rats, pigs and deers, and exotic plants from the Dutch colonies and consequently changed the ecology (Hume, 2006). It is in this context that the dodo, a ground-dwelling bird endemic to the island, as well as many other species of plants and animals, became extinct within a few decades.²⁹

For almost two hundred years, the dodo took on a mythical existence until it was brought to fame by the vulgarisation by the vulgarisation of its extinction by European taxonomists and natural scientists in the nineteenth century (Cheke and Turvey, 2008) through the publications of their research on the dodo to prove its existence.³⁰ Since

²⁷ The Dutch East India Company operated in the Indian Ocean Region (From South African to Indonesia) while the Dutch West India Company was based in the Atlantic Region (such as Suriname, Guyana and Brazil) in the seventeenth century

²⁸ Internal colonialism is the ‘biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna’ (p. 4) within the borders of the colony.

²⁹ I explain why I choose the term ‘ground-dwelling’ for the dodo instead of the most common terminology ‘flightless’ in Chapter Four.

³⁰ ‘The Dodo and its Kindred; or the History, Affinities and Osteology of the Dodo, Solitaire and other extinct birds of the islands of Mauritius, Rodriguez and Bourbon’ Melville and Strickland in 1848 and ‘Memoir on the Dodo’ by Owen in 1866 written after the discovery of the first fossil material in 1865, when an English teacher in British Mauritius found dodo bones (Hume, 2006; Parker 2007).

then, as discussed in Chapter Three, the dodo the acknowledgement of the bird's extinction within the natural sciences was then publicized to a wider non-scientific audience which led to its iconisation as a representation of extinction. This in turn has been reproduced in the colony and the symbol of the bird was further nationalised in Mauritius after Independence. In this sense, the iconic animal is used in this research as an object of enquiry as well as signifier and site of appropriation and counter-appropriation of meaning within colonial legacies.

Although most islands were uninhabited, the strategies of external, internal and settler colonialism were all deployed to establish sovereignty over 'virgin' lands for capitalist exploitation. Taking the dodo bird on mainland Mauritius, made extinct in the seventeenth century, as signifier of the first non-human inhabitants of the island, this research contests the discourses that colonisation of the pristine islands was a civilising project and that decolonisation was achieved with Independence. The common narrative that colonisation was a progressive project which established 'modernity' on the island is maintained by colonial institutions which have furthermore been nationalised after Independence (Forest, 2011), on the basis of preserving a narrative of foundation which represent European men as the harbingers of development and civilisation. I demonstrate, in Chapter Three, that the European 'myth of origin' is reproduced by national institutions on the island (Boudet and Peghini, 2008) and that this narrative is problematic as the destruction of the habitat of animal and plant species has been described as 'ecocide' (Broswimmer, 2001; Gómez-Barris, 2017), used here to describe the destruction of ecosystems of a territory.

The decolonial framework of indigenisation discussed in Chapter One unsettles two aspects of the coloniality of knowledge: the discourse of the inevitability of extinction of the indigenous bird, and the myth of origin and progress of European settlers. This reframes the discourse of the 'disappeared dodo' from the narratives found in the Natural History Museum in Mauritius, which I discuss in Chapter Three. I develop a point of view from the perspective of the indigenous animal who did not 'disappear' but was precipitated to extinction as a result of European exploitation colonisation in the Indian Ocean region. In this regard, I question the colonial rhetoric of 'uninhabited islands' that justified the exploitation of the non-human world, established the racialised systems of exploitative labour (slavery and indenture) and transformed the land into colonial outposts and settlements. Understanding the epistemological shift of the post-1492 New World is relevant to a reading of colonialism in the Indian Ocean region. Wynter challenges contemporary bourgeois scholarship of 'great civilisation' by

proposing to look at the origin stories of Africans, who were enslaved and exiled from the continent, based on the creative process of rehumanisation which took place under a regime of oppression. The systems of slavery of people from the African continent, Madagascar and India (Mozambique and Goa in particular) was initiated under Dutch external colonialism in the seventeenth century (Allen, 2011; 2014; Peerthum, Sheriff, Teelock and Wahab, 2016), following the human-induced extinction of unique species in the main island of Mauritius.

Within a few centuries of the arrival of European, the islands were reduced to a sugar plantation economy under Dutch exploitation colonisation (1598-1710), French settler colonialism (1715-1810) and English colonial administration (1810-1968) that was dependent upon enslaved labour from Madagascar, Africa and South Asia and then indentured and migrant labour from India and China after the abolition of slavery (TJC, 2011).³¹ The history of European contact on the islands was thus started at the inter-related junction of slavery-based merchant capitalism and external colonialism, which legitimated exploitative systems of labour.³² The labour of enslaved Africans on tobacco plantations was already a British practice in the Americas in the early seventeenth century and continued across the Atlantic with Barbados as the first British island colony in 1625 (Beckles, 2006; Mintz, 1986; Trouillot, 1995). The colonisation of the Indian Ocean islands followed the same logic; the islands were transformed into cartographies of struggles – a term I borrow from McKittrick (2006) – where people were enslaved to work for the capitalist extraction of resources initiated for the wealth of the European metropolitans.

Those who resisted and escaped in the forests (maroons) and who represented the phase of primary resistance in the history of decolonisation (Said, 1993) were left on the island when the Dutch colonists finally moved in 1710 to the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, already under the influence of Dutch trade and settlement since the 1650s (Allen, 2011; 2014; Peerthum, 2012; Vaughan, 2005). In the context of Dutch, French and English mercantile, settler and administrative colonisation of the uninhabited Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, I argue based on Wynter's line of thought that, the 'humanisation' of the scarred landscape (depleted of its indigenous ebony forests and animals) occurred through the peopling of the remaining forests by those who escaped

³¹ The islands were visited by Dutch ships since 1598 but Dutch settlement to exploit the island and ship back natural resources such as the wood of ebony to the metropolitan, started in 1638.

³² There are different phases and aspects of capitalism. For example, mercantile capitalism was followed by industrial capitalism and the recent period has been explained as promoting cognitive capitalism.

from enslavement and were left stranded on the island when the Dutch East India Company left. In reference to the notion of indigenisation discussed in the previous section, the Indian Ocean islands did not have Indigenous peoples, the maroons were the first people to indigenise and humanise the island before French settlement by becoming the permanent ‘occupants of the uninhabitable’ (McKittrick, 2013, p. 6). Within the decolonial framing of indigeneity, particularly Wynter’s, colonisation is read as encompassing the racialised exploitation of human bodies and the extinction of both non-human beings (the indigenous bird) as well as the ‘extinction’ of original mother tongues (that carried indigenous knowledge) on the Indian Ocean islands.³³ Slavery, as a violent displacement, enforced the necessity of Africans ‘to plant themselves as indigenous to the New World’ (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 6) and indigenised the place with their practices (Wynter, 2007). By drawing from Wynter’s genealogical work from a Caribbean context, I draw a parallel between the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean region to destabilise the colonial narrative of European discovery and progress on mainland Mauritius. In this sense, Caribbean scholarship and Black Studies proved to be essential for a critique of the discourse of discovery. Carolyn Cooper, whose experiences are situated within the Jamaican context explains that

Revisionist readings of the geography of suffering that was mapped ... in the age of European enlightened discovery, reposition Africans as explorers, if not conquistadores. They did come before Columbus, but apparently had no heart for the imperial enterprise (Cooper, 1993, p. 196).

McKittrick reiterates that colonial encounters ‘incited “discoveries” and violence, as well as social, economic, and political exchanges between local (indigenous, black) and European cultures’ (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 143). On the other hand, the colonial narrative of discovery, as Grada Kilomba explains in relation to the Portuguese colonisation of Angola, her ancestral home, is a whitewashed and glorified version of the history.

We were asked to read about the ‘Portuguese Discovery Epoch,’ even though we do not remember being discovered. We were asked to write about the great legacy of colonization, even though we could only remember robbery and humiliation. And we were asked not to inquire about our African heroes, for they were terrorists and

³³ Wynter makes a reference to Africans in the continent, in comparison to the African diaspora, who still managed to remain auto-centered and experience themselves as human within the terms of their own autopoiesis (2015, p. 27, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). It is in this perspective that she argues that the notion of indigenisation is also possible when African languages and practices in the language are transformed into new modes of creative existence as autopoetic languaging living systems.

rebels. What a better way to colonize than to teach the colonized to speak and write from the perspective of the colonizer (Kilomba, 2010, p. 35).

The system of slavery from Africa, Madagascar and India was continued by the French East India Company from 1715 to 1767 and then by the Royal Government under the French monarchy until 1810. The labour of enslaved Africans was capitalised upon to fuel sugar plantations on the Mauritius islands (then named Isle de France), Réunion (named Bourbon), the Seychelles, Mayotte and the Comoros Islands until the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁴

Sugar, initially a rare and costly spice, became a commonly consumed commodity in Europe, to sustain the existence of colonies, for political expansion and power (Teelock, 1998). The last years of French rule on the island under Decaen's regime (Prentout, 1901) are considered, by historians, to be the most violent: paradoxically, this was the time when the Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen was passed in Europe (1789). The brutality of the gratuitous violence against the enslaved (beating, lynching, torture, whipping, hanging, burning, mutilation, rape, abuse, scorching, branding and imprisonment) have been documented and is discussed further in Chapter Five. While slavery was abolished in France in 1794 following the French Revolution, slavery was restored by Napoleon in the colonies in 1802.

I argue that epistemic colonisation on the islands of Mauritius took place as forms of 'linguistic violence' (Arends, Muysken and Smith, 1994, p. 4) or 'linguistic terrorism' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38) on the enslaved whose mother tongues were suppressed under French slavery.³⁵ A Creole language developed from the urgency to communicate and respond to the French language of the colonists from the Brittany region (Chaudenson and Mufwene, 2001; Glissant, 1997).³⁶ This aspect is covered in more details in Chapter Five. After the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), English sovereignty was imposed on the Indian Ocean region. Under the negotiated 1815 Treaty of Paris, the French plantocracy gained rights of occupation to maintain their laws and customs on the island. The

³⁴ There were no French settlers on the Mauritius islands until 1735. Bourbon (Réunion Island), already a French colony since 1665, was the administrative centre, until the French base of operations was moved to the more secure harbour in Mauritius. By 1810, there was an enslaved population of more than 60,000 people working as agricultural labourers, household servants, fishermen, artisans, port workers and sailors, against a recorded 6,227 French settlers on the main island of Mauritius (Selvon, 2005). The French oligarchy was made of colonials, plantation owners, workers from France and their descendants born on the island, later categorised as Franco-Mauritians.

³⁵ Anzaldúa discusses the act of being shamed for using her mother tongue, Chicano Spanish, in school as linguistic terrorism.

³⁶ According to Glissant, the formation of creole languages with French lexifiers across the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean could be linked to the fact that Breton and Norman dialects had 'not yet achieved their normative unity and [were] thus able to enter into the composition of a new language' (1997, p. 97).

Roman Catholic Church and other institutions would enforce the French Civil Code, French language and culture and new laws established in relation to the local context.³⁷ The suppression of knowledge, languages and cultures from Africa, Madagascar and India by the colonial matrix of power was ensured with the forced conversion of enslaved people to the Catholic religion.

By the 1830s, at the prospect of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, the English Government devised the system of indenture exploitation, in the form of contracted labour from British India, to replace slavery (Teelock, 2001). The ‘Great Experiment’, as they called it, was tried in the Indian Ocean colonies (Mauritius) and followed in the Atlantic region (Trinidad, Jamaica, Demerera (Guyana), South Africa and Fiji). Half a million Indians, many of whom were peasants from rural India (Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Mumbai, Tamil Nadu and their peripheries), were ‘recruited’ by local agents and made to sign a work agreement. This bound them to serve five years in British Mauritius in return for a free passage back at the expense of the planters (TJC, 2011). The strategic ‘experiment’ continued until 1910, and many ‘skilled’ Indians and Chinese also migrated to Mauritius and later joined the social category of a rising Asian bourgeoisie, after they were allowed to own land and property to encourage permanent settlement.

The growing indentured population, under English administration and French occupation (1810-1968), contributed to a shift in power dynamics and consequently changed the linguistic, social and cultural set-up. The great majority of Indians came from Bihar and spoke Bhojpuri, the predominant language of the Mauritian countryside at the end of the nineteenth century (Eisenlohr, 2006). The ‘gravitational pull from India is strongly felt in Mauritius: it possesses a much stronger Indian flavour than any society in the New World’ (Eriksen, 1992, p. 125). After India and Nepal, Mauritius is the country with the third-largest community of Hindus and has, as a result, witnessed a process of creolisation that has differed from those of the Caribbean islands, producing a multi-ethnic and multilingual society by the end of British colonialism that is perhaps most closely mirrored by the multi-culturality and the politically represented Hindus of Trinidad and Tobago.

Bhojpuri was widely spoken in the rural areas in the second half of the nineteenth century by the different linguistic communities that came from India as well as people

³⁷ In Dutch Mauritius, children born out of Dutch fathers and African mothers were only liberated if they became Christians. In French Mauritius, the project of colonisation ‘was accompanied by an agreement signed between the Compagnie des Indes and the Congregation de la Mission, a body of Catholic Church on March 21, 1721 in France for the creation of churches and parishes in the island’ (Selvon, 2005).

of Chinese descent and the ‘coloured’ or ‘milat’ (mulatto) people, particularly on the plantations, while Creole became associated with the urban working class, lower government offices and schooling, initially run by mostly missionaries (Eisenlohr 2006, p. 208).³⁸ As civil posts required baptism and conversion to Catholicism, most colonial schools used French or Creole as language of instruction, refusing to teach children of Indian origins in their mother tongues.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a rising middle class made of doctors, lawyers, teachers and businessmen) began to challenge the sugar barons.³⁹ In the 1930s, the Mauritius Labour Party, which would become the first government at Independence, was established by intellectuals and activists of mixed race and Indian origins pressuring the British to draft a new constitution to allow universal suffrage, which the Franco-Mauritians – descendants of French settlers – vehemently opposed. Furthermore, the 1940s witnessed the launch of a literacy campaign in the country in Hindi by two brothers, Basdeo and Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, laying the foundations of political emancipation of the rural working class (Hazareesingh, 1977).⁴⁰ In 1948, a crucial year in the history of the islands’ independence, the results of the election brought the control of the electoral process in the hands of a majority of Indo-Mauritians (Mauritians of Indian origin).⁴¹

Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, with more than forty percent of the population (mainly the Creoles, Chinese, Muslims and Franco-Mauritians) voting against the coalition party for independence due to the fear of a Hindu hegemony (Eriksen and Ramtohul, 2018). A second phase of ideological resistance in the context of Mauritius (as discussed in the first section) rested in nation-building, with a Franco-Mauritian economic bourgeoisie sharing centre stage with a (mostly) Hindu rising political and economic elite. The economic stability of ex-slave-owners was laid down from compensation received, following the negotiation of a Franco-Mauritian lawyer,

³⁸ The term ‘coloured’ was used, in the eighteenth century, to describe people of mixed race who were freed from enslavement (Selvon, 2005).

³⁹ The visit of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1901 and the arrival of Manillal Doctor, a lawyer sent by the Gandhi to defend the cause of the Indian indentured workers, in 1907, were precursors to the political party, ‘Action Libérale’ set up in 1910 which lasted for four years. WW1 broke and political activism was put to a stop in the colony. The mid 1930s witnessed a rising workers’ consciousness and initial ideas of a nationalist movement of decolonisation was circulated in the colony.

⁴⁰ 13 August 1937 is considered the turning point in the revolution of indentured labour in Mauritius when three labourers were shot dead in a confrontation between labourers/small planters and the police/sugar estates.

⁴¹ There were no members of the Muslim and Chinese community elected. This provoked a debate about ensuring guaranteed representation through the electoral process. The constitution consequently adopted an ethno-centric system (what is called ‘communalism’ in Mauritius), the Best Loser System, which ensured the political representations of all the main ethnic/religious communities.

Adrien D'Epinay, just prior to the enactment of the British law on the Abolition of Slavery. I discuss the monument that commemorates D'Epinay in Chapter Two.

A strong pre-independence financial sector was already constituted on the island and with the establishment of a political and economic support by the first government, the foundation was laid for a socialist state based on a centre-left politics (Eriksen, 1998). With most of the land and property acquired in the colonial era by Franco-Mauritians, a sharing of power was devised to promote a mixed-capitalist economy, giving way to a ‘consociational democracy’ (Boudet and Peghini, 2008) and subsequently a ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ (Amin, 2014) or a bourgeoisie based on a ‘dominance without hegemony’ (Guha, 1997). This bourgeoisie, composed of a privileged class of French, Afro-Euro, Indian and Chinese ancestry with common economic interest, paved the way for a bourgeois nationalism that has been the form in which colonised societies enter Western notion of modernity (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Venn, 2000).

The cultural make-up of contemporary Mauritius is made up of a multi-ethnic and multilingual society of under 1.3 million inhabitants who speak Hindi, Marathi, Tamul, Telegu, Gujarati, Urdu, Arabic, Hakka, Cantonese and Mandarin and practice different religions (Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and to a lesser extent Buddhism, Sikhism, Protestantism and Adventism). Most ancestral languages play an important role in the cultural, religious and ritualistic set up of the different communities on the island, such as religious ceremonies, rites of passage and social practices. At the time of Independence, Mauritians spoke twenty-two ancestral languages, with a knowledge of a dozen more languages, identified as mother tongues of Indian ancestors. These languages still play an important role in the cultural, religious and ritualistic set-up of the different communities.⁴²

The 1968 Constitution categorised the population into four groups: Hindus representing the majority of Indian descendants, Muslims, Sino-Mauritians and the General Population which consists of African and French descendants and people of mixed race, mainly of Christian faith. The first category represents Indo-Mauritians (sixty-eight percent in 1968 after independence) who are culturally divided based on ancestral languages: Hindi/Bhojpuri, Tamil, Telegu and Marathi (each community having a separate public holiday). Muslims are divided into Sunnis, Shi'ites and Ahmadis and Sino-mauritians into Hakka and Cantonese speaking groups. The General

⁴² In this thesis, I concentrate on Creole as a mother tongue created after the suppression of the original languages carried by enslaved people.

population is divided into three subcategories: Franco-Mauritians who represent less than two percent of the population, the Creoles referring to individuals of African or Malagasy origins (about twenty percent) and the *gens de couleur* representing people of mixed French, Malagasy, African and South/South-East Asian origins (TJC, 2011).

This broad ethnic/religious categorisation served the purpose of the new government to politically represent each cultural group and avoid religious and ethnic conflicts after independence. I argue that this classification is based on a nationalist logic of imagining a nation from the premise of a colonial governance and administration of differences. Direct colonial rule was certainly over but an epistemic colonialism – the colonisation of knowledge – remained in the present, sustained, to some extent, by a neo-colonial bourgeoisie, as can be witnessed in many postcolonial countries (Ngũgĩ, 1986). A few events attest to this: the 1968 ‘race wars’ (Collen, 2009) which were violent interactions between ethnic groups (namely Muslims and Creoles) stirred by parties who were pro and against Independence (Simmons, 1982; Boudet, 2000); the General Strike of 1979, the biggest upsurge of working-class struggle in the history of Mauritius; and the 1999 uprising following the death of Kaya, a Creole reggae singer, who was brutalised by the police. These ethnic uprisings have been analysed as the result of economic and racial injustices maintained by the complicity of the state and the oligarchy (Boudet, 2000). I further discuss, in the last section of this chapter, how colonial demarcation of space inherent in the postcolonial geography is a form of slow violence on the lives of the Black/Creole people.

This research attempts to explain the structural and epistemic violence of colonialism which persist in a specific postcolonial context and reveals the modes of resistance and reconstruction within that space. A symbolical event, relevant to the understanding of language and artistic activism on mainland Mauritius, took place on 12 September 1969, only one year after Mauritius negotiated independence with Harris Wilson’s government. A group of young militants, protested against the official visit of Princess Alexandra and her husband, businessman Angus Ogilvy, a financial supporter of the plantocracy on the island (Selvon, 2001).⁴³ Influenced by the rise of student mobilisation across Europe and liberation/decolonisation movements around the global South, a few engaged students at the University of Mauritius formed a collective (Club

⁴³ After their release from prison, this group of students would eventually mobilise under a political party with a radical left/socialist program and form the Mouvement Militant Mauricien. Their youth, fervour and ideologies would inspire many Mauritians to create a strong opposition to the Labour Party.

de Étudiants Mauriciens) and organised a street protest against the ethnocentric programme of the new government.

They expressed their concerns with the residual inequalities reproduced by the economic structure of colonisation (land ownership and economy still run by white sugar barons), and denounced the conservatism and ethnic politics of the Labour party and their Western notion of development, modernisation and state-building sustained by colonial apparatuses, attitudes and practices (Selvon, 2001, pp. 208-209). Their revolutionary ideas clashed with the programme of decolonisation of the new government, based on Fabian socialism and set on sustaining a capitalist economy and sharing power with descendants of French settlers. Furthermore, I argue that the immediate post-independence uprising occurred between an urban intellectual elite who harboured a revolutionary politics, and an intelligentsia with close connections to the rural demographics and a drive to take over the political control of the country and relieve the people of colonial rule. This urban elite group, comprising of the artist Firoz Ghanty, militated against the diplomatic relations between Mauritius and Israel and denounced Israel's colonial policy of occupation of Palestinian lands, as well as the relations between Mauritius and the apartheid regime in South Africa. The next section looks at how the Truth and Justice Commission, set up in 2009 to look at the consequences of slavery and indenture in the present, determined that Mauritians know very little about Mauritian history.

2.2 Theorising Colonial Anaesthesia

... many Mauritians know so little about Mauritian history and their family history. What Mauritians have preserved about their own history is limited, although this is to some extent understandable, because most Mauritians have led difficult lives. However, it is clear that their approach to life differs considerably, depending on their culture, religion (or absence of it), class and economic status in life (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 43).

The TJC reached a conclusion that many Mauritians know very little about their history because most Mauritians have led difficult lives (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 43). The Truth and Justice Commission attributed this 'lack of historical knowledge' to 'the historical and contemporary denigration and/or ignorance of slave/indentured labourer contributions to the society, [that] perpetuates stereotyping, racism, underdevelopment, poverty and cultural amnesia' (p. 283). The commission published extensive research on the contemporary racism and the marginalisation of the Creole people, which I read

as residues of three hundred years of antiblack/anti-African violence endorsed by the racialised hierarchy of labour of slavery and indenture. The TJC revealed the violence of slavery in Mauritius and the reproduction of that violence in the present in forms of contemporary structural racism and prejudices against the Creole people. Rose Boswell, an anthropologist who studied the plight of the Creole people in contemporary times, explains that the Creole people are shamed for their history of enslavement or racial mixture, marginalised (Boswell, 2006, p. xix), stigmatised (p. 1) and sexualised by dominant groups (p. 57), and ghettoised by government neglect (p. 141).

In this sense, I analyse the report and highlight the reference to the pathology of trauma used by the TJC. Hayner (2010) positions truth commissions as inquiries which investigate with a ‘victim-centered’ approach which is often based on medical definitions of trauma. The TJC stated that there was a recurrent narrative of having led a difficult life in the past in the semi-formal interviews conducted from 2009-2011. Based on the testimonies collected in Mauritian Creole and translated in English, the TJC reported that:

Most respondents recall the following from their life: ‘*avant ti ena buku misère, aster ki la vie facile*’. (Before it was hard; now life is easy) (TJC, 2011, vol. 3, p. 9).

The technical studies and surveys, in Volumes Three and Four of the TJC report, reveal that although most respondent recall that their life is ‘easy’ in the present, many suffer from a generational trauma of slavery and indenture.

Furthermore, the TJC pathologised the trauma as possibly ‘post-traumatic slave disorder (PTSS)’ what they qualify as ‘a variation of the well-known syndrome of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)’ (vol. 1, p. 287). The different causes of trauma reported were:

- . Aversion to plantation work after the abolition of slavery;
- . Creation of propensity to alcohol consumption in individual slaves and possible impact on children
- . Trauma caused by a sudden change of occupations – from tailor to plantation work, for example; trauma caused by the dislocation of families, as plantation slaves were sold/hired to other owners of plantations
- . Trauma caused by fear of physical punishment and humiliation of publicly-administered punishment; fear of the ‘White’ man, of authority, further instilled by threat of physical punishment (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 137).

They acknowledge that trauma is exacerbated by the racism, the economic inequalities and prejudices of Mauritian contemporary society.

No attention has been given to the consequences of slavery in Mauritius previously and so little is known of PTSS. There is a growing number of people who are affected by complex sociopathologies in Mauritius and this is because of racism and differentiation that exist in Mauritius, and many people are finding it very difficult to cope with these. The majority of those affected come from the Creole community or at least, the more impoverished communities on the island (vol. 1, p. 287).⁴⁴

The problem of racism has not ended with the abolition of slavery, the achievement of Independence from Colonial Rule or even the various amendments to the Mauritian Constitution. The economic legacies of slavery (economic inequality, lack of access to the means of production and ownership), continue today. In fact, a worsening of the situation is occurring as Mauritius becomes a more economically liberal society in which maximum profits are to be made (p. 288).

Furthermore, the chairman of the TJC added that many people prefer to forget and not to engage with a history of suffering. He claimed that people ‘favoured amnesia rather than remembering’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 7).

There is always violence present in the histories of all of these countries, and there are always victims who have suffered from this violence. There is also always denial. There are many in each of these countries who have sought to deal with the past, as well as people who opposed it and who favoured amnesia rather than remembering. They argued that it was better to turn the page, not to disturb the past, but to move forward (p. 7).

The chairperson emphasised that many people with an experience of a traumatic event ‘favoured amnesia’ (p. 7) over remembering. The act of favouring amnesia provided a starting point to reflect on amnesia as pathology, for example as a symptom or a consequence of trauma. The work on memory, forgetting and trauma by Paul Ricoeur (2004), is used here as a guideline for examining the relationship between amnesia, trauma and memory. The clinical approach to cognitive memory, through the corporeality of trauma and the pathological model of amnesia (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 27) implies a loss of memory as a dysfunction (p. 426) and is caused by distressing events. *Mnēnē* in Greek is a simple evocation or the passive presence of memories, characterised as an affection (*pathos*), while *anamnēsis* is an effort to recall, the act of recollection, or the returning to an earlier experience (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 4, p. 19, pp. 26-27). One of the TJC’s mission, which is relevant to this research, was to repair the state of cultural amnesia by proposing to write a national history, what has been

⁴⁴ They propose a series of measures to alleviate the suffering and trauma of the Black/Creole people, among which a land monitoring and research unit to allow for a redistribution of land (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 352) and programs to tackle racism and economic inequality (p. 387).

described in memory scholarship as the necessity of a reconstruction of history ‘even when social memory preserves direct testimony of an event’ (Connerton, 1989). For Connerton, this historical reconstruction helps a society to remember parts of history that has usually been repressed by a group in power through ‘organised forgetting’ (p. 14). In this sense, using Ricoeur terms, the TJC’s revision of colonial history was aimed at both repairing the passiveness of *mnēnē* (social memory) in its amnesic state and provoking *anamnēsis* (effort to recall).

Favouring amnesia also presupposes what Stoler calls an ‘active dissociation’ (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 125), which reiterates what the TJC explains as a conscious decision ‘to turn the page, not to disturb the past, but to move forward’ (p. 7). This perspective of amnesia demonstrates that forgetting is not necessarily a debilitating loss of memory or a pathology of memory loss (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 26) but can be a voluntary wish for or unconsciously willed into, as a survival mechanism. This opens up a line of analysis for this research: forgetting can be informed by a blurred ‘border between the normal and the pathological’ (p. 427) and can be ‘induced’ as a form of coping with the trauma of a past of exploitation.

Ricoeur explains that the medicalisation of memory, through the corporeality of trauma and the pathological model of amnesia implies a clinical loss of memory diagnosed to have been caused by distressing events (2004, p. 27). I draw from Ricoeur who questions the clinical classification of forgetting as part of the ‘dysfunctions of memory alongside amnesia’ (p. 426). For Ricoeur, forgetting is not always a dysfunction of memory but a biological phenomenon and cannot be clinically assessed under the discourse of amnesia.

Ordinary forgetting is in this respect on the same silent side as ordinary memory. This is the great difference between forgetting and all the types of amnesia with which clinical literature abounds (p. 27).

The use of discourse on trauma and amnesia also stems from a psychoanalytical lens and has also been problematised in the postcolonial context (Greedharry, 2008; Hamilton, 2010; Khanna, 2003; Radstone, 2000).⁴⁵ The South African Truth and Justice Commission, for instance, has been criticised for ‘applying psychoanalytical concepts to political and social relations [... arguing that] the best way to cultivate patience for

⁴⁵ Postcolonial theory has frequently rejected psychoanalysis, ‘criticized for its universalizations, its elitism, and its ahistoricism’ (Khanna, 2003, p. 7). However, the works of Sigmund Freud on psychoanalysis and later psychoanalytic theory during anti-colonial movements, by Octave Mannoni, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, René Menil, Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi (Khanna, 2003) remains relevant to the discourse on trauma and amnesia in relation to the postcolonial context.

proceduralism is through trials that hold perpetrators accountable' (Grandin, 2005, p. 63). In psychoanalysis, trauma is described as 'experienced (or blocked from experience) in individuals' (Khanna, 2003, p. 14). However, according to Khanna, not all forms of memory and forgetting need a psychoanalytic lens to interpret traumatic events (p. 12).

Along the same line of thought, critiques from memory studies – an academic field studying the use of memory as a tool for remembering the past, as discussed in Chapter One – stipulate that a focus on trauma theory, in the field memory studies, is often reduced to a pathological approach which focuses on victim-centred narratives (Hamilton, 2010; Kansteiner, 2014).⁴⁶ Therefore, as memory scholar Carrie Hamilton (2010) discusses, the discourse on trauma does not always provide an understanding of 'the structures of political power, exploitation or abuse, nor of those responsible for them' (p. 268). Hamilton, whose interest lies in political conflicts and memory, looks at the political utility of trauma in theorising historical forms of oppression (p. 265). She explains that

Unlike oppression, trauma does not necessarily involve a human agent as well as a victim. By focusing on the victim, trauma theory does not necessarily provide an understanding of the structures of political power, exploitation or abuse, nor of those responsible for them (p. 268).

For Kansteiner, memory studies should also focus on 'an explicit cause and effect model' which (2014, p. 125) account for the historical continuation in, what memory scholar Astrid Erll calls 'certain mental, discursive, and habitual paradigms that were formed in long historical processes (2011, p. 4-5).⁴⁷

In this sense, I argue that the act of knowing so little about the history of Mauritius based on the trauma discourse used by the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC, 2011, vol. 1, p. 43) is either a biological process of forgetting for self-preservation, or is an embodied trauma that does not necessarily purport a cognitive acknowledgement, remembrance or forgetting. According to Grada Kilomba everyday racism as is 'not only the restaging of a colonial past, but also [...] a traumatic reality' (2010, p. 3). In

⁴⁶ I do not undermine the medical and psychoanalytical approach to help people suffering from trauma. I problematise the use of the rhetoric on trauma in academic and official discourses which can lead to a non-engagement with the causes of the perpetuation of trauma in the present.

⁴⁷ Erll discusses the '9/11' terror attack and the reactions of the West to focus on the trauma of the victims instead of the consequences of an involvement of the United States in the politics of the Middle East throughout a long history of violence.

relation to the various causes of trauma of the Creole people, listed by the TJC, I problematise trauma as pathology through Christina Sharpe's discussion of the reductive response of pathologising Black trauma (2016) in the American context. This is relevant in my examination of the trauma of the Creole people in the Mauritian context. Sharpe establishes a connection between 'Black death' and 'Black trauma' (2016, p. 13) and the afterlives of slavery and pinpoints present structures which reproduces colonial systems of oppression.

In this sense, I propose to argue that the trauma of slavery is perpetuated by the ghettoisation of the Creole people which is discussed in the next section and in Chapter Five. This research problematises the conclusion of the TJC that Mauritians know little about Mauritian history because of cultural amnesia and proposes to read their 'lack of knowledge' of history as a form of 'aphasia' (Stoler, 2011) or colonial anaesthesia, in contrast to cultural amnesia. Following from the work of Connerton and Ricoeur, Stoler explains that 'forgetting and amnesia are misleading terms to describe this guarded separation and the procedures that produced [the amnesia]' (p. 125) and theorises 'aphasia' as

a more apt term, one that captures not only the nature of that blockage but also the feature of loss... In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things (p. 125).

This 'dismembering' (p. 125) is articulated here as a lack of engagement with and an inability to discuss or a dissociation with the histories of colonisation and its residues. Aphasia refers to both loss and active dissociation. Furthermore, drawing from the term 'aphasia' I claim, in this research, that coloniality induces suppression of sensation – similar to a state of 'anaesthesia' – a term which comes from the Greek meaning 'loss of sensation' and acts as a numbing effect (British Journal of Hospital Medicine, 2013, p. C71). From the medical terminology on amnesia, I deduce that amnesia can occur with anaesthetic psychoactive drugs (sleeping pills, anaesthetic drugs for example) to derive temporary relief and a reversible state of unconsciousness which can be analgesic – reflex suppression or relief from pain without eliminating sensation (British Journal of Hospital Medicine, 2013, p. C71). A state of anaesthesia follows, from where pain and sensation are suppressed without the loss of consciousness. I draw from the literature which explains that a general anaesthesia, in contrast with a regional anaesthesia for example, is divided into three stages: induction, maintenance and emergence (p. C71). Using anaesthesia as a metaphor, I propose to look at how amnesia can be induced and

maintained to reach a state of loss of sensation (anaesthesia) as a mechanism of coloniality. In this sense, the decolonial turn offers a productive starting line to trigger the third stage of a general anaesthesia: that of emergence.

In regard to this research on aesthetics, I decided to look at the mechanism of coloniality which does not necessarily purport a violent institution of control such as the colonial police. Drawing from critical geography and the work of McKittrick on cartographies of struggle, I analyse, in the next section, the postcolonial city of Port Louis and the colonial monuments which are not representative of physical violence. However, I demonstrate that settler cartographies organised on the demarcation of space which is based on a racialised plantation economy are sites of slow violence to refer to structural violence, ‘a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all’ (Nixon, 2011, p. 2).

I take a detour here with Frantz Fanon’s seminal texts, *Black Skin, White Masks* (first published in 1952) in which he writes about his encounter of racism in the streets of the metropolitan ‘mother country’ France and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) in which he evokes the urban infrastructure of the coloniser/colonised. I also draw from Wynter’s critique of the reproduction of colonial structures of power by the bourgeoisie in the Caribbean. I discuss Fanon’s experience of the violence of the metropolitan city, Paris that is not spectacular and not typically viewed as violence. The ‘Fanonian moment’ – cited in countless scholarship – when he is faced with a white child expressing surprise and fear of his Black body in the streets of Paris (2008, p. 84) allowed me to reflect on how the street can be a space of racial violence for the former colonised. Fanon’s visceral description of his embodied experience of racism, in his essays, and Wynter’s decolonial perspective of Fanonian psychoanalytical explanation, allowed me to build my argument of how colonial anaesthesia works at a cartographic level in the postcolony.

Fanon’s trajectory from his middle-class status in the French colony of Martinique (Hudis, 2015, p. 14) to being othered in the metropolitan city of Paris led me to examine how coloniality is ‘planted’ in settler colonialism and in the bourgeoisie. Fanon was born in the 1950s from a well-educated family in the French colony of Martinique and, as described in the vast literature on him and his work, ‘had assimilated all the cultural values of France’ (Fanon in Filostrat, 2008, p. 157) after ‘growing up, exactly like a French bourgeois child’ (Wynter, 2007, p. 11) and encouraged to speak French instead of Creole (Hudis, 2015, p. 14). I draw from this status to examine how settler

colonialism is also reproduced by the bourgeoisie in Martinique and in Mauritius. According to Wynter, Fanon could not experience himself as a ‘negro’ despite his biogenetic phenotype (2007, p. 11) and when he left Martinique, he considered Paris as the motherland.

[...] as Fanon’s exploration enables us to see, as long as the Caribbean Negro remains in Martinique or Guadeloupe, he does not experience himself as a *nigger*. Rather, his sense of self, one which impels him to void ‘acting like a nigger’ is, as Fanon shows, produced as normal and thereby as a ‘*white self*'; in effect, produced as the French bourgeois mode of the self, in whose terms he has been socialized through the mediation of the formal as well as familial educational processes (Wynter, 2001, p. 34).

The Fanonian moment of what Wynter calls the realisation of ‘the anomaly to being human’ (p. 11) – or what I deduce here as the visceral realisation of coloniality – happens on the streets of Paris through the apprehension of a white child by Fanon’s black body.

‘Look, a Negro!’ It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile (Fanon, 2008, p. 84).

While I was forgetting, forgiving, and warning only to love, my message was flung back in my face like a slap (p. 86).

I argue that the proximity of the child’s gaze on his body brought him abruptly (‘like a slap’) to the realisation of coloniality from the ‘motherland’. ‘The White man’s eyes break up the Black man’s body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed’ (Bhabha, 1996, in Fanon, 2008, p. xxv). This encounter is read, in this research, as a moment of ‘awakening to the world’ (p. 108), as a form of disruption from the anaesthetic condition reproduced in the middle-class French Antilles. Fanon’s wife, Josie, remarked that the francophile bourgeoisie implemented within the plantation colony is the most perfidious

This pathology is common to the people of the French-speaking Antilles. Even today, these colonies are the territories where French colonialism has been the most over-emphasized, most perfidious, and most noxious (Filostrat, 2008, p. 157).

Wynter argues that the bourgeoisie has been the main obstacle to the acknowledgement of what she calls the cosmogonically chartered autopoesis within the culture of the Black/Creole people.

For Wynter, Fanon’s realisation of coloniality occurred at the moment when he had an embodied experience of racism. Fanon’s remark ‘I had been dreaming’ (p. 88) reveals that he had been desensitised of the viscerality of coloniality, despite the influence of Aimé Césaire’s revolutionary politics on him and the racialised

geographies which abound both postcolonial contexts and the metropolitan centres.

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day [...] I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling (pp. 86-87).

Fanon makes an allusion to a body marked by the violence of realisation ('sprawled out', 'distorted', 'recoloured'), and how this affected body, consequently, is marked and marks its space ('I move slowly in the world'). Furthermore, 'I progress by crawling' can be read as an oxymoron, as the act of crawling minimises the possibility of progress, in a space which has the power to inflict a slow violence to the body.

The act of moving in the world also gives a spatial dimension to the embodied experience, emphasising a violence which is present, yet silent, in the metropolitan city. For Fanon, this space of encounter becomes significant. In this sense, I argue, in the next section, that the non-acknowledgement of the violence present in the concrete physical landscapes of both Martinique and Mauritius – representing colonial order and progress from a settler point of view – act as a metaphorical injection of induced amnesia. Fanon's experience of coloniality (racism) in the spatialities of the metropolitan city was visceral and stands in contrast with the knowledge that Fanon had already acquired on the violence of colonisation and its afterlives: a consciousness of the violence without feeling/sensing the viscerality of the violence.

I elaborate on this example to argue that the non-engagement with the coloniality of the geography (physical, cultural and linguistic), embedded in what Fanon articulates as an 'atmosphere of violence' (1963, p. 81), had kept him in a state of colonial anaesthesia: a state of knowing but not sensing the violence. I also challenge the pathology of trauma and looks at an exterior stimulus, in the next section, that keep Mauritians in a state of non-acknowledgement of the trauma of the Creole people.

2.3 'Post'-colonial Geographies of Slow Violence

[...] historical traces are held in the stones of the old colonial buildings (Boudet and Peghini, 2008, p. 5).

Being postcolonial presupposes either imperial presence in/through the metropolitan periphery, as exemplified in the case of the Département of Martinique, or living within the residues of an inherited system of colonial structures (both physical and institutional) organised around the plantation in Mauritius. The 'post'-colonial geography of Mauritius refers to the islands marked by three hundred years of European

exploitation of the land and resources as well as the present racialised cartographies of occupation and settlement (1638-1968). In this section, I discuss the grid-like stratification of space and the ‘monumental leftovers’ (Stoler, 2013, p. 9) in the capital city of Port Louis, which was developed as a naval base and shipbuilding centre in the eighteenth century. The city represents a space of transition between the sugar colonies and the European cities where sugar is exported to.

While physical violence is recognised in its most horrifying manifestations, geographies of violence ‘hidden beneath ideology, mundanity and the suspension of critical thought’ are less recognisable, as remarked by critical geographers, Le Billon and Springer (2016, p. 1). In this sense, the physical geography of the island is read here as scarred, first, by the deforestation initiative of the Dutch East India Company, initiated by the Dutch Government to bring together several rival trading companies, to export hard ebony wood to the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. After the capitalisation of wood and the decimation of unique endemic plants and species such as the (now iconic extinct) dodo, which evolved for eight million years, the forest-islands of Mauritius were levelled for the infrastructural planning of sugar plantation colonies and ‘planting’ of people (Bogues, 2010, p. xi). The planting of colonies implied settling people into stratified spaces (p. xi) from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. After the Dutch (1598-1710), the island was converted into a sugar plantation economy under French settler colonialism (1715-1810) and English administration (1810-1968).

I draw from Achille Mbembe who explains that colonial occupation is ‘a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area — of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations’ (2003, pp. 25-26).

The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries [...] Space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it (pp. 25-26).

Furthermore, plantations are, according to Mbembe, topographies of cruelty and ‘deathworlds’ (p. 40) and produce a means of racially settling and disciplining displaced peoples to labour under the authority of a planter.

Wynter posits that plantation islands ‘were “planted” with peoples not in order to form societies, but in order to carry on plantations’ (Bogues, 2010, p. xi). It is ‘the plantation that was mapped onto the lands of no one and became the location where black peoples were “planted” [...] not as members of society but as commodities that

would bolster crop economies' (McKittrick, 2013, p. 8). This echoes Lugones's colonial strategist's viewpoint of cartography which is marked by 'the distance of maps accompanied by the power to "empty" lands of history and the concreteness of local histories' (2003, pp. 212-213). The plantation is often defined 'as a "town," with a profitable economic system and local political and legal regulations' (McKittrick, 2013, p. 8) and is linked to transport that enable the shipping of crops, slaves, and other commodities (p. 8). Consequently, the plantation 'spatializes early conceptions of urban life within the context of a racial economy' (p. 8).

The grid-like cartography of colonial cities (Figure 2.1 & 2.2), which reflects the urbanism of the colonial project of modernity, is a mechanism of control.



Figure 2.1 Varsha Baptiste 2017, 'Ancestral Footprint' [Archival map], Group Art Exhibition 'Homeland', India. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

In this sense, I examine the port and capital city of Mauritius, Port Louis, named after the monarch Louis XV during the French occupation of the Indian Ocean islands.⁴⁸ I argue that the grid-like cartography of the city (Figure 3.1) bears witness to the governing and ordering of the colony based on the enslavers' strategy of control within

⁴⁸ Port Louis became the main port in the Indian Ocean region after the French administration shifted from nearby Reunion island to mainland Mauritius.

the structures of the plantation colony. The racialized cartography of the port of Mauritius was stratified and repartitioned to equip the colony with an efficient port.

I argue that this decolonial perspective demonstrates that the colonial geography is embedded in a slow violence – a violence that is out of sight, typically not viewed as violence at all (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). This aspect is absent in the museum as well as in the national narrative of the foundation of the capital city. By pinpointing the slow violence of the racialised order of the city of Port Louis, I disrupt the settler narrative of progress that stipulates that the Indian Oceans islands of Mauritius entered modernity from the colonial organisation and ordering of the islands. While Figure 2.1 demonstrates the flattening and the grid plan of the landscape which starts from the port and contours the river bank and the mountain ranges, the racialised demarcation of space can be further defined from a present Google cartography (Figure 2.2) of the city.



Figure 2.2 Port Louis, Mauritius [Google Map], Accessed 12 January 2018.

The area directly in front of the port was designed for the management of the colony (government, finance, court), commerce (where China Town grew from) and further inland for military purposes (where the Champ de Mars – a training ground converted into a racecourse under the British – now stands). It reveals the mechanism of ordering according to the different functions needed for the management of the plantation colony. The racialised stratification of space (Mbembe, 2003; McKittrick, 2013) is a

result of the urbanisation of colonial cities. The east side of the port (see Camp Yoloff in Figure 2.2) reveals smaller grids in the cartography which account for the original spaces where enslaved people lived (Peerthum et al., 2016) – separated further between freed slaves, government slaves employed in public works and free people of mixed race (Alpers and Schnepel, 2018, p. 217). The living and working quarters of traders (predominantly Muslim – Plaine Verte on Figure 3.2) are also demarcated from the west side and centre section of the city, designed for institutions of control and discipline, such as the police, prison and hospital complexes, as explained in Indian Ocean Studies scholarship:

[...] the center of the town was meant to be lived in by whites, while the eastern suburb was for Indians and the western suburbs for freed slaves (Alpers & Schnepel, 2018, p. 217).

The colonial organisation follows a logic of racialised segregation between white elite geographies (Salverda, 2013) and Black cartographies of struggle (McKittrick, 2006). This topography of violence reveals that architecture and urban spaces are bound up within a racialised division of space and, therefore, informs a post-independence ‘atmosphere of violence’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 81).

Fanon argues that an atmosphere of violence remains, after colonisation, in the skin of the colonised which is eventually transformed into a violence in action (pp. 70-71). I infer, here, that slow violence – structural or spatial violence – is a form of violence in action (comparable to Nixon theorisation of spectacular violence (2011, p. 2)) which was demonstrated by the riots triggered after the death of the reggae artist, Kaya. His death was at one level a confrontation between the Creole people and the police, at another level between the modes of life in the ghettos and the institutional space that is oppressive to them. This reading opened new ways of streetwalker theorising (Lugones, 2003, p. 219) the tensions between postcolonial geographies and the left-over mnemonic debris (Stoler, 2013) of postcolonial colonial spatialities, represented here by the cartographies of struggle on the peripheries of the centre which resides ‘in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes’ (p. 9-10).

As explained in the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter One, Katherine McKittrick discusses the ‘cartographies of struggle’ as ‘demonic grounds, the spaces of Otherness, the grounds of being human, poverty, archipelagos, of human Otherness, les damnés de la terre/the wretched of the earth, the color-line, terra nullius/land of no one’ (2006, p. 123). Taking the case of the ghettoisation of Roche Bois where Kaya produced

his music before his death, this discussion on postcolonial geographies of violence highlights the racialised demarcation of the settler geography between spatialities of colonial authority and the cartographies of struggle of the colonised. This is inherent in the postcolonial grid-like cartography of the capital city, Port Louis and the reproduction of power from the centre where, as I mentioned, the institutions of control and discipline are located. The death of Kaya in the hands of the police was made visible by the peaceful march of the community of Roche Bois whose experience of institutional violence stems from the system of European slavery and continued through the prejudices perpetuated by the colonial structures on which the new nation was built. There was, furthermore, an outburst of racialised attacks on the Creole people mourning the death/murder of their idol, from Indo-Mauritians who vilified the Rastafari culture. These demonstrations, referred to as the 1999 inter-ethnic riots which prompted the Government to declare a state of emergency, is one of three uprisings that had shook the island in the twentieth century (Boudet, 2000). This is further discussed in Chapter five in relation to how Creole sega artists experience coloniality.

The second aspect of postcolonial geography that I analyse in this section is the repository of mnemonic practices (p. 126) of the colonial founders, ‘still standing’ (as noted by Salverda (2007) today in the capital city of Port Louis. In this context, I analyse a second left-over mnemonic architecture: the colonial monument of a pro-slave apologist, Adrien d’Epinay (Figure 2.4) who is remembered by settlers for advocating freedom of the press on the island for the French and English oligarchy. The statue superimposes itself in the *Jardin de la Compagnie*, a public garden in the centre of the city, as contextualised in Chapter One, located next the Natural History Museum. It is a common ground for protests and public demonstrations. The statue of Adrien d’Epinay was one of the monuments on the list of thirty colonial buildings and monuments identified in 1930 by the Historical Records Committee, an institution which was instrumental in establishing a memorial framework in the colony and proposing a legal template to the colonial government for the preservation of certain sites, buildings and monuments as heritage (TJC, 2011, p. 818).



Condemned by history', Jardin de la Compagnie, Port Louis, 2011. Photograph courtesy Tijo Salverda.

Corinne Forest, in her article 'Memory and Representations of Slavery and Indenture in Mauritius: towards the Recognition of Slave and Indentured Heritage in Mauritius' in the report of the Truth and Justice Commission (2011), establishes a historical link between colonial institutions of knowledge and the national memorial framework. Forest explains that the 'colonial memorial framework' (Forest, 2011, vol. 4, p. 803) still in place in Mauritius was promoted by scientific institutions in the colony such as the Société d'Emulation (1805), the Société d'Histoire Naturelle (1826), The Société Royale des Sciences et des Arts (1846) and the Historical Records Committee (1883), created in the nineteenth century under the French and English with the contribution of

their network in the European metropolis (pp. 810-814).⁴⁹

This process would lead to the recognition of an heritage defined on Western grounds. This would be the fundamental element leading to the recognition of local heritage. This would survive colonial times and last until recent years. In this process, the Colonial Government signified its adhesion to the elite and created the image of a strong central power, allying the economic and political power. The example of the Historical Records Committee is also particularly significant in the elaboration of this memorial process. It is also important since it was created as an institutional body. Almost thirty years after its creation, it would become the Ancient Monuments Board and later lead to the creation of the actual National Heritage Fund. (Forest, 2011, p. 815).

The Franco-Mauritian oligarchy benefitted from the abolition of slavery, after D'Epinay negotiated with the British government (in 1833) for cash compensation to plantation owners (TJC, vol. 1, p. 66). Sculpted by his father, who is the author of other public colonial monuments across the island, the statue of Adrien d'Epinay was finished in 1866, at a time when governments across Europe were placing monuments in the public space to show support to established regimes of power (Cosgrove, 2008). A few streets on the island also bear the name of D'Epinay. Figure 2.4 also shows the monument of Adrien d'Epinay with a protest sign 'Guilty. Condemned by history' which was anonymously placed on the sculpture in 2010. The protest sign provoked a controversial debate in the Mauritian media around the removal of colonial monolithic figures. Adrien d'Epinay has been criticised for his anti-abolition position on slavery.

During the last decades, public monuments – across East Europe and in the postcolonial world – have been highly political sites from where authority has been challenged (Erll, 2011). There is a wide scholarship, particularly in memory studies (in relation to the Holocaust and to the communist regime in East Europe) and influenced by the work of the French historian Pierre Nora on sites of memory (1989), which look at the political and national project of erecting monuments in Europe and the post-World-War-II discussions of dismantling monuments which reflect a past of oppressive regimes (Bal, 2001; Erll, 2011; Huyssen, 1995; Radstone and Schwarz, 2010; Winter, 1995). The literature provides an understanding of the culture of European memorialisation that was also embedded in the colonies, as I discuss in relation to

⁴⁹ The *Société des Sciences et des Arts de l'Isle de France* (Society of Sciences and Arts of the 'Island of France') was created from a European model of scientific society, aimed at developing science, agriculture and trade in the colony. Queen Victoria, the monarch at the head of the British Empire, granted the authorisation to use the word 'Royal' in 1847, when the island became an English colony. The Société was renamed *Royal Society of Arts and Sciences* or *Société Royale des Sciences et des Arts*, an appellation used in both the French and English language until today (Forest, 2011, p. 810).

Mauritius.

In the context of questioning of European memorial culture in postcolonial geographies, particularly in the Indian Ocean region, the #RhodesMustFall movement is a prominent landmark in the history of dismantling colonial monuments. #RhodesMustFall was a students' protest movement that started on 9 March 2015 at the University of Cape Town where students demanded the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a British colonialist who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. It is in this sense that a critical engagement with the colonial landscape of Mauritius is necessary. Unlike the monument of Cecil Rhodes which has been removed a month later after the protest, the statue of d'Epinay is still standing next to the colonial museum of Natural History without any change to the colonial narrative.

Drawing from the field of critical geography, I discuss postcolonial geographies and architecture as '[i]mperial formations [...] defined by racialised relations of allocations and appropriations. Unlike empires, they are processes of becoming, not fixed things' (Stoler, 2013, p. 8). In this sense, colonial architecture and monuments on the island, when promoted as positive landmarks, mask and render invisible their history of violence. As discussed in the final section, violence is not always recognisable and, although never free from power, is not always intended to coerce or dominate (Springer, 2016, p. 1). In this sense, the mapping of this contemporary postcolonial space is articulated here as embedded in 'slow violence'. I draw from Nixon who argues that we need 'to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales (2011, p. 2). Colonial buildings/monuments, sanitised by the 'postcolonial bourgeois' (Bhabha, 2012, p. 72) or the metropolitan intellectual (Ngũgĩ, 1986) as relics of colonialism, emit a structural violence, that is typically not viewed as violence.

I claim here that the high visibility of colonial geographies acts as a sustained inducement of colonial anaesthesia which desensitises the space of its past of colonial occupation. The normalisation of settler cartographies and postcolonial architecture is pervasive of a slow violence which acts metaphorically as a syringe or anaesthetic gas, inducing its inhabitants into a state of anaesthesia and silent acceptance. In this sense, the monumental landscapes of the postcolonial city are symbolic sites of colonial power and are markers of a non-critical engagement with a past of violence. Fanon was articulate about the 'peaceful violence' (p. 81) embedded in postcolonial spaces, embedded in colonial symbols, landscapes and architecture which reflects a complicit

agreement between the ‘peaceful violence that the [present] world is steeped in’ (Fanon 1963, p. 81) and the actual violence reproduced by the apparatus of the state. They contribute to the legitimising of a settler history which is inscribed in the violence of the appropriation of the space. I argue that his monument is like an ominous spectre of colonisation whose presence still hovers over the streets of the city.

Colonial architectures of the past include both monuments commemorating the founding enslavers, such as the statue of Adrien D’Epinay, and institutional buildings such as the Mauritian Natural History Museum. This is discussed in greater details in the next chapter in relation to the nationalised colonial archive that it houses and the ‘myth of origin’ of the colonial founders of knowledge.

Conclusion

The secondary literature on the limitations of the Indian Ocean model in relation to the Mascarene islands, elaborated in the previous chapter, was useful for Chapter Two to propose a decolonial historiography of the Mauritius islands. It positioned the Indian Ocean within the wider history of the ‘post-1492’ European colonisation of the Americas and the Caribbean islands. This chapter also summarised three hundred years of exploitative labour under Dutch, French and English colonisation (1638-1968), such as slavery, indenture and migrant labour from Madagascar, Africa and South/South-East Asia.

This chapter further contributed towards the deconstruction of the linear settler narrative that Europeans ‘migrated’ and ‘civilised’ a wild island into a plantation economy. A critical method of analysing postcolonial geographies through a ‘pedestrian’ gaze and thorough observation of the spatiality of the city provided evidence that history and geography is linked. I discussed the reproduction of colonial symbols and narratives in the present cartography of the postcolonial city.

The question asked in this research was contextualised and the Truth and Justice Commission’s use of a trauma discourse was problematised. Furthermore, in section 2.2, I create an analogy with the word ‘anaesthesia’, which I draw from the medical terminology as the act of injecting (I stress on the act of injecting) anaesthetic fluid to ease and numb the pain, and the numbing effect that coloniality impose on the former colonised, who consequently cannot sense the violence of colonial structures of power and knowledge. I argue that a pathological discourse of cultural amnesia does not consider the violence that remains in the colonial present. ‘Colonial anaesthesia’

referred to the process of being induced into a paralysing state of anaesthesia, constraining people into normalising the violence of colonisation. It proposed, instead, the notion of an ‘induced amnesia’ or colonial anaesthesia which is projected by the uncritical preservation of colonial architecture and monuments and the nationalisation of colonial institutions. The metaphor of colonial anaesthesia is used to show that the non-critical engagement with postcolonial spaces contribute to the erasure of history in comparison with the pathological process of cultural amnesia.

Chapter 3: The Necro-aesthetics World of the Dodo

Introduction

Chapter Three focuses on the Natural History Museum to demonstrate how an institution of knowledge can also contribute to the ‘organised forgetting’ (Connerton, 1989, p. 14) of colonial history. This chapter discusses how the history of extinction is presented by the museum and focuses in particular on the dodo as a signifier of colonialism (extinction) and coloniality (the bird iconised as the symbol of extinction by the national Natural History Museum). The thematic of the dodo is further relevant in the next chapter which looks at representations of the bird in the visual culture of the island.

I draw from the decolonial option to first situate the museum by contextualising the emergence of natural history museums in Europe and their replicas in the colonies. Reiterating the relevance of space and architecture of postcolonial geographies in inducing forgetfulness, this chapter locates the museum within the colonial cartography of the city. I use the term ‘toponomology’ – which I borrow from Derrida (1996) – to refer to the authority (nomology) prescribed by the physical domicile (topography) of the building which houses a colonial archive. Furthermore, this diagnosis of coloniality is contrasted with what I describe as the anarchive of decolonial narratives produced by contemporary artists such as Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry. Also argued in this chapter is that museums in Mauritius reproduce a settler historiography and a ‘myth of origin’ of colonial founders.

I employ visual ethnography and discursive analysis to, then, examine the interior ‘exhibitionary complex’ (Bennett, 1995) of the Natural History Museum nationalised by the state after Independence, as a commentary of the national reproduction of colonial symbols and narratives, in relation to the coloniality-modernity matrix highlighted in the scholarship on decoloniality. I develop the term ‘necro-aesthetics’, the politics of aestheticising dead objects such as the taxidermy and skeletal display of the dodo, to make a topographical analysis of the display of the museum. The representations of the extinct bird, used as a cultural signifier of coloniality in this chapter, is further used to discuss decoloniality of aesthetics in Chapter Four.

This short chapter explains how a colonial aesthetics and epistemology become a dominant paradigm through the institutions of knowledge that are nationalised in the postcolony.

3.1 Colonial Archive: The Toponomology of the Natural History Museum

The Blue Penny Museum is located on privatised land in the area of the port [which] was, once, the dockyard and the terminus of the train station, where sugar was loaded on ships, for export. The only traces, of the history of the dockyard, are the stones of the old colonial buildings [which] could have bore witness to a Creole memory (as the majority of dockers, due to the ‘ethnicisation’ of work, under colonial rule, were mainly Creoles), and the harshness of their labour. This was, nevertheless, not preserved on the museum site. The history of the dockers is [also] not told, despite the actual museum being built in the old general quarters of the dockyard (Boudet and Peghini, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Boudet and Peghini (2008) analysed coloniality from the narratives of the Blue Penny Museum – a private museum funded by the Mauritius Commercial Bank (a financial institution set up from compensation received by ex-slave owners after the abolition of slavery).⁵⁰ The museum focuses on the development of the capital city of Port Louis under the French Governor Mahé de La Bourdonnais and displays objects, statues, documents and maps of the colonial era. The authors refer to ‘organised forgetting’ of the memorial aspect of the dockers’ site, on which the museum was built.

Furthermore, Boudet and Peghini (2008) demonstrate that the Blue Penny Museum portrays a colonial history within a narrative of progress and a ‘mythical-history’ of French settlers as founders and architects of a civilising mission on the island (p. 6). The erasure of the physical materiality of the dockers’ site of work is a slow violence to memorialisation in the same way that the narrative of progress and the ‘myth of origin’ (Boudet and Peghini, 2008) reproduced by the institution of knowledge produces a colonial anaesthesia. This chapter demonstrates how the same dialectical narrative is consistently repeated across colonial museums, nationalised after Independence (Forest, 2011), namely the National History Museum and the Natural History Museum.

In Europe, Natural history museums were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth century at a formative point in the development of the natural and human sciences (Foucault, 1969) after the colonial ‘discovery’ of what was considered the ‘New world’. They belong to an era of scientific and colonial ambition stretching from the Renaissance through the early twentieth century with its climactic moment in the second half of the nineteenth century (Bal, 2001, p. 121). In line with the juxtaposition

⁵⁰ The Mauritius Commercial Bank opened its doors on the 1 September 1838 to cater for traders based in Port Louis and the London trading houses with offices in Mauritius. The main company was Blyth Brothers which played an important role in the payment of the compensation money to enslavers. For example, the planter/slave owner, Paul Froberville received financial compensation of £9,020 in 1837 for 282 slaves. There were other planters and slave masters, such as Hunter, Chapman, Arbuthnot, who contributed to the initial share capital (TJC, vol. 1, p. 66).

the ‘modernity/coloniality matrix’, discussed by decolonial scholars (Escobar, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Bhambra, 2007; 2014), which locates the origins of European modernity in the project of European colonialism, the natural history museums in Europe were emblematic of the colonial enterprise of collecting ‘curious objects while promoting itself as an institution of knowledge, reflective of the project of modernity. Collecting as an activity in natural history museum was carried through the European enterprise of amassing curious objects, as denoted by the term ‘cabinet of curiosities’ – rooted in Renaissance Europe as encyclopaedic collections of objects that were yet to be defined. The recent use of the terminology defined collections by early practitioners of science in Europe in the seventeenth-century and were precursors to museums. The first (in)famous cabinet of curiosities from the natural sciences was a collection of plant specimens and objects, by the John Tradescants (father and son), English gardeners (Keepers of his Majesty's Gardens) and plants collectors in the seventeenth century. The Tradescant collection was acquired by the Oxford University Museum, one of the earliest natural history museums in Europe, in 1863 as a ‘curious collection of “rarities”’ (British Archaeology at the Ashmolean Museum, 2018).

Among the Tradescant Collection were the remains of an extinct dodo believed to come from a bird probably brought alive to England in the seventeenth century (Hume et al., 2011; Hume and Nowak-Kemp, 2016). The Oxford University Museum, which brands itself with the image of the bird, like the Mauritius Museums Council, promotes its ownership of ‘the only surviving dodo soft tissue remains in the world’ as well as two paintings of the dodo, a copy of George Edwards’ 1758 depiction and one by a Flemish artist Jan Savery, dated 1651 (Oxford University Museum, undated). These paintings, as discussed below, have iconised the fat representation of the extinct bird.

Natural history museums were transferred from the metropolitan to the colony and represent a colonial project binding the production and administration of ethnographic knowledge (Bennett, 1995; Pratt 1992; Fabian, 1983). Museums have also been duplicated as sites of instruction and historical consciousness (Bal, 2001; Bennett, 1995; Foucault, 1980; Mignolo, 2007). Historical consciousness, as Bhambra (2007) explains, was the foundational ideas behind the concept of modernity during the Renaissance.

There is a wide scholarship on the historical context of ownership and display of cultural objects in museums (Bal, 2001; Bennett, 1995; Foucault, 1980; Kilomba, 2010), acquired with a ‘economy of predation’ (Vergès, 2014, p. 26) and displayed with a ‘reductive ethnology’ (p. 29). Such institutions have been described as material signifiers of a self-proclaimed power to acquire, archive, document, maintain, care,

interpret, promote and disseminate knowledge about objects deemed valuable for scientific experiments, for historical preservation or for media sensationalism (Foucault, 1980; Bal, 2001; Bennett, 1995). On the other hand, the museum is an institution which highlights the difference of non-European traditions (Mignolo, 2007, p. 46).

The Natural History Museum on mainland Mauritius was the first museum built in the region between 1880 and 1884. It is the archetype of Natural History Museums developed outside Europe in the nineteenth century. This occurred upon the request of the naturalists attached to The Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in 1829 and their network in the European metropolis to focus on Natural History, Ornithology, Zoology, Biology and Botany, and the development of a sugar cane plantation economy. At an epistemological level, the Natural History Museum established a colonial memorial framework in the colony (Forest, 2011, vol. 4, p. 803-810). As discussed in Chapter Two, scientific institutions in the colony, such as the Société d'Histoire Naturelle set up in 1826, established a ‘legal framework expressing the intention to include heritage in the General Policy of the Colonial Government’ (p. 818) for the preservation of buildings and monuments.

The elite inscribed itself on a social project that claimed its intellectual and political predominance by codifying references to the past supported by the authorities. This led to the creation of an institutional memory prevailing over the rest of the population.... The alliance of power can be attested in the memorial process that report privileged the Western symbols present in the recent past of the country (pp. 814-815).

Forest’s critical work is pertinent as it reveals how a Western epistemology was introduced in the colony promoting scientific research as a project of modernity (Bhambra, 2007; Mignolo, 2007).

George Cuvier, credited for defining extinction as a form of revolution after elaborating on catastrophism (natural catastrophes causing mass extinctions) as a mechanism of extinction (Kolbert, 2014), was appointed the first patron of the Société and used his contact to establish a correspondence between the Natural History Society of Mauritius and the Royal Society of London (Rivière, 2006).⁵¹ The transformation of scientific ideas – which was propelled as part of European modernity and which feed

⁵¹ There was a widening interest in the idea that extinction could be caused by the human species, after the publications of *The Animal Kingdom* in 1817 by George Cuvier and *The Voyage of the Beagle* in 1839 by Charles Darwin. Both work became controversial for putting to the test the dominant European/Christian paradigm that promoted the Genesis creation narrative. According to creationists, God could not bring an end to its own creations, the human and non-human species on the planet. Cuvier dismissed theories of evolution predating Darwin (as well as doubted the existence of the dodo before 1830).

into the coloniality-modernity matrix highlighted in decolonial scholarship (Bhambra, 2007; Escobar 2007; Mignolo, 2009) – was also transposed over the colonies. Museums are repositories of colonial epistemologies of othering which are reproduced across the metropolitan cities and postcolonial world (Mignolo, 2009). The example of the colonial museum and the objects on display, in this research, is used as a signifier of residual colonisation on the island, representing a larger power structure that is sustained by the post-independence coloniality of power which retain the expansion of colonial dominance at systemic and epistemic level.

The edifice of the museum in the English colony of Mauritius was raised in the centre of the capital city, which was ‘meant to be lived in by whites’ (Alpers and Schnepel, 2018, p. 217). It stands between the crossroads of two main streets which connect the house of the colonial government constructed by the French East India Company to the Police Headquarters and prison set up under the English administration. The Natural History Museum is a one-storey building designed in an Italianate style of architecture that was popular in England in the nineteenth century and was replicated in the colonies. Its monumentality and architectural structure (Figures 3.1), in comparison with the other buildings of the city, reflects the colonial project of using architecture as an operational tool of display of European modernity. This building is a partial copy of the Colombo Museum in Sri Lanka, also built around the same time under British rule.

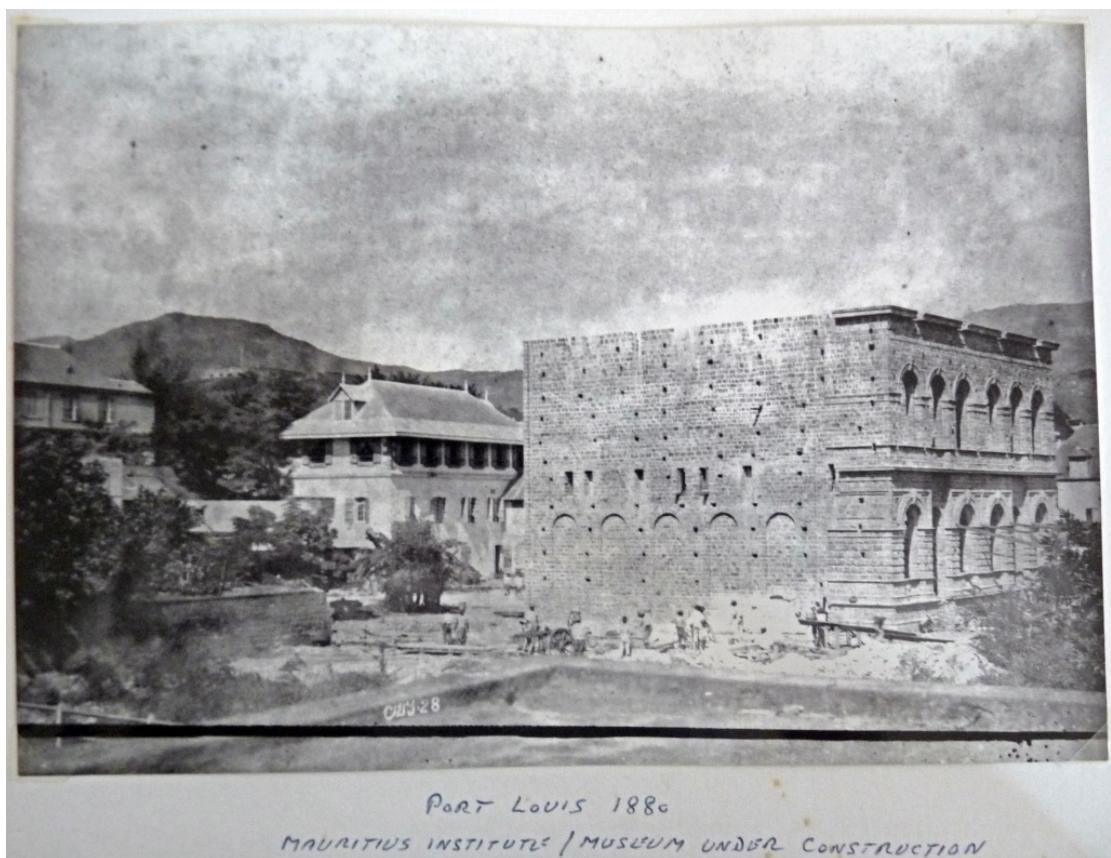


Figure 3.1 Building of the Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 1880 [Picture from website], mymoris. <https://mymoris.mu/histoire-port-louis-1900/>. Accessed 11 May 2017.

Architectural history is significant because of the centrality of buildings to human experience (Stoler, 2013; Weizman, 2014). Forest, in her archival research about ‘still standing’ colonial museums on the island, reminds us that ‘the choice of the building where a museum is set up is never meaningless’ (2011, p. 824). Representations of the past are presented in a meaningful location which stands as a reference for a nation or a group (p. 824). For example, the ‘Mauritius Institute’ was created in 1880 – four years before a colonial Sugar Exhibition was organised – and was a ‘project conveying the ambitions of the Scientists, the cultural elite and the Colonial Authorities to gather in one location all the expressions of “knowledge” as per European standards, with a view to sharing this knowledge’ (Forest, 2011, p. 820).

The Natural History Museum as well as the National History Museum (a French colonial house built in 1772, converted into a naval museum in the 1950s and rebranded as a national history museum) were declared national museums under the Mauritius Museums Council Bill in 2000. The Mauritius Museums Council does not position the museums as colonial museums and advertises itself as the patron of ‘the systematic collection, study and recording of the fauna and flora of Mauritius and the Mascarene Islands, and over the years developed into a centre of documentation and exchange in the various fields of natural history of the Mascarenes region’ (Mauritius Museums Council, 2018). I argue, here, that the nationalisation of colonial museums legitimised a colonial memorial framework of the past, through the reproduction of a colonial historiography and the non-critical engagement with postcolonial geographies, architecture and museum objects which glorify colonial history.

The hypervisibility of the physical location of culture set up in a grid-like cartography of the colonial city is discussed here through what Jacques Derrida (1996) calls the ‘toponomatology’ of the archive. This refers to the authority and place of truth (nomology) prescribed by the physical domicile (topography) of the institutional building which holds the archive. Derrida places the archive at the intersection of the topological and the nomological (1996, p. 9). I draw from his reading of the archive to discuss how archived objects are housed by the museum and are inscribed meaning from its containment within the topography of the residence of knowledge, revealing the violence embedded by the colonial cartography and architecture. According to Derrida (1996), the ontological principle – the first natural or historical principle – defines the

event that will be historicised and archived for memorial practices.⁵² Reading the topography of the colonial building through Derrida's lens reveals the attribution of a physical location to the archive that imposes itself as the residence of knowledge. The topological is here the place, the domicile or the attribution of a physical location for the establishment of a colonial archive which can, therefore, affirm itself as an authoritative entity. According to Derrida, the archives would not hold power without substrate or domicile.

In this sense, it is the setting up of this building which marks the institutional safeguard of colonial knowledge. It is in this sense that Foucault reiterates the relationship between the production of institutional knowledge and the imposition of its power through the establishment of its rules, laws and authority over other forms of knowledge. The imposed monumentality of institutional buildings and, here, the museum itinerary of the Mauritian Natural History Museum tie the visitor to 'the museum as expository agent' (Bal, 2001, p. 122) of knowledge production.

The second section will look at the politics of display of the colonial archive. The colonial edifice of the Mauritian Natural History Museum houses the museum on the ground floor and a library on the first and has four small permanent galleries, which contain numerous 'cabinets of curiosities', displaying taxidermist specimen of animals as well as preserved plants. The museum holds a collection of objects and documents which represents a colonial archive related to the natural world put together during the French and English colonial era in the Indian Ocean region. The ethnographic collections of the Natural History Museum consist of taxidermy of birds in the first hall and species of fish and shells in the second gallery dedicated to the underwater world. The third hall is focused on geology and meteorology, showcasing an eclectic collection of fossils, insects, butterflies, different types of wood and an outsized plastic snail model among others. Part of the politics of display of natural history museums is to present the 'monstrous' wonders of the natural world. The dodo, as discussed in the second section, inhabits the museum space as a spectacle of monstrosity in the seventeenth century. Figure 3.2 is an example of a fossil of a 70-kilogramme giant clam which is on display in a glass cabinet in the first hall of the museum.

⁵² In *Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression* (1996), the archive, for Derrida, is Sigmund Freud's house in London converted into a museum. The word archive is derived from the Latin word *archeion*, which means the house magistrate, but also comes from the Greek word *arkhe* which has two meanings: commencement and commandment. For Derrida, the *arkheion*, was 'initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded'. He argues that it is the status of the museum which moves the private archive into an institutional one.



Figure 3.2 Giant clam, Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016. Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.

The last room, the ‘World of the Dodo’ gallery, which is the highlight of the museum was designed as a contemporary exhibition dedicated to the famed dodo. The visual ethnography of the museum reveals the same grid-like arrangement of space that was discussed in the Chapter Two on the cartography of the city. Similar to the ordering of the colonial city, museum practices have been articulated as ‘humane’ colonial governance (Foucault, 1980) developing processes of collecting, ordering, governing and producing dominant epistemologies, as opposed to the initial cabinet of curiosities, which were initially collections of eclectic objects that lacked classification in sixteenth-century Europe. Museums are also ‘cultural technologies which achieve their effectiveness through the articulated combination of the representations, routines and regulations of which they are comprised’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 10). They form the colonial archives of the museum and have also been instrumental in shaping modern/colonial subjectivities by re-enforcing classification and categorisation of knowledge. Stoler reminds us that

What constitutes the archive, what form it takes, and what systems of classification and epistemology signal at specific times are (and reflect) critical features of colonial politics and state power (p. 87).

Stoler informs us that the archives are not ‘inert sites of storage and conservation’ (Stoler, 2002, p. 90) but ‘cultural agents of “fact” production, of taxonomies in the making, and of state authority’ (p. 87). They can no longer be solely ‘archives as source’ (p. 87). The singularity of museums’ narratives found in informational texts superimposed on display cases, vitrines or individual objects denote the activities and

impacts of museum praxis: museums display and classify as well as imagine, fetishise and mythologise under strategies of protection and conservation and pedagogical purposes (Bal, 2001; Bennett, 1995; Foucault, 1980; Mignolo, 2007; Vergès, 2014). The relationship between fact production and museum geography (the topography and taxonomy of collecting, imperial assemblages, curatorial display and organisation) highlights the function of colonial institutions as spaces of knowledge which operates in service of the colonial project.

The politics of museums' display also reveal how artistic production and space are important elements of the exhibition complex. Displays in the ethnographic museum achieve their purpose 'between the visual and the verbal, between information and persuasion, as it "produces" the walking learner' (Bal, 2001, p. 123). Bal explains in reference to the American Museum of Natural History that

[the] displays hover between an attempt to represent reality as natural through an aesthetics of realism and the attempt to demonstrate the wonders of nature through an aesthetics of exoticism (Bal, 2001, p. 126).

Bal explains that the interior spaces of museums embody a 'circular epistemology [...] which makes] effective use of the possibilities of visual and verbal channels of information [...] imposing a particular, semiotically loaded order' into the exhibition (p. 136). Bal explains that

[t]he use of expository discourse is foregrounded in ... storytelling as well as history writing – and through space – taxonomy as well as geography (p. 136).

The visitor's experience of the museum space is designed from a pre-determined taxonomy of information.

The museum and the archives it holds anaesthetise the space of colonial violence and eventually provoke forgetfulness/amnesia, it also assumes its presence of authority in the production of knowledge and perceptions, as reiterated by Forest (2011). The museum as the repository of a colonial archive incites, according to Derrida, 'forgetfulness, amnesia, [and] the annihilation of memory' (1996, p. 14). It reduces *mnēnē* (passive presence of memories) or *anamnēsis* (the effort to recall, the act of recollection, or the returning to an earlier experience) to *hypomnēma* which is merely a 'mnemonic supplement' (p. 14). The ethnographic drive of the museum to archive, store, label, restore, preserve and frame for eternity, as objects of display will never be *mnēnē* or *anamnēsis* 'as spontaneous, alive and internal experience' (p. 14).

This confirms the argument in this thesis that amnesia is a necessary strategy of

erasure by institutions of power to incite a forgetfulness of the economic agreement between settlers and the former colonised that consolidated a post-independence comprador bourgeoisie, as explained in Chapter Two. Forest reveals that at the time of Independence ‘memory problematics’ was not the concern of the politic party in power (TJC, 2011, vol. 4, p. 835). In the present case, instead of provoking recollection of a past of colonial violence, nationalising monumental leftovers anaesthetise the remembrance of the violence of the history of colonisation. This thesis argues that colonial buildings embody architectural and epistemological violence and their sustenance as national heritage sites – without a decolonial reflection – induces a state of colonial anaesthesia.

3.2 Epistemological Seduction and Topographies of Death

One of the most visited exhibits of the Natural History Museum in Mauritius is a complete dodo skeleton, the only one in the world consisting of bones assembled from just one bird.⁵³ It is found in the ‘World of the Dodo’ Gallery which has been recently renovated in 2009 with the support of several Dutch institutions such as the Tropical Museum of Amsterdam and Naturalis and the Natural History Museum of Netherlands.⁵⁴ This occurred under the aegis of the Mauritius Museums Council and was funded by one private organisation in Mauritius and by the Mauritian Dutch Embassy. The Dodo Gallery is a relatively small room. Two of its four walls have a series of tall arched windows facing the exterior and has thin screens to filter the bright tropical sunlight. It contains paintings of the dodo, bones and skeletons of the bird and video documentaries on the archaeological excavations in Mare aux Songes (a swamp with sedimentary deposit and preserved dodo bones located close to the sea in the south-east of Mauritius).

Three skeletons of the dodo, enclosed in individual glass boxes, stand on a low exhibition display furniture, placed in the centre of the room (Figure 3.3). The renovated Dodo Gallery also has a new island window display – a display furniture that

⁵³ The Thiroux Dodo skeleton contains the smallest bones, such as the kneecaps, that are usually lost when an animal disintegrates. See BirdWatching, “Laser scans of complete Dodo skeleton.”

⁵⁴ The other Dutch institutions, involved in the renovation, were the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, Universiteit Van Amsterdam, the Zoölogisch Museum Amsterdam, The Geological Survey of the Netherlands and the National Museum of Natural History Naturalis, Leiden (from a panel in the Natural History Museum).

stands on its own (Figure 3.4) – placed in front of the windows of one wall. The design of the display draws emphasis on an enlarged print of the first illustration, drawn from a Dutch expedition journal in the early seventeenth century, of a live dodo in its pre-colonial habitat (Figure 3.5)



Figure 3.3 Skeletons of the dodo. Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016. Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.



Figure 3.4 Museum Exhibits, Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016. Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.



Figure 3.5 Close-up on museum exhibit, Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016.
Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.

This island display is placed opposite the exhibitionary glass cases containing the skeletons. This arrangement leaves enough walking space for the museum visitor to be immersed in an experience of the gallery named ‘the World of the Dodo’ (Figure 3.6).

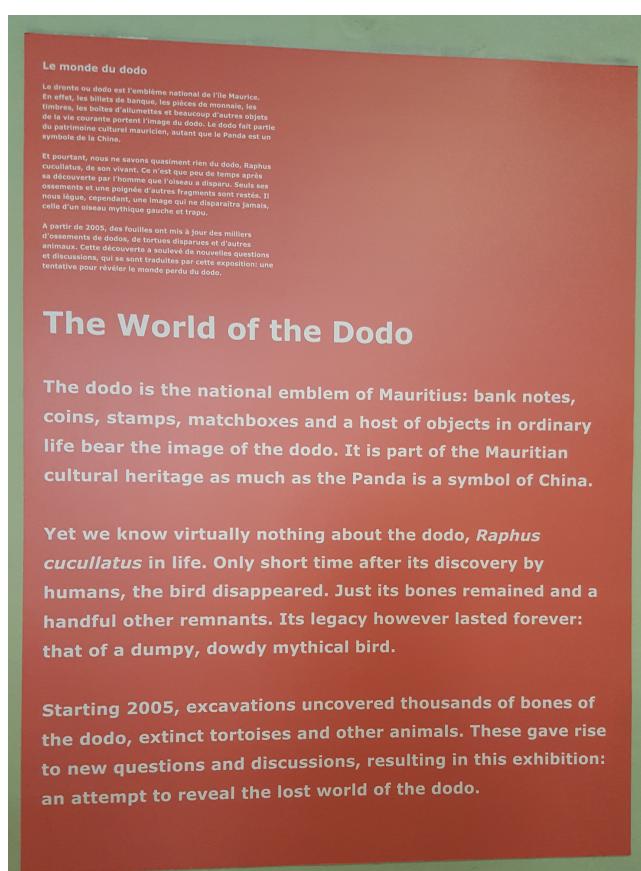


Figure 3.6 The World of the Dodo [Exhibition panel], Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016. Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.

Cultural theorist, Mieke Bal calls a ‘circular epistemology’ (Bal, 2001, p. 126) or the ‘epistemological seduction’ (p. 126) of the exhibition space. This strategic arrangement ‘seduces’ the visitor into a guided (and controlled) pathway around, in the case here, the museological world of the dodo. The island window display encloses an enlarged print of an illustration (copper engraving) from the 1598 expedition journal *Het Tweede Boeck (Made in the Netherlands)*, dated 1601 (Hume, 2006).⁵⁵ The engraving (Figure 4.3) illustrates the activities of Dutch colonists, such as ship-building/repairing or stocking up on food. A live dodo (numbered 2 in Figure 4.3) and two endemic giant tortoises (numbered 1) are seen across the landscape of the island. Both species were brought to extinction.

The display of the exhibition is framed around the illustration of the live bird and, therefore, promotes a form of sensational pedagogy of the modern museum which focuses on displaying genealogies of representations to contextualise the fame of the bird, rather than on scientific displays and historical enquiry (Murray, 1904, in Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). The text on the left side of the illustration which reads: ‘the Dutch were the first to give detailed descriptions of the island’ obscures – obscurity being part of the tension and paradox of museums’ narratives (Bal, 2001, p. 126) – the fact that the Dutch were also the first to bring ecological devastation, in the form of extinction of animals and plants unique to the uninhabited island, despite the presence of Malays, Arab, African, Indian, Chinese and Astronesian travellers and explorers in the region for the last five thousand years.

For forty years, from 1598 to 1638, sixteen Dutch ships landed on the island which was a port of call for ships and a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company. The dodo was hunted and salted for the ships’ travel to Asia as well as captured live to be transported to India and (possibly) Europe. By the time a first Dutch settlement was established, from 1638 to 1658 to exploit the island of its ebony forest and ship back the dark wood to the Netherlands, the bird’s habitat had been destroyed by the introduction of ship rats and other animals such as cats, pigs and goats (Hume, 2006, p. 66). It is assumed that the last authentic mention of a dodo on mainland Mauritius was in 1640 and on offshore islets 1662 (Cheke, 2004, p. 7-22). This is the story of the extinction of

⁵⁵ The copper engraving was attributed to John Theodore and John Isreal De Bry and a print was used in the journal of Cornelis Jacob Van Neck, who actually never visited the island (Hume, 2006). He sailed with 8 fleets from Amsterdam on his second expedition to Indonesia to bring back spices (Masselman, 1963). Three of his ships landed on the island because of bad weather. This island was named ‘Mauritius’ after Van Neck’s return to Amsterdam in 1599.

the dodo and other species within forty years of European exploitation colonisation of the region. Cheke (2013) lists forty-nine birds made extinct on the Mascarene Islands from 1640-1880. Other extinct species are bats and small-bodied reptiles. The extinction of a large number of species during European colonialism, since the fifteenth century, has been attributed to active overexploitation through unrestrained hunting, habitat destruction and introduction of exotic species.

Furthermore, the opening text of the World of the Dodo Gallery sets the tone for the series of narratives deployed with the distant gaze of the institutional strategist planner (De Certeau, 1988):

The dodo is the national emblem of Mauritius: bank notes, coins, stamps, matchboxes and a host of objects in ordinary life bear the image of the dodo. It is part of the Mauritian cultural heritage as much as the Panda is a symbol of China.

Yet we know virtually nothing about the dodo, *Raphus cucullatus* in life. Only short time after its discovery by humans, the bird disappeared. Just its bones remained and a handful other remnants. Its legacy however lasted forever: that of a dumpy, dowdy mythical bird.

The last three sentences, short and unapologetic, summarise the life of the bird from its encounter with humans to its representations after its demise. The narrative reflects a human-oriented historicity in which the animal is silenced to an object which is ‘discovered’ and then ‘disappeared’. Discovery, I argue here, implies that the bird became relevant after it was ‘discovered as valuable’ by humans.

This period referred to and represented as the Age of ‘discovery’ within a European historiography (Bhambra, 2007) has been deconstructed in both postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. However, this research demonstrates that this narrative is still reproduced by institutions of knowledge such as private and national museums. As discussed in the first section the narrative that colonisation was a progressive project which established ‘modernity’ on the island, maintained by colonial institutions which have furthermore been nationalised after Independence, is problematic as, in the case here the destruction of the habitat of animal and plant species has been described as ‘ecocide’ (Broswimmer, 2001; Gómez-Barris, 2017). The term ecocide has been used to describe the unintended accelerated consequences of human progress, on a global scale, associated with the rise of modernity – namely the capitalist mode of production and the emergence of the modern nation-state (Broswimmer, 2001). It also describes specific modes of extensive destruction of ecosystems of a territory such as extractive capitalism – the extraction of natural resources for capitalist ends (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 141). I

argue that the colonisation of the Indian Ocean islands in the seventeenth century represents an ecocide in the sense that the islands were depleted of their natural resources causing the destructions of ecosystems and the extinction of plant and animal species. The proclamation of having ‘disappeared’ moves the focus away from the history of Dutch exploitation colonisation in the Indian Ocean. As explained in Chapter Two, the terms ‘exploitation colonisation’ refers the exploitation of animals, plants and human beings for the wealth of the metropolitan. The non-critical engagement at national level reveals coloniality in the present.

Furthermore, the content development and display design of the ‘World of the Dodo’ gallery was coordinated by members of Dodo Alive, a foundation ‘that aims to stimulate research and outreach on the world of the dodo and the reasons of its demise’.⁵⁶ The arrangement of display and narrative demonstrate ‘the kind of epistemological usage visual storytelling allows’ (p. 136) which seduces the visitor into the colonial reconstruction of ‘World of the Dodo’, the title representing a Dysneyfication of the destroyed world of the bird and hence a sanitised version of colonial history. Furthermore, a panel in the museum stipulates:

The dodo was doomed. It is not known for certain if the Portuguese released pigs or rats on the island, but the Dutch certainly did... Unfamiliar with predators – at least in the beginning – the dodo was an easy catch for the hungry sailors. Extinction was inevitable.

The discourse around ‘The dodo was doomed’ and ‘Extinction was inevitable’ portrays the fatality of extinction of the ‘flightless’ bird and neglects to reveal the impact of a history of exploitation colonization in the region. It is important to note that the naming of the ‘flightless dodo’ follows the logic of a Darwinian theory of evolution: that the dodo, a prime example of natural selection, evolved from a pigeon into a ‘flightless’ bird and was, therefore ‘doomed’ to an inevitable extinction. Part of proposing a decolonial historiography of the island is the reconstruction of the paradigm of knowledge that inform natural history museums.

The bird became known as ‘flightless’ – denoting a lack – from taxonomic

⁵⁶ Dodo Alive is chaired by a Dutch researcher, Dr Kenneth F. Rijsdijk. The content development was coordinated by two board members, Marijke Besselink and Paul Boomers, a Naturalis colleague in cooperation with the Universiteit Van Amsterdam, the Zoölogisch Museum Amsterdam and The Geological Survey of the Netherlands and with the aid and data of the Dodo Research Programme, a research initiative by members of Dodo Alive raised after the discovery of a mass grave of dodos and other extinct animals in Mauritius. Further support was provided by Omnicane, a Mauritian sugar cane company and the Mauritius Museums Council and the initiative was funded by the Dutch Embassy. see [dodo-research.org http://dodo-research.org/?page_id=130](http://dodo-research.org/?page_id=130)

definitions in the Natural Sciences: *Didus ineptus* for example portrays the bird with a lack (cannot fly or is not competent). The development of modern taxonomy – the branch of science concerned with classification of organisms is attributed to Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century. Linnaeus defined the dodo as *Struthio Cucullatus* – Genus *Struthio* from *Struthionidae* (flightless bird), *Cucullatus* meaning hooded – in 1758 and *Didus Ineptus* – Genus *Dididoe (Dodo)* and *ineptus* meaning inept or incompetent – in 1766. The name ‘dodo’ was described as ‘Walghvogel’ in the 1598 Dutch expedition journal (Hume, 2006). Walghe means ‘tasteless’, ‘insipid’, ‘sickly’, ‘disgusting’ and ‘vogel’ means bird. The word ‘dodo’ could come from the Dutch words ‘dodoor/dodaars/dodoers’ (meaning ‘sluggard’, ‘cluster of feathers’, ‘fat-arse’, ‘knot-arse’ or ‘bundle of feathers’) used in 1602. The word ‘dodar’ and ‘dodo’ was introduced into the English language in the 1620s, traced back to the Portuguese word ‘dodou’ meaning ‘simpleton’ or ‘foolish’. Furthermore, enunciations imposed on the bird by European scientists, artists and ‘explorers’ have been popularised in expressions such as ‘as dead as the dodo’ or ‘as stupid as the dodo’, because the dodo did not flee from its predators, and because it ‘became’ (rather than ‘having been made’) extinct. Contemporary depictions (film, books, common expressions) show the bird as preposterous (silly, cute, funny, goofy, stupid, absurd, exotic) and fictitious. Cheke pinpoints the dodo’s iconisation to popular publications and books as early as 1807 – a few portraying the bird as clumsy, fat, ugly, disgusting, bloated, vicious, gross, following the taxonomic classification of the animal as *Didus ineptus*, to the life-size reconstruction of a dodo displayed in 1851 at the Great Exhibition in London (visited by six million people) and the characterisation of the dodo in the novel, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), by Charles Dodgson (better known by Lewis Carroll) who was a frequent visitor of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (Cheke and Turvey, 2008, pp. 156-158).

I draw from the work of Jamaican philosopher, Sylvia Wynter (across this article) who posits that the practice of representation follows governing codes that divide the natural sciences and the humanities (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 146). In this sense, Wynter’s reflection on coloniality in the Caribbean islands is relevant to the study of the Indian Ocean islands. I apply this line of thinking to the scientific representation of the bird as ‘flightless’. Followers of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, based on the survival of the fittest (hence collapse of the weakest), condemn the dodo to an unfit ‘flightless’ bird ‘doomed’ to an inevitable extinction, reproduced in the natural sciences. The next chapter demonstrates that this narrative is reproduced in

the visual arts as well as is deconstructed by Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry.

Moreover, the aesthetic display of dead animals (or more precisely in the case of the dodo, ‘made extinct’) is built, I argue, within a necropolitical regime of representation and aestheticisation of death, which I discuss as a form of necro-aesthetics. The term ‘necroaesthetics’ was used in a curatorial art project which looks at the display of birds in natural history museums (Springer and Turpin, 2016). It is defined as the aesthetics of the dead and relates to ethnographic presentations of taxidermy specimens and skeletons of animals in museum collections (Haraway, 1989), as well as to the politics of the institution to ‘cultivate’ nature by turning a dead animal into a natural history specimen (Kolbert, 2014; Tavares, 2013).⁵⁷

In this sense, the museum is a repository of ethnographic praxis from which collected objects usually represent a past or a dying culture (Haraway, 1989): from dodo memorabilia – such as matchboxes or stamps with the dodo on – to the skeletons of the bird in the context of the Mauritian Natural History Museum. It houses ethnographic collections of dead animals encased and framed according to a museum aesthetic and epistemology. In this context, it is read as a deathscape of objects where urban beautification, modernity and death are interrelated.

the accumulation of objects destined to celebrate the wealth of a nation belonged to an economy of predation, looting defeated peoples or exploiting the riches of others. It belonged to an economy of consumption that invested the object with narcissistic meaning. (Vergès, 2014, p. 26)

Achille Mbembe’s exploration of necropower and necropolitics reveals the politics of lawfully imposing death, where the right to kill and who is to be killed are decisions which a sovereign entity gives itself the power to make (2003). The topographies of cruelty (the plantation and the colony) which Mbembe refers to as deathworlds (p. 40), representing the taking of life of others as well as the taking of one’s life (suicide), inform his conceptualisation of necropolitics. A more literal reading of the word *necro*, following the Greek word *nekros* which means ‘corpse’ (the dead body), is used here in the context of this research. Natural history museums extrapolate on the politics of display of (already) dead beings – corpses.

While streetwalker theorising the city with the methodology of the visual

⁵⁷ Springer and Turpin (2016) briefly mentioned the dodo as coming from Madagascar and being alive in the sixteenth century. They misquoted Grove (1996) on the location of the dodo bird and the era when it was brought to extinction. The dodo was exterminated in Mauritius in the seventeenth century. This mistake further confirms the fame of the bird outside its geographical and historic context of colonisation in the Indian Ocean region.

anthropologist at home allowed me to map out the cartography in relation to the pedestrian and the ‘body-to-body engagement’ (Lugones, 2003, p. 207), connection and interaction of people, the experience of the spatiality and ‘circular epistemology’ (Bal, 2001, p. 126) of the exhibition room was one restrained to a space without human contact. What Mieke Bal calls the ‘epistemological seduction’ (p. 126) of the museum (1988) has been conceived from the position of the strategist who, for Lugones (2003), is a representative of an institution of power and operates the space within the distant frame of Western/scientific/colonial rationality. On the other hand, the tactical strategist interacts in a pedestrian line of vision, at ‘street-level, among embodied subjects, with ill-defined ‘edges’, that the tactical strategist lives without myopia, without epistemological/political short-sightedness (p. 207).

In this sense, the necropolitical strategies of museum display and arrangement of interior spaces are projected with abstraction and distance, what Bal describes as the top down view which is ‘in the visual discourse of Western culture – a mastering colonizing gaze’ (2009, p. 19). They also promote the distant point of view of the strategist planner (Lugones, 2003) who ‘masters places through sight, transforming “foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured”’ (De Certeau, 1988, p. 36). In the case of the natural sciences, the ‘foreign forces’ behind the act of dying, or having been killed, or killed purposefully – for the sake of collection (butterflies for instance) – are neutralised in the aestheticisation of the dead specimens through inanimate taxidermy or the display of skeletons as collectibles.

The aesthetic display of dead animals (or more precisely in the case of the dodo, ‘made extinct’) is built on the aestheticisation of death. The display of skeletons is read here as a necro-aesthetic installation, replacing the ‘aesthetics’ of being alive (movement, growth, decay) with the inertia of a skeletal presentation or ‘inanimate taxidermy’ (Haraway, 1989) found in museums. Similar to taxidermist arrangements of animals, Donna Haraway, author of the seminal text *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1984), reminds us that

The animal is frozen in a moment of supreme life ... This is a spiritual vision made possible only by their death and literal representation. Only then could the essence of life be present (Haraway, 1989, p. 30).

It reiterates the work of Foucault on the museum which he describes as a space in which time is frozen and knowledge of the time is sustained in the present and preserved for the future. Museums, according to Foucault, are heterochronies, which are ‘indefinitely accumulating time’ (p. 7) and ‘establishing a sort of general archive

[...with] the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that it itself outside time, the project of organizing in its way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place' (p. 7). Haraway, on her side, is referring to inanimate taxidermy practices which fulfil 'the fatal desire to represent, to be whole' (p. 30).

This experience of viewing death has been called 'vivispective' as it emphasises ways 'in which the observer can be trained by the necro-aesthetic procession of natural history collections to see as alive what is evidently, even at times emphatically, dead' (Springer and Turpin, 2016). In this sense, the museum narratives are read as a form of necropolitical aesthetics which promotes the visuality of death presented in the sensationalisation of dead bodies. Here, the death of the animals is represented in the taxidermist specimen as well as the skeleton of the bird as museum display. In contrast, the narration overlooks the causality of death with white innocence.

The display of objects in the Natural History Museum operates within a framework of freezing the animal in a moment of supreme life (Haraway, 1989, p. 30) that portrays death worth of contemplation. Furthermore, they do produce a 'slow violence' of cultivating Nature into museum artefacts. As discussed further in Chapter Five, the violence is made in/visible and not/visceral (Sharpe, 2016, p. 21) while the hypervisibility of the object of extinction from a point of view of preservation (Bal, 2001, p. 126) is projected through the politics of care embedded in the conservation programmes of the museum.

Furthermore, the Natural History Museum has a collection of paintings of the live birds (Figure 4.5) which are framed in 'imperialist nostalgia' – I use the term proposed by the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo who describes imperialist nostalgia as revolving around a paradox (1989, p. 108).

A person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, somebody deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention. At one more point, people destroy their environment, and then they worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of 'innocent yearning' both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination (p. 108).

For Rosaldo, imperialist nostalgia engages with feelings of loss yet neutralises any sense of responsibility for and any confrontation with the destruction. Imperialist nostalgia looks at 'the process of yearning for what one has destroyed as a form of mystification' (p. 109) and also provokes 'a pathological homesickness' (p. 108), an

almost reverence towards Nature as sacred and a worship for what civilisation has destroyed (p. 109).

In this sense, the notion of imperialist nostalgia pinpoints the production of a distant point of view by institutions in their strategies of memorialisation. Rosaldo's notion of 'mourning', in '[a] person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim' (p. 108), is devoid of Christina Sharpe's hauntological mourning which presupposes that the spectres of the 'undead' make themselves present (2016, p. 13). I discuss hauntological mourning further in the next chapter. In the case of imperialist nostalgia, mourning is the memorialisation through representations of the 'already dead'. Imperialist nostalgia also informs "idealized fantasies" [that are] designed to gloss over violence and brutality' (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 110). A 'gloss over violence and brutality' describes the eclectic collection of contemporary illustrations of the bird which is depicted alive. Figure 3.7 shows a display of works framed in one of the arched windows of the museum. According to Bal, the strategy of speculating over realist representations in museums 'is the truth-speak that obliterated the human hand that wrote it, and specifically Western human vision that informed it' (2001, p. 131). In this sense, this chapter demonstrates how colonial institutions of knowledge instil a memorial framework and an epistemology (the normalisation of the exhibition of dead objects) in the colony.

This epistemology and aesthetics have been questioned and challenged in the natural sciences as well in the last decades. While the first illustrations of the bird by Dutch sailors who visited the island as well as several versions before 1626 were athletic and thinner (Figures 3.5 and 3.8), contemporary depictions were endorsed by nineteenth-century paintings and reproduced in the colonies. They represented the dodo as puffy, fat and heavy-looking. Natural scientists argue that these representations were most probably drawings of mummified birds in bad state of decomposition or of birds brought to Europe in captivity and fed the wrong diet (Hume, 2006). Nineteenth-century paintings, treasured by natural history museums, have been the source of most mainstream reproductions afterwards. For example, the Natural History Museum of Mauritius prides itself of owning a copy of Roelandt Savery's (the Flemish artist Jan Savery's uncle) representation of the dodo (Figure 3.9) as fat and heavy.

This version of the bird has also contributed to the construction of imaginaries supported by a deterministic theory of evolution which describes 'island gigantism' as an evolutionary phenomenon. This theory purports that animals, which evolved in a predator-free and insular space for millions of years, increases dramatically. However,

the latest laser scan and bone histology (Bourdon, Gold and Norell, 2016; Live Science, 2014; Hume, 2017) confirms that the dodo was much thinner than what the Oxford University Museum and nineteenth/twentieth-century natural sciences endorsed.



Figure 3.7 Representations of the dodo, Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016.
Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.

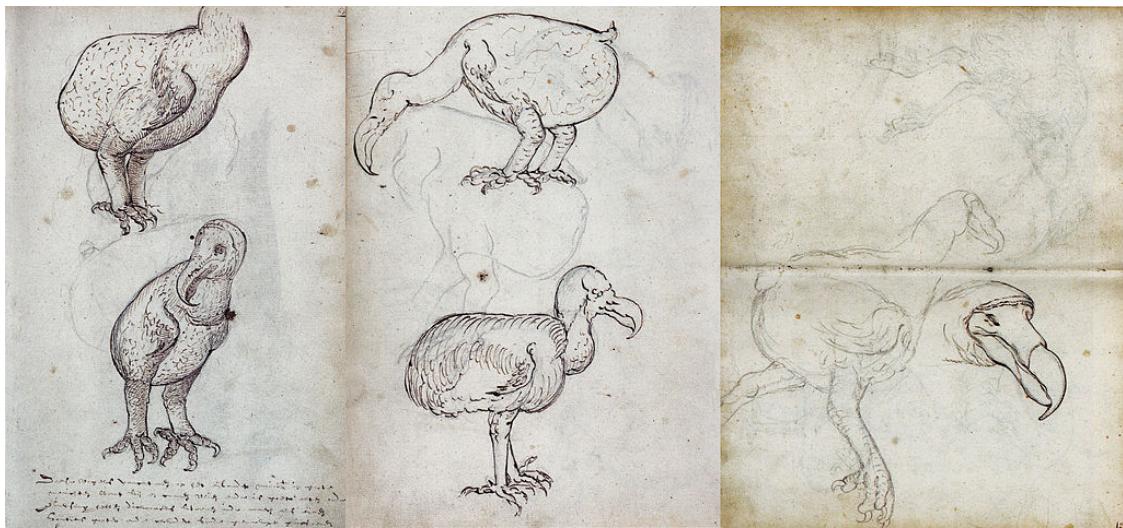


Figure 3.8 Compilation of the *Gelderland* sketches from 1601 of live dodos [Picture from website], Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dodo>. Accessed 21 August 2018.



Figure 3.9 Reproduction of Roelant Savery's version of the dodo, Natural History Museum, Port Louis, 2016. Photograph courtesy Natalia Bremner.

What this research shows is that the colonial imaginaries are reproduced and promoted by the state. The act of appropriating and vulgarising colonial representations promotes a fetishistic memorialisation, where the icon of extinction becomes an object of obsessive reverence and a fixation. This can be seen across natural history museums in the UK which pride themselves of owning unique remains and skeletons of the bird.

... the Thirioux skeleton in the Mauritius Institute [represents] the only known complete dodo skeleton, and the only one consisting of bones from just one bird. The second Thirioux specimen, now housed in the Durban Natural Science Museum, is nearly complete but may have been put together from the remains of more than one bird (British Natural History Museum, 2016).

The dodos were a curiosity, and some were brought to Europe by wealthy collectors. One of these birds was exhibited in John Tradescant's London museum. His collections were later left for Elias Ashmole and so came to Oxford, where now only

the mummified head and foot remain. Although minimal, these specimens represent the most complete remains of a single dodo, and are of great value to scientists today (Oxford University Museum of Natural History, para. 1).

While the website of the British Natural History Museum promotes the unique specimen of the Natural History Museum in Mauritius, the Oxford University Museum – which brands itself with the image of the bird, like the Mauritius Museums Council – prides itself about owning a mummified head and foot of the bird as well as a painting of the dodo by a Flemish artist Jan Savery, dated 1651. These objects have since become an important asset of the institution.

Both postcolonial and decolonial scholarship denounce the hostile strategies deployed behind the politics of the artefacts' acquisition which are not historicised in the institutional narrative. In the case here, the violence behind acts of appropriation is neutralised by the formulation of glorifying narratives (by iconising Ashmole as the benefactor of the Oxford University Museum, for instance) camouflaged by the hypervisibility and fetishistic memorialisation of museum branding and publicity. In the case of Mauritius, this narrative is also reflected in the myth of foundation and the white-washing of the violence of colonisation perpetuated by colonial museums nationalised after Independence. This consequently promotes a colonial memorial framework and a fetishistic memorialisation of the bird which becomes rooted in the visual culture of the island. I also argue that by preserving a necropolitical discourse, the Natural History Museum in Mauritius paradoxically glorifies the island as the last home of the Dodo, instead of its only legitimate home.

In 1902, the bird was used in the design of the coat of arms (see Figure 1.2), sixty-three years before Independence (Jackson, 2001), by a white South African member of the Free Masonry – a male-dominated fraternity that has its roots in the Scottish 'Grand Lodge' (Allan, 2004) shared by the colonial elites on the island. In the classical European tradition consisting of shield, supporters, crest, and motto, the coat of arms pictures a rampant Dodo and a deer as supporters, two sugarcane stems representing sugar plantations, a lymphad for exploration, three Palm trees for the three 'dependency islands', a key and a star, symbolical objects in the cult of the Free Masonry representing, here, the strategic position of the island in the Indian Ocean.

It was approved by the colonial government which consisted of French settlers and English administrators, both members of the Grand Lodge of Mauritius in 1905. The colonial coat of arms was not redesigned after Independence; national coats of arms are usually designed, together with a flag or an emblem or seal, to represent a sovereign

state and a new government (Stephen, 1987). These symbols are used for official use – passports or banknotes, for example. While a new flag was designed and a new anthem written for Independence, the dodo bird from the coat of arms remained the national emblem. When the status of Mauritius was changed to that of ‘Republic’ on the 12th March 1992, the *Trochetia Boutoniana* (commonly known as ‘Boucle d’Oreille’) was declared the National Flower, alongside the dodo as national symbol.

Representations of the bird are, furthermore, used strategically in the media for branding purposes and tourism (see figure 1.1 in the Introductory Chapter). The dodo has also become a household term, encountered in literature, art and in everyday practices (rhymes, jokes, folklore, storytelling), as an animal of endearment, a symbol of belonging and national identity. Many artists represent the dodo in their works, following the museum’s depiction as discussed in this chapter. I build from those representations to show that the nationalisation of colonial symbols contribute to the narrative that European men founded and developed the island. Firoz Ghanty, whose work I analyse in the next section, pushes the reflection further: ‘To recognise oneself in a bird which was exterminated must be the ultimate negation of oneself’ (2010). Ironically, the museum acquired Ghanty’s work on the dodo in 2012, in which he denounces the coloniality of representations in the narratives of national institutions. By transiting through the exterior open garden of the Natural History Museum in Mauritius, the visitor encounters two randomly placed life-sized sculptures of the bird, one of which is Ghanty’s (Figure 3.10). The next section will engage with the enunciations of the extinct bird outside its necro-aesthetic representations.



Figure 3.10 The Mauritius Institute, Port Louis, 2012 [Picture from website], alamy. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-mauritius-port-louis-the-mauritius-institute-75779841.html>. Accessed 11 February 2017.

Conclusion

A decolonial historiography in the context of Mauritius entail not only knowing the history of slavery and indenture but understanding that European colonialism consisted on exploitation colonisation of land where animals were made extinct. In this sense, it was necessary to examine the representations of the icon of extinction, the dodo, to pinpoint coloniality and to contribute to the decolonisation of the history of Dodoland/Mauritius.

This chapter diagnoses coloniality in the national Natural History Museum by discussing the colonial archive that it houses and the colonial memorial framework that it reproduces. In this sense, it is presented as enacting a form of ‘organised forgetting’ or inducing a colonial anaesthesia whereby the history of colonisation is erased and neutralised of its violence under the strategies of museum preservation. This chapter also discusses the relevance of location and the imposing architecture of the museum in anaesthetising the postcolonial space, demonstrating that a non-critical engagement with the national reproduction of a settler historiography is problematic and contributes to the amnesia of Mauritians who, according to the Truth and Justice Commission, know very little about their history.

A discursive analysis of the necroaesthetics of the ethnographic display of the museum further challenged the glorifying narrative of the myth of origin and civilisation of colonial founders. This chapter demonstrated that aestheticising dead objects (taxidermist and skeletal specimen) is not only a form of imperialist nostalgia for what has been destroyed during colonisation but a strategic move to erase the violence of colonial history by aestheticising the object of the already dead. In the next chapter, the contemporary art works on the dodo will reveal how the artists Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry problematise those narratives.

Their works are presented as anarchival – against the colonial archive – and allow this research to move to the propositional and offer an alternative historiography.

Chapter 4. The Anarchive

Introduction

The last two chapters of this research propose to look at art and music to build world-views that challenge coloniality in relation to how the history of colonisation is remembered by institutions of knowledge. After diagnosing colonial anaesthesia in the way representations of the dodo in the museum inform a slow violence on remembrance of colonial history, this chapter presents the works of two artists, Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry to draw a comparison between the necro-aesthetics politics of the museum, discussed in the previous chapter, and the decolonial aesthetics of the two artists. I also use the terminology ‘anarchive’ to discuss contemporary art in Mauritius that questions and challenges official history. As I explained in Chapter One, the term was derived from the work of the art historian, Hal Foster, who mentions that the ‘anarchival impulse’ could explain the archival impulse of artists to question the official archive.

While Ghanty challenges representations and narratives reproduced by other artists on the island with the intention to anarchise (bring anarchy to) the colonial archive, Hurry de-historicises the archive (Ernst, 2016) as he untaps the archives and brings visibility to un-historicised events (the cause of extinction and the history of colonisation). According to Foster, archival artists extract historical information often displaced or misinterpreted, and bring forward a different anarchival visibility (2004).

This research aims at proposing a methodology to analyse works of art (and music in Chapter Five) that produce alternate modes of thinking and historicising. In this sense, Walter Mignolo’s decoloniality of aesthetics provided the tools to look at how artists produce work outside the global establishment and network of art and aesthetics set up from the dominant Euro-American markets. Although Ghanty and Hurry participate regularly to international exhibitions and biennale, for this research I focus on the specific works that were produced to challenge and question institutional memory, what has been analysed as a colonial memorial framework established by European institutions in the colony and reproduced by the state after Independence.

In this sense the dodo is the main object of analysis in this chapter so that a comparative analysis can be made between how the Natural History presents the history of colonisation/extinction and how artists disrupt the narratives.

4.1 Contextualising the Visual Arts

This section contextualises the visual art scene in the colony of Mauritius and discusses the paradigm shift that occurred around Independence. In the 1880s, a *Comité des Beaux Arts* (Committee for the Fine Arts), under the umbrella of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences, was set up to organise artistic exhibitions ‘to encourage the development and improvement of Talent among artists and of taste in the community at large [and] to present works of art in line with European aestheticism and corresponding to the liking of the elite’ (Forest, 2011, vol. 4, p. 810). The reports of the Royal Society of the Arts (July 1848) indicate that three hundred and fifty works of art were exhibited: oil paintings from the European Masters and from local artists as well as watercolours, daguerreotypes, engravings, busts and medals.⁵⁸ The paintings of foreign artists represented fifty-nine percent of the artistic exhibition, as opposed to seventeen percent of paintings of ‘*Créoles ou artistes résidents*’ (Creole or artist-residents) and twenty-four percent by amateurs (Forest, 2011, vol. 4, p. 810). Forest argues that the presentation of works from classical European artists showed the intention of promoting the ideal aestheticism (naturalistic realism in portraiture, linear perspective, chiaroscuro, for example) of the Renaissance period. The ambition was to emulate them by training novice artists, in the colony, in the tradition of European art academies. These artistic references appealed to an eclectic rising middle class of French settlers, English administrators and people of mixed race in the colony (defined as ‘Creoles’, at the time). As such, the ‘literati’ supported the classical arts of Europe, which became references in the colony (pp. 810-811).

In 1881, an art showcase was organised by the Société as part of the ‘Inter-Colonial Exhibition’ taking place at the colonial Government House in the capital city of Port Louis.⁵⁹ As the initiatives required important investment, the collection of artworks promoted by the Société was incorporated into exhibitions dedicated to Science which regrouped industrial products and natural resources of Mauritius. The RSA reports note that the exhibition presented rare objects, objects of curiosities which were specific to the island as well as paintings from Réunion and Mauritius (p. 811) and coincided with the emergence of a new elite among people of mixed race, who were then recognised as

⁵⁸ The European artists were Albert Cuyp, Jordaens, Paul Véronèse, Brueghel de Velours, Frans Hals, Canaletto or Jacques-Louis David

⁵⁹ The building of the Government House was built during the eighteenth century and was later named ‘Hôtel du Gouvernement’ ('Government House').

a ‘local’ bourgeoisie. Forest remarks that the Société promoted the respective culture of the colony through the presentation of works of art that promoted European culture. ‘In this context, their action was in line with a colonial strategy aimed at transposing the Metropolis hegemony in the Colony’ (p. 811).

Following on Forest’s research, I analyse the illustrations made by a French draughtsman, naturalist and artist named Jacques-Gerard Milbert, who was one of the founders of the Société. His work is commonly used in cultural institutions (such as the museums) for representing the vestiges of the past. Milbert was destined to be part of a colonial expedition to Australia as an artist responsible of producing the voyage’s scientific drawings (Greppi, 2005). Due to illness or disagreement with the captain, Milbert left the journey during a stop in Mauritius in 1800.

He went on to produce detailed observations of the island before returning to France and publishing them in 1812 in *Voyage pittoresque à l'Ile-de-France, au cap de Bonne-Espérance et à l'île de Ténériffe* (*Panoramic voyages to Mauritius, Cape colony, South Africa and Tenerife, Canary Island*). His illustrations (Figure 4.1, for example), from the published monograph, represent typical depictions of landscapes as produced by nineteenth-century European scientists, artists and writers: botanical drawings, maps, travel texts, diagrams, paintings and photographs from the colonies which treated Nature as picturesque and sublime.

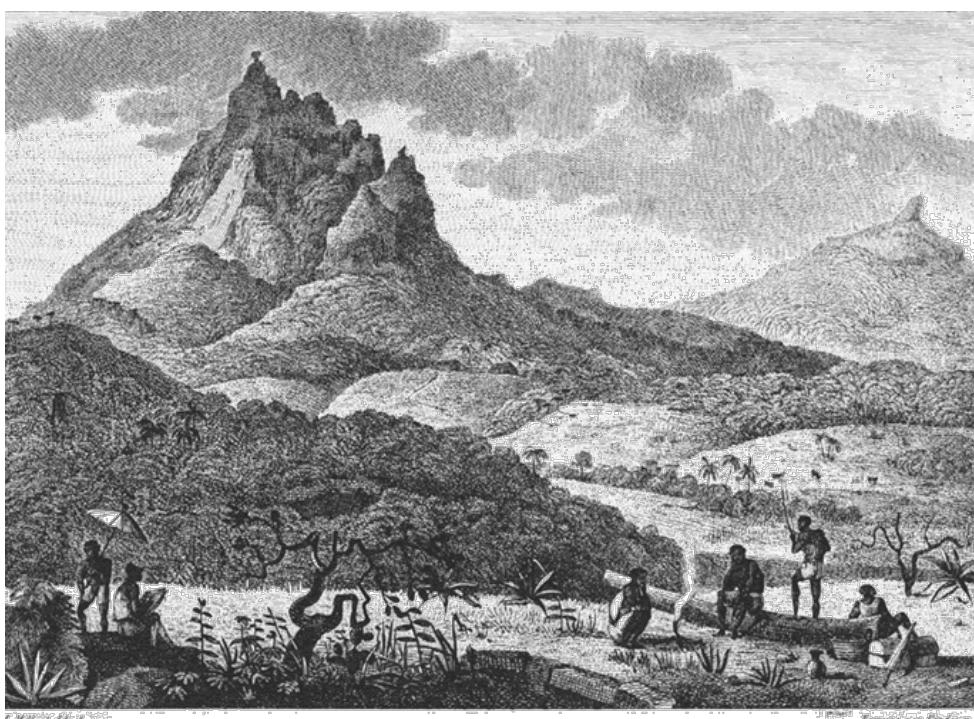


Figure 4.1 Jacques-Gerard Milbert (undated), View of Pieter Bot mountain [Etching]. In: *Voyage pittoresque à l'Ile-de-France, au cap de Bonne-Espérance et à l'île de Ténériffe*, France 1812.

As explained in postcolonial theory since Edward Said's seminal text, *Orientalism* (1978), the notion of an 'other' was created from the literary, poetic, artistic, philosophical works of Europeans who travelled to the colonies and created colonial imageries (Hill, 2013; Pratt, 1992; Said, 1978). Travel and drawings produced by 'imperial eyes' (Pratt, 1992) denote a Eurocentric view of the world 'that domesticates the site of the other and figures it into economies of imperial consumption' (Hill, 2003, p. 3). In the case of island colonies, the work of naturalists like Milbert reproduced an island imagery, based on a settler epistemology and aesthetics which feed into the 'green imperialism' (Grove, 1996) of the time. Grove defined green imperialism as the initiative of European naturalists/conservationists to protect/save what remained of the environment they have exploited (p. 3).

Taking Lugones' strategist position of a bird eye view (panoramic and picturesque) of the landscape, I argue that paintings of the colonies by European naturalists represent a strategical abstraction from the concrete engagement with the people on the streets. In Milbert's illustration, huts, animals and carts, as well as enslaved people, are all portrayed as 'objects' of identical importance, in a simulacrum of order and harmony with Nature. Within a decolonial perspective, the landscapes portray what McKittrick articulates as 'geographic nonexistence' (2006, p. 132) of slaves, where their bodies are made invisible and their humanness Othered and reduced to insignificant objects of study or aesthetic reproduction. The panoramic landscapes represent colonial geographic imaginaries (Kothari and Wilkinson, 2010) that intervene 'in the physical and social space of former colonies and [...] continue to be mobilised in postcolonial contexts' (p. 1396). The 'pervasiveness of these imaginaries in representing specific spaces and peoples as well as the role of colonial discourses in language, literature, the arts and film' (p. 1395) reproduces.

a geographic imaginary [which] refers, literally, to how spaces are 'imagined', how meaning is ascribed to physical spaces (such that they are perceived, represented and interpreted in particular ways), how knowledge about these places is produced, and how these representations make various courses of action possible [...] Representations of these places are thus constructed by discourses that help us conceive of them in particular ways (p. 1397).

The relationship between the colonial matrix of power and the construction of settler imaginaries is 'constitutive' (Hall, 1996, p. 443) of dominant paradigms of aesthetics and knowledge. This reiterates the direct connection between what Stuart Hall calls 'scenarios of representation' (p. 444) which do not simply describe the world but

inscribe and prescribe meanings (Pratt, 1992 in Hill, 2013) where machineries of power which do not operate outside of cultural conditions.

Milbert's naturalist drawings of the colony acted as a stylistic and thematic template for European and Franco-Mauritian artists and are displayed today across different educational institutions, such as museums, without a contextual explanation about the colonial epistemology that underpins its aesthetics. A few books, published from the 1980s (Decotter, 1986, 1989, 1991; Pitot, 1988), regroup collections of artists' works and systematically reveal the prominence of landscape in art as a colonial imaginary. One of the prefaces (Pitot, 1988) summarises the works of the artists as reflecting a nostalgia of colonial times, what has been articulated in the literature on postcolonial representations as 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo, 1989), which describes 'idealised fantasies' designed to gloss over violence and brutality' (p. 109). The preface reads:

Let us try therefore to imagine the impressions the first Europeans must have had when they saw Mauritius – a magnificent island covered with trees and flowers, the small mountains to scale with the size of the country, the bays and coves easily accessible to their ships, rivulets of clear fresh water, birds, of all colour and size, white sandy beaches, transparent lagoons – a glimpse of Paradise as suggested by Mark Twain (p. 7).

Imperialist nostalgia describes an emotion which invokes an attempt 'to establish one's innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed' (p. 108).

The truncated quotation from Mark Twain, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter, is used as a reference to reinforce the narrative of a paradise island. The European destruction of the habitat of endemic plants and species behind the making of a paradise for human habitation remains absent from the narrative. This imaginary is reproduced throughout the island, as can be revealed below, in the branding of 'local' products or in aerial photographic panoramas or sceneries at mountain viewpoints.

Figure 4.2 is a still from a promotional video produced in 2013 as part of the island's branding strategies for tourism. It represents a top view of Le Morne, which is also a symbolically mountain that was used as shelter by the enslaved people who escaped French plantations and slavery in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. I elaborate on the significance of this site in Chapter Five when I discuss the sega of the enslaved. Le Morne was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008.

The oral traditions associated with the maroons have made Le Morne a symbol of the slaves' fight for freedom, their suffering, and their sacrifice, all of which have relevance to the countries from which the slaves came – the African mainland, Madagascar, India, and South-east Asia. Indeed, Mauritius [...] also came to be known as the 'Maroon republic' because of the large number of escaped slaves who lived on Le Morne Mountain (UNESCO, 2008).



Figure 4.2 ‘Branding Mauritius’ 2013 [Still from promotional video], Online.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezwXcYYKyVI>. Accessed 19 April 2017.

Le Morne has become a protected site and a national heritage. It represents the history of a community of maroons who chose suicide over capture, at the sight of English officials who were on their way to announce the abolition of slavery in 1835, according to the colonial archives. Despite its inscription in the World Heritage List and a state commemoration in 2009 and 2011, the site was strategically aestheticised in the promotional video in 2013.⁶⁰ The video, endorsed by the state, presents the island with ‘myopia’, a term used by Lugones to explain a mechanism of distance, like someone ‘perched up high’ in a ‘disengaged position’ from the everyday realities and politics of the streets (2003, p. 207).

A strategist’s point of view of abstraction is therefore promoted from which ‘the distance of height “permit” a fictionalized seeing of a fictionalized city – “the concept-city” to appear real’ (p. 212-213). The strategist’s point of view is positioned above the street, so that the picture as a ‘whole’ can be abstracted from the concrete. Strategies are ‘devised by planners, managers, subjects of will and power from a strategic point of view that is positioned high above the street’ (p. 211), ‘characterised by the distance of height and abstraction’ (p. 212) and erasing the concreteness of body-to-body engagement at ground level. For cultural theorist Mieke Bal, whose work on the museum space is relevant in Chapter Three, the top down view is ‘usually – in the

⁶⁰ The Slave Route Monument, a sculpture in stone, was erected at the foot of the mountain and an annual public holiday on the 1st of February to commemorate the Abolition of Slavery was announced in 2011

visual discourse of Western culture – a mastering colonizing gaze' (2009, p. 19).

A decolonial perspective involves breaking away from the distance taken by nineteenth-century European naturalists, artists and scientists or twentieth-century anthropologists who saw the colonies as far away spaces. They observed, recorded and illustrated the colonies in scientific travelogues, which were later reproduced in research and literature from the metropolitan centres. Lugones's streetwalker theorising also stands in opposition to the literary flâneur or the 'drifting' artist who, despite their proximity to the streets, retained the abstraction of a top view approach and remained disengaged from those oppressed in the colonies.

The flâneur is often the male European writer or artist who had access to the colonies, like Charles Baudelaire – a French poet who is revered in the context of Francophone Mauritius. Similarly, the theory of the 'dérive', literally meaning 'drifting' was theorised by the Situationists International, a European intellectual movement that evolved from the art movement of the Dadaist and the Surrealists in the 1950s and 1960s and articulates a method of exploring the streets' margins to produce revolutionary art and poetry (Sadler, 1998, pp. 94-95). Drifting involved wandering around the city in a 'spontaneous' and unplanned mode for the sake of surveying the psycho-geographical articulations of the modern city (pp. 94-95).

The works of Ghanty and Hurry that I analyse in the following section embody the street-level line-of-vision of the tactical strategist (Lugones, 2003, p. 207). This is in opposition to the 'abstraction of height' used by the literary flâneur like Baudelaire or the artist 'dériveur' like Milbert who, despite their proximity to the streets, retained the abstraction of a top view approach and remained disengaged from those oppressed in the colonies. The tactical strategist also engages with the concreteness of the street in both its material physical properties and the concrete violence of postcolonial spatialities, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The flâneur was associated with the Parisian literary man-of-leisure in the nineteenth century and elaborated by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin in the twentieth century from his reading of Baudelaire and his experience of urban modernity in Europe.

Charles Baudelaire defended dandyism as the 'best element in human pride,' commanding the flâneur's attempt to 'combat and destroy triviality' in the struggle with a social conformism that threatened to install homogeneity everywhere that industrial capitalism had established its regime in the nineteenth century (Harootunian, 2002, p. vii)

A reputed poet in the metropolitan centres, Baudelaire was (and still is) acclaimed in the French colonies for his poems inspired by his brief encounter of the islands of the Indian Ocean, namely mainland Mauritius.⁶¹ What is less known is the fact that Baudelaire was sent by his father to Calcutta in 1841 – to be cured of his ‘melancholia’ – and thus transited through Mauritius and La Réunion island (Lionnet, 1998). Lionnet reveals that his ‘lack or precision regarding his destinations’ reveal his ‘strategies of representation’ (p. 65) and ‘strategies of avoidance’ (p. 65). For example, he never spoke about his exilic journey that was ‘dead-ended in exotic tropical islands’ (p. 65) for fear of ridicule.

Consequently, his work contributed to nineteenth-century exoticism (Miller, 1985), to imperial homogenising and misnaming (Spivak, 1986) and to lyric poetry in the era of high capitalism (Benjamin, 1983). Lionnet comments that

Islands do not bestow on the [European] traveller the same aura of acquired knowledge or esoteric wisdom; they are mythical, seem unreal, and tend to be seen as places of escape and rest, hideaways onto which an infinite number of desires can be projected (p. 65).

In the visual arts scene, nineteenth-century exoticism recurs in the form of subliminal imaginaries of the Other or self-Othering, are common thematics among Mauritian artists – idealised paintings of sugarcane workers and romanticised portraits of Indian or Creole women for example. Literary and artistic exoticism, in the form of presenting the culture of non-Europeans by Europeans to be consumed by Europeans, occurs across the colonised world, as theorised by Edward Said in the context of orientalism, and was initially theorised by European scholars such as Victor Segalen (2002) as a ‘positive’ movement from the age of Imperialism, representing an ‘aesthetic of diversity’ (Segalen, 2002). For Segalen, exoticism cannot be ‘about such things as the tropics of coconut trees, the colonies or Negro souls, nor about camels, ships, great waves, scents, spices, or enchanted islands. native uprisings … oriental thought, and various oddities’ (p. 46). It reflects, instead, a recognition of difference or the perception of ‘Diversity’ that the one representing converts into a process of self-reflection of his own difference and therefore embraces the culture it represents. ‘Exoticism’s power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise’ (p. 19).

The portrayal of otherness, as discussed in nineteenth-century art and literature,

⁶¹ Some of his Indian Ocean poems are ‘A une dame creole’, ‘La belle Dorothee’, ‘A une Malabaraise’ and ‘Le cygne’ (Lionnet, 1998, p. 65).

depict their subjects of representation with the strategical abstraction from the concrete engagement with the people on the streets, which I draw from Lugones (2003) and discussed in Chapter One. The strategist's point of view is 'characterised by the distance of height and abstraction' (p. 212) and erases the concreteness of body-to-body engagement at ground level. Drawing from two publications by Franco-Mauritians (Decotter, 1991; Pitot, 1998), I observe how this distance has been normalised as an aesthetic form. The Pitot collection of paintings depicts the different features of the island-colony – the port and city, vegetation and sugar factories as landmarks through the established canon of European modernism – particularly Realism, Impressionism, Postimpressionism, Fauvism or Cubism, Abstract art – which were imported into the colony and were widely used for landscape paintings. Observing and painting the everyday life of the Creole people, from ghettoised and marginalised spaces, was also a recurrent artists' activity, as can be revealed in the published collections of work on the capital city by Decotter (1991).

The artists in the collection produced works with the abstraction of distance and height, and do not engage with the racialised segregation of the space, the colonial hierarchy of the plantation structure and the labour of the colonised (fishermen, labourers and washerwomen, for example) which is furthermore idealised in many of the paintings as the stereotypical gregarious islander. In this sense, both collections promote representations of the island from the point of view of abstraction of the artist '*dériveur*' who deploys a strategist's abstraction. I make a deeper analysis of the two examples of contemporary art, Figure 4.3 and 4.4, which also highlight this argument.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 are both recent (2008 and 2017) invitation cards, by artists of European origins, designed to promote their exhibitions. While the artwork in Figure 4.3 plays with features of the plantation-colony – oxcart, Indian labourer, transport of sugarcane, sunny island, palm trees – as thematics, and presents an idealised imaginary of plantation societies, Figure 4.4 is the close-up photograph of a woman labourer in a sugarcane field holding an object devised by the artist, here a ball in papier maché.

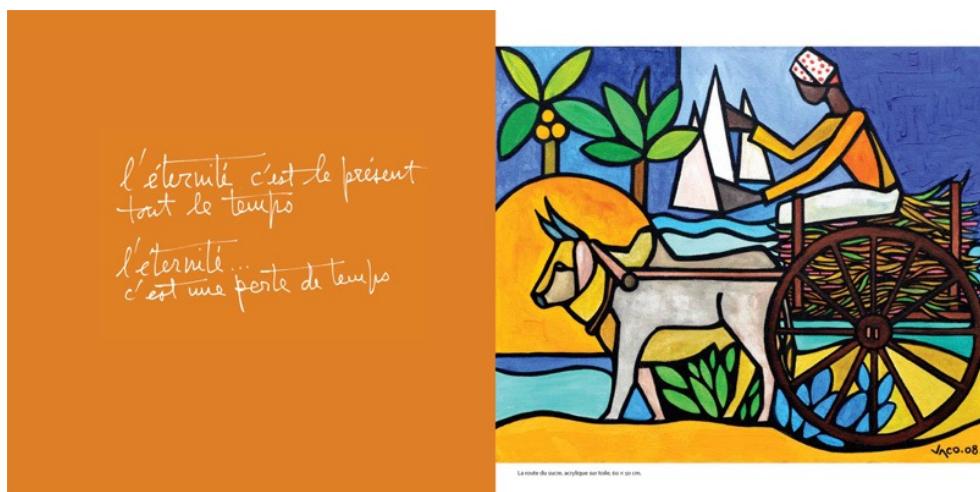


Figure 4.3 Vaco Baissac 2008 [Invitation e-card]. Email. Accessed 23 March 2008.

FEMMES DES PLANTATIONS PATRICK JELIN

Mars 2017

MAHATMA GANDHI INSTITUTE
Fine art section - Moka - Mauritius.



Figure 4.4 Patrick Chelin 2017
[Invitation e-card]. Email.
Accessed 13 February 2017.

They both depict the desires of the exots to develop what Segalen articulates as an ‘aesthetics of diversity’, deconstructed here as a settler aesthetics; the former colonised labourer still remains at the bottom of the plantation complex in the contemporary context of coloniality. Both artists exoticise the plantation worker who is depicted as objects of artistic inspiration, reproduce the colonial gaze of othering and present voiceless subject under the artist’s white authorship, similar to the erasure of the

islanders from colonial island imaginaries. The contemporary artists explored a settler aesthetics of the postcolonial geography outside the political engagement of Lugones' streetwalker theorist who create solidarities with the 'subjects' of study: the subject of contemplation in the case here. As with Milbert's sublime depiction of nature in the colony, the exoticised landscape in Figure 4.3 and 4.4 is given a similar prominence, relegating the portrait of the former colonised as complementary.

Furthermore, Figure 4.4 promotes an exhibition entitled *Femmes des plantations, ces Mauriciennes authentiques* (Women of the Plantation, those authentic Mauritian women). It was a collection of photographs of women labourers in the sugarcane fields who paused and posed, for the photographer-flâneur in quest of a Mauritian authenticity, while holding objects presented to them by the latter. I draw from Roshini Kempadoo who discusses photography and the racialised subject in her conceptualisation of a pictorial archive (2016). Kempadoo refers to scopophilia as the pleasure of looking and the desire to take photographs in order to create memorials and to sustain archives. In relation to the colonial archive, she draws from Frantz Fanon, Françoise Vergès and Homi Bhabha and refers to 'ways in which the scopic drive of the European *fixes* and objectifies the racialised Other' (2016, p. 107).

This 'profound psychic need' contributed to the colonial ... subject being perceived as other by the European, configured and maintained as a racialised subject (p. 106).

Photography, as a visualizing methodology, partially fulfills the (white) male psychic need to consign the black body. Within the colonial process, photography contributes to the operation of repeatedly representing the colonial subject as primitive, childlike, mentally deficient and sexually charged' (p. 107).

In the case of the depiction of labourers – in both Figures 4.3 and 4.4 – the labour of the colonial subject and the hierarchies of labour in the postcolony are made invisible and are reduced to flat ('stylistic' in the case of Baissac and 'shallow' for Chelin) portraits of workers.

Moreover, the terminology 'plantation' (Women of the Plantation, those authentic Mauritian women) is rarely employed in Mauritius. The terms 'estate, sugar mill, factory, establishment/institution' (Claveyrolas, 2016) are commonly used. The artist aestheticises the plantation (ex)colony and does not engage with the histories of racialised labour on the plantation and the 'plantation memories' (Kilomba, 2010) that embedded in the objectification of the Black body as everyday coloniality (p. 13). Kilomba, in *Plantation Memories* (2010), describes everyday racism as:

not only the restaging of a colonial past, but also as a traumatic reality, which has been neglected. It is a violent shock that suddenly places the Black subject in a colonial scene where, as in a plantation scenario, one is imprisoned as the subordinate and exotic ‘Other’ (p. 13).

This idealisation of the ‘fictive “native” other’ (Harootunian, 2002, p. xi) which becomes more prominent in the twentieth century in the context of Mauritius, are constructions of the ‘exots’, a term used by Segalen to define the settler who desires a ‘fetishistic reunion with the other’ (p. xi), revealing a ‘strategy of displacement [which] corresponds to exoticism’s penchant to repress the historicity that produced the colonial context which constituted the scene of exotic enactment’ (p. xi).

[E]xots failed to acknowledge an identity between a colonial present and the indeterminate time and place of the other which had become the sublime object of their desire... (p. xi)

Within a decolonial viewpoint, this construction of exoticism in the depiction of workers of African, Indian and mixed ancestry, painted in post-impressionist brushstrokes or graphic outlines, establishes an instrumental system of knowledge in the forms of metaphors and images used by Europeans to characterise, identify and organise their perceptions of the colonial periphery.

In the context of a settler aesthetics in the present, I argue that the aesthetisation of the settler’s gaze denotes ‘an epistemology of ignorance’ (Mills, 2007, p. 16) which refers to ‘a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made’ (p. 18). In the case here, an epistemology of ignorance refers to the settler societies who are in a state of denial of the racialised hierarchies of labour of the plantation society. The Mauritius islands’ economy was centred around a land-based colonial occupation and the European-controlled monoproduction of sugarcane for exportation (Alpers, 2014). The ‘plantation’ refers to an exploitative system of a racialised hierarchy of work and has been articulated as topographies of cruelty and ‘deathworlds’ (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40). People, enslaved and dislocated from the African and Asian continents as workers to the new world, were also organised by and around the plantation – housing, work, religion, dispensary, leisure (Claveyrolas, 2016). The plantation in contemporary Mauritius is, furthermore, not used as a ‘lieu de mémoire’ of enslaved and indentured labour (Claveyrolas, 2016, p.). Instead, historians have proposed the Aapravasi Ghat – a landing point of arrival for Indians under the indenture system – and Le Morne – a

rugged mountain used as shelter by those who escaped slavery and who also resorted to collective suicide to escape recapture – as national commemorative sites.

The settler's gaze reveals the avoidance of facing colonial history and discussing the plantation logic (McKittrick, 2013, p. 11) that inform the racialised demarcation of space in Mauritian society. Exoticism is also the process by which the coloniser's perspective is normalised and adopted by the colonised who self-exoticise its own culture and normalise settler aesthetics and epistemologies. The exhibition entitled *Femmes des plantations, ces Mauriciennes authentiques* was endorsed by an art historian (of Indian origin) at the School of Fine Arts, who justifies the exotic gaze:

It is not a stereotypical gaze in search of the superficially exotic. Conscious of the construction of his gaze, he still seeks to encounter the other, mainly Mauritian female labourers.

His critique of 'encountering' is problematic and reflects a settler aesthetics of distance. Most urgently, it reveals the endorsement of self-othering practices which erase the 'cartographies of struggles' and 'black women geographies', to use McKittrick's terms (2006) that inform the subject of the artist's artwork. The artist is furthermore given legitimate permission to 'drift' – drawing from the *dérvieur* metaphor – in a set-up where the 'encounter' is based on a power relation. This phenomenon also reveals that colonial imaginaries are normalised, reproduced and authorised by 'post'-colonial scholars and artists despite a paradigm shift which occurred in the arts around Independence. This aspect is contextualised in the next section.

The last sections look at the art practice of Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry who are amongst the post-independence artists to contribute to a paradigm shift in the visual art.⁶² This shift occurred in art patronage when the state institutionalised and democratised culture by setting up the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, a cultural institution sponsored by the Indian government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. The institutionalisation of the arts with the collaboration of India was seen as a form of

⁶² A break up in the group of Franco-Mauritians took place in the 1940s when Malcolm de Chazal and Hervé Masson, two artists of French descent, questioned the settler mentality of their peers and the mechanism of sugar plantation capitalism enforced in the colony. Both denounce the conservative settler bourgeoisie and ally themselves to a spirit of Independence, although they would both disagree with the Labour Party's policies of decolonisation afterwards. In their privileged position, they both produced a conversation around decolonisation and, as Firoz Ghanty (2016) points out, wrote 'Page 0' of the islands' cultural history. Despite being involved in Independence movements, Masson, who lives between Paris and Mauritius, remained a modernist artist within a European formalist tradition and explored figurative art. On the other side, De Chazal's writing was hailed by André Breton, the founder of the Surrealist movement in the 1920s for the writer's search of a poetics of universality (Pyndiah, 2019).

ethnic politics where the dominant ethnic group uses art to promote their political agenda.⁶³ However, a School of Mauritian, Asian and African Studies (initially named School of Mauritian Oriental and African Studies) was instituted in 1974 to promote the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups. A Department of Fine Arts (renamed the School of Fine Arts in 1997) was set up under the aegis of the institution and was led by the first visual artist of Indian origin, Moorthy Nagalingum after he returned from his studies in India in 1964.⁶⁴

Nagalingum trained in art and music at the Kala Bhavana (Institute of Fine Arts) of the Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, more commonly known as Santiniketan (1957-1961). He worked under the guidance of Ramkinker Baij, an Indian modernist artist and sculptor (Mukherji, 2006, p. 1), and later joined the Madras College of Art (1961-1963), where he developed a unique style of figurative abstract gouache painting.⁶⁵ A pioneer of what could be described a postcolonial aesthetics on the island, Nagalingum walked away from the tradition and formalism of European modernism that was superimposed in the colony. His initial works were landscapes in the impressionist tradition, but with much darker overtones and earthy colours. His later paintings, which became his signature style, explore the feminine form in monochromatic lines, forms, light shades and tones in watercolour (Figure 4.5) – a reminder of the aesthetics of some of the early modernist Indian artists, such as Nandalal Bose or Rabindranath Tagore.

Nagalingum's works do not subscribe to the settler aesthetics and have been misread by Mauritian art writers – who draw on the modernist tradition attributed to the American art critic Clement Greenberg – as ‘a graphic gesture, an inspired calligraphy, toned effects or more precisely a pearl effect which gives his works as much a sharp edge as content and the forms harmoniously complete the essential elements of the sketch’ (L'Express, 2006). Santiniketan, where Nagalingum studied, is also evoked by the same writers as ‘a metaphor for the authentic Indian identity and that in turn is articulated as spiritual and transcendental’ (Mukherji, 2006, p. 1).⁶⁶

⁶³ In Mauritius, most cultural events are politicised and artists, writers, musicians, curators and arts managers often work in close collaboration with political parties, with high-profiled personalities.

⁶⁴ The School of Fine Arts is the only fully-fledged art school in Mauritius offering post-secondary school practical and academic courses in the Fine Arts and in other related visual media.

⁶⁵ Kala Bhavana is known for its ‘internationalism’ (p. 7) adapting European modernism to the Indian context and for also encouraging style of representation that breaks from Western aesthetics

⁶⁶ Indian scholar, Parul Mukherji, retraces the genealogy of these terms and finds out that Indian artists of the 1960s were also guilty of reproducing an orientalist depiction of Indian culture (2006, p. 8-9).



Figure 4.5 Moorthy Nagalingum 1993, ‘Comfort’ [Lavis painting], Artist collection. Photograph Manjoola Appadoo. In: *Vertical Horizon: M.Nagalingum*, Mauritius 2006.

According to Mukherji, Nagalingum was exposed to two directions at Santiniketan: Ramkinker Baij’s bold appropriation of western modernism while referencing it to the local experience; and K.C.S Panikkar’s unconventional retrieval of the pre-colonial past via a modernist vocabulary. Nagalingum was inspired by the ‘pan Asian aesthetics which refers across a range of styles from that of Ajanta, the monumental Kanheri cave sculptures to the Far Eastern calligraphic strokes’ (Mukherji, 2006, p. 18) and returned to Mauritius four years before independence and state patronage of the arts.

While state intervention in the arts, in India encouraged globalism (and not globalisation), positioning local artists to create solidarities with the Global South (Adajania, 2013), in Mauritius state sponsorship around independence has been less

focused on internationalism and more on internal dynamics by promoting artistic practices that celebrated ancestral culture (rather than inherited colonial culture) and cultural diversity, as stated in the mission of the Ministry of Arts and Culture:

To foster a balanced and harmonious Mauritian Society through consolidation of existing pluralism, promotion of creativity and the celebration of cultural values (Ministry of Arts and Culture, 2015).⁶⁷

Nagalingum joined the new department of Fine Arts as a teacher before being promoted to the role of an administrator. He democratised the arts by creating the first annual exhibition, the *Salon de Mai*, which promoted young and experienced artists from across the island. Many students became teachers at the department and have produced works that explore themes and aesthetics outside the dominant aesthetics. Many artists went for further training in European and Indian art schools. I observed a set of recurrent themes around the nostalgia of ancestral origins, the oppression of the indenture system, narratives of resilience, Hinduism as a religious philosophy (tantric art, spirituality) and multiculturalism and politics of identity in mediums ranging from traditional oil paintings to new media.

A power dynamic emerged between private sponsorship of the arts from the Franco-Mauritian bourgeoisie, on one side, and institutionalisation (with collaboration from the Indian Government) on the other. The two paradigms cannot be read as fixed cultural hegemonies due to the movement of artists working with available funding, promotion and recognition. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, many of the works produced by artists following Moorthy Nagalingum demonstrate the shift from a settler imaginary of the islands as idyllic to engaging with theatics of gender, history and memory, identity, local politics, to name a few.

A parallel can be made with a similar tension with state patronage in India after independence from British colonialism, taking the visual artist Vivan Sundaram from India and Firoz Ghanty from Mauritius as example of two contemporary politically engaged artists involved in activist/militant art who protest against institutional abuses. Concerned that internationalism in the arts scene overlooked 'India's rich and complex

⁶⁷ Adajania argues that the first few editions of Triennale India (inaugurated in New Delhi in 1968) were the manifestation of a confident globalism from the South and even a globalism before globalisation. 'Initiated by the visionary novelist, editor and art critic Mulk Raj Anand, Triennale India consciously articulated the Nehruvian internationalist vision of non-alignment that sought solidarity among Asian, African and Latin American countries, marking a 'third position' in Cold War politics' (2013).

civilizational history, and ... Indian modernity with its own particular history' (Adajania, 2013,p. 176), Sundaram protested against the Triennale in the 1970s and questioned the involvement of internationalism and state sponsorship on the arts scene. He argued that they would pervade into the modernities of precolonial/pre-nationalist modernities and local aesthetics. On a different note, Ghanty and several other artists supported anti-establishment cultural movements in the early 70s, named the golden era (Harmon, 2011) and allied themselves with the leftist politics of the time. They were concerned about the nationalist appropriation of the visual arts. In this sense, I explore Firoz Ghanty's art practice in the next section focusing on his work on the dodo so a comparative study can be made between the institutionalisation of memory in the museum and the alternative historiography offered by the artist. The last section analyses the work of the artist, Nirmal Hurry.

4.2 'I refuse to be nostalgic about Empire': Firoz Ghanty

Two years after independence, in 1970, Firoz Ghanty who was a nineteen-year-old activist and self-taught artist-intellectual at the time joined his older brother Ismet Ganti and another artist Yacoob Patel to form a collective, called the Groupe 1. A vanguard and non-elitist art collective, Groupe 1 aimed at questioning, in Ganti's words, 'the reactionary politics of artists from the colonial bourgeoisie in Mauritius who were still promoting values and aesthetics of the last century' (2015).⁶⁸ The group unsettled the conventional modes of representation and thematics of the visual arts of the pre-independence era, to denounce forms of elitism in the arts and bring political art to the public. Ismet Ganti and Firoz Ghanty were influenced by the contemporary art movements in Europe and America such as Arte Povera in the 1960s and 1970s in Italy which proposed to look at common objects and make the everyday meaningful; Dadaism and experiment with typography, photomontage, line drawing and graphic design to subvert the conventional visual order of mainstream art; the Parisian André Breton's subversive Surrealist 'poèmes-objets' of the 1930s; Pop art that emerged during the popular culture of the 1950s and imageries and texts merged from collage and found objects; the International Fluxus group generating new art forms in audio-

⁶⁸ Groupe 1 also brought other artists such as Shah Nawaz Bucktowar, Dev Soobrayen, Remy D'argent and Rosa Henry together

visual media; and the social revolutionaries of the Situationist International.

Their works denounced coloniality by engaging with topical international events such as the Vietnam war, the Biafran war, the Northern Ireland conflict and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The media coverage of the four exhibitions organised by Groupe 1 (Mauritius, 1970-1971), the two brothers' collective show (Mauritius, 1973, 1974) and Firoz Ghanty's fifteen solo exhibitions (in Mauritius and Réunion) from 1972-1984 dismissed the seriousness of their political messages, by pinpointing their youthful exuberance, their 'unemployment', the 'imported' style and thematics that they mimic, and their preoccupation with contestation and shocking the public.⁶⁹ The international art movements that influenced them were also put in juxtaposition with the 'modernist' trend in art that inspired the artists of European origins in the colony, considered aesthetically progressive.

Only a few journalists acknowledged the intellectual rigour of the young artists in highlighting global social and political upheavals through art. The philosophy behind the Groupe 1, founded upon the resistance to any form of compromise with oppressive systems, is recurrent in the brothers' politically charged works during the 1970s. Both Ganti and Ghanty established new modes of thinking and artistic representation outside the conservatism of settler aesthetics vulgarised in the postcolony as well as denouncing – through their newspaper articles, manifestoes and poster and pamphlet designs – the lack of transparency within state sponsorship of the arts and culture. Ismet Ganti has also been very active in bringing artists together and, after founding Groupe 1, set up another art organisation in 1993, Le Collectif, as well as developing, organising and managing a dozen more local, regional and international art initiatives during the following three decades.⁷⁰ Since then, Ghanty has participated in over a hundred group exhibitions in the Indian Ocean region and abroad with about twenty solo exhibitions in Mauritius and in Reunion Island, with works in private collections across continents.

They disrupted the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie (representations, technique, composition, materials, themes) by using frameless canvases, newspaper, wood as platform and mixed media, collage, texts in Mauritian Creole within a philosophy of

⁶⁹ This information was retrieved from Firoz Ghanty's personal archive of newspaper cuttings, which includes the initial press coverage of Groupe 1 in 1971 and the works that his brother and himself continued to produce, after the other members of Groupe 1 left.

⁷⁰ A few of his exhibitions: Galerie Max Boulle-Mauritius (every year from 1973-1976), Festival Source Vive-La Réunion (1996), Quinzaine Mauricienne-Strasbourg (1985), Johannesburg Biennale-South Africa (1995), Logos Art Gallery-Tokyo (2002), Cairo Biennale-Egypt (2003), and art residencies: Atelier Andre Beton-La Réunion (1999), Yuji Inoyama-Art Collector-Tokyo (2002) and Aifacs-New Delhi India (2011).

political art, with a range of themes from cosmology to activism. Branded as ‘radical’, ‘anti-art’, ‘rebellious’, ‘anti-aesthetics’, ‘provocative’ and ‘controversial’ since the 1970s, Ghanty and Ganti still represent what is alternative and anti-institutional. Recently Ganti professed a new slogan, ‘Stop painting, Make art!’ (2015), as a response to the lack of transparency in the institutionalisation of the arts in Mauritius.

Ghanty was closely involved with his brother’s curatorial activities while he was involved with a Marxist-Leninist party (1974–1976), the Mauritian Militant Movement. They were both actively engaged in protests against the new government’s ethnic policies and produced subversive works for solo exhibitions that they also took outside the gallery to community centres, municipality halls and trade union spaces.⁷¹ By the end of the 1970s until 1985 when he left Mauritius to explore Paris for a decade, Ghanty became more focused on developing new forms of aesthetics by incorporating political texts that do not overshadow the visual form.

Abandoning the framed canvas as medium, he adopted what has become his signature style, the kakemono – a vertical scroll of canvas, fabric, cardboard, plywood or paper to produce forms of pictorial writing in ink primarily. The themes which recur in Ghanty’s work are also explores occult and esoteric philosophical theomatics, tantric art, geometry and symbolism. In Figure 4.6 Ghanty explores the visual element of texts, the relevance of writing (*Écriture*) in art and the artistic form of typography in the vertical kakemono space. He disrupts the pattern of modernist painting on the island as well as the status of the artist flâneur with his social and political engagement. His works in the early 1980s, and in the 1990s after leaving Paris in 1986, denounced bourgeois nationalism and promoted processes of *mauricianisme* (a form of Creole nationalism supported by intellectuals and artists to develop a national identity through the vitalisation of the Creole language).

Figure 4.7, *Otoportréstaman* (2001), is an auto-portrait depicting his political and artistic convictions. The text in Creole, *Pa pans kominal. Pans Morisien* (Do not think through an ethnic lens. Think Mauritian), is repeated across the poster and reflects Ghanty’s political activism in the 1990s. In 1999, he presented himself as an

⁷¹ He was assaulted by the police in 1974 and arrested during the May 1975 student demonstration (a march towards the capital city of Port Louis, planned by the students, to protest against the inequality in state education as well as the colonial education reproduced in educational textbooks and classroom pedagogical methods which had not changed since independence). Students were brutally dispersed with tear gas and batons by the Riot police. Ghanty was arrested again in 1981 during another protest and was condemned to three months in jail.

independent candidate for a mid-term district election (Beau Bassin – Petite Rivière) and used the Creole language as a political tool and a symbol of national unity and nation building to denounce the ethnocentric politics which had been institutionalised on the island. was involved in a campaign (against the first Government) that proposed the Creole language. The next section will situate the political activism and nationalist discourse around the Creole language, which influenced both Ghanty and Hurry.



Figure 4.6 Firoz Ghanty 1987, ‘ÉCRITURE’ [Multimedia on paper], Solo exhibition, Collection Artothèque Réunion. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4.7 Firoz Ghanty 2001, 'Otoporréstaman' [Multimedia on paper], Solo exhibition, Collection Artothèque Réunion. Photograph courtesy of the artist

I refuse to identify myself with the Dodo ... a specimen exterminated by the Dutch coloniser and used as a symbol on the national insignia, under English oppression? ... Really! No! I have nothing to do with this creature! (Ghanty, 2010 (author's translation))

The extract above is from a text that Firoz Ghanty wrote for a public art project which focuses on the thematic of the dodo. In 2009, Ghanty was invited to contribute to 'The Landing of the Dodo' project, conceived by a collective of contemporary artists, Arts Initiative Ltd. Its aim was 'to build upon and challenge contemporary views on the iconic symbol of the bird' as well as to make art accessible to the general public and find potential buyers for the works (The Landing of the Project, 2009). Several artists across different fields (music, film, jewellery design, visual arts, to name a few) were selected to use a fibreglass mould of the bird, prepared by Arts Initiative, as a support medium on which to produce an artwork.

The mould of the bird followed the 'scientific' nineteenth-century interpretation of the museum's specimen which was based on the deductions made by natural scientists that the bird was fat and heavy (deconstructed recently as discussed in the previous section). The end result was a public display of colourful birds in fiberglass, whose titles and artistic transformation evoked the imagination of the artists: Slave-dodo, Migrant-dodo, English-dodo, Dodobaba, The monument, Dodo-Mauritius Army, Dodo-yetu, Ecolododo, Eldorado, Dodoritian, among the three dozen birds (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8 Painted dodo moulds. Maison Euréka, Moka, 2010. Photograph courtesy The Landing of the Dodo project.

Arts Initiative was not the first collective of artists to draw from the thematic of the dodo for a contemporary art project. Other artistic projects have either produced imaginative representations of the bird, reinforced the museum narrative of the ‘disappeared dodo’, as discussed in the first section, or mythologising the bird by questioned its existence. For instance, ‘The Dodo Project’ was conceived by pARTage, an artists’ initiative funded by several international organisations and corporations, in 2010. The project brought together twenty Mauritian contemporary artists to work on the dodo theme from any medium of their choice. I observe three different narratives in the project that mythicise the dodo. In the synopsis of the project, the question was first raised as to whether the bird existed.

Did the Dodo really exist? Who has ever seen one? Yes, we have seen bones and stuffed Dodos covered with the feathers of other birds, but never a real one. Does anybody know exactly what the Dodo looked like? (The Dodo Project, 2009).

This narrative questions the existence of the bird, following the myth that often surrounds the dodo. Secondly, the invitation card of ‘The Dodo Project’ was presented with a discourse of indigeneity and pseudo-nationalism on which the bird was anthropomorphised as ‘the first Mauritian’ (Figure 4.9).

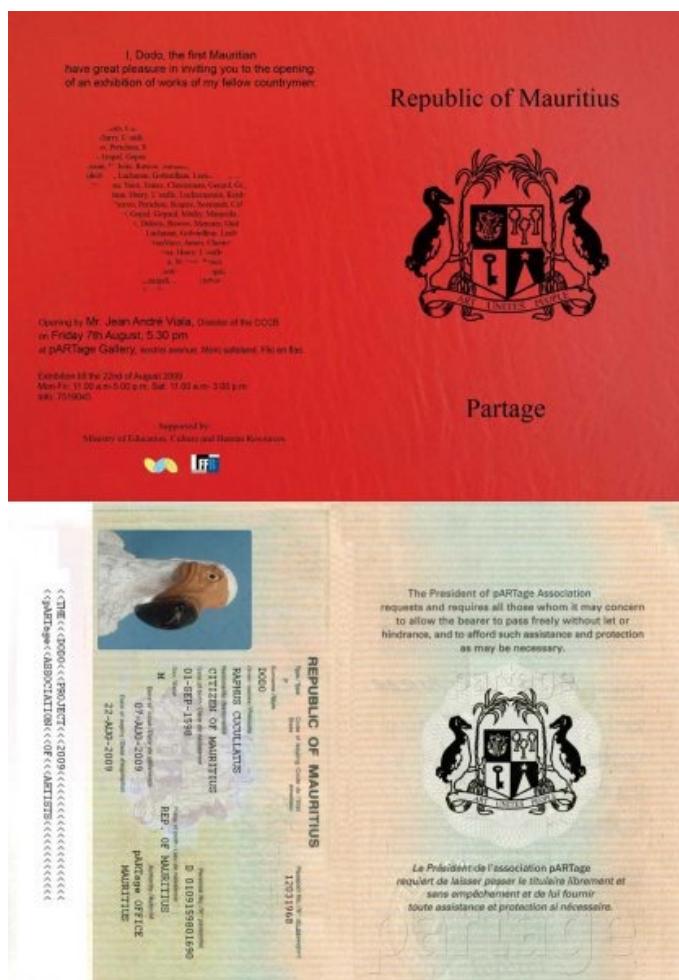


Figure 4.9 Invitation card, The Dodo Project, 2009. Photograph courtesy The Dodo project.

A scanned copy of a Mauritian passport (with the coat of arms visible) was superimposed with a photo and information of the bird. The text on the card reads: ‘I, Dodo, the first Mauritian have great pleasure in inviting you to the opening of an exhibition of works of my fellow countrymen’. The representations of the bird as indigenous/native to the island is expounded by the public art project, in the sense that the demised bird claims its space as a native animal who lost its land and life to the European colonisers as well as takes centre stage as a host. As ingenious as it sounds, the narrative of citizenship – which is embedded in the emergence of the nation – undermines the violence of its extinction. Thirdly, ‘The Dodo Project’ reproduces a discourse of glorification, similar to the Natural History Museum in Mauritius.

The Dodo long dead, the very icon of extinction, yet an emblematic figure of our past and our present. The Dodo has gifted us with a rich cultural legacy which is very much alive and breathing in various forms on the island (The Dodo Project, 2009).

While the fact of extinction is depicted as unquestionable here, the first extract (above) paradoxically questions the existence of the bird. What is completely absent in the ethos of the project is the awareness of a past of colonial exploitation of the ecology of the islands and the loss which follows. It reproduced the narrative on one of the panels in the natural history museum, as discussed in the previous section: ‘Its legacy however lasted forever: that of a dumpy, dowdy mythical bird’. Not only is the past occurrence of colonisation absent in the narrative but the violence of exploitation is subdued by terminologies that produce a narrative of glorification (‘icon’, ‘emblematic’, ‘gifted’, ‘rich’, ‘alive’, ‘breathing’). The dodo is not remembered for being ‘alive’ and ‘breathing’ while its iconography is much ‘alive’ in popular culture. It reflects what McKittrick calls ‘brutal unforgetting’ (2017, p. 98). The ‘unforgetting’ of death implies that the animal will not be forgotten after its death while the violence on its life has already been erased.

Arts Initiative Ltd was more ambitious than ‘The Dodo Project’ and aimed at literally (re)populating the island with sculptures of birds, as an artistic endeavour. The title, ‘The Landing of the Dodo’, was emblematic of the mission to take the bird out of the exhibitionary spaces of the gallery into the ‘wild’ where it once belonged. The initial plan of the initiative to display the sculptural life-sized birds in public spaces – in the villages and the towns – backfired as the team didn’t anticipate the logistics needed to assure the protection of the fiberglass works, in open spaces, against climatic conditions, vandalism and theft.

Instead, the colourful birds went on public display in the secured spaces of a shopping mall in the capital (The Caudan Waterfront), a state-French sponsored cultural institution (Institut Français de Maurice – The French Institution of Mauritius) and in an outdoor coastal location (Grand Port), maintained under the State Heritage Fund as a memorial site commemorating the victory of a French battle during colonial times. Some of the birds also travelled to a private IRS resort (Anahita World Class Sanctuary) after an official launch at a colonial house converted into a private museum (La Maison Eureka) where the Minister of Culture was invited.⁷²

These locations depict the close collaboration between capitalist ventures and cultural institutions sponsored by ex-colonies under state blessing which inform the contemporary art scene in Mauritius. Visual artists collaborate with cultural institutions that are funded under the cultural policies of the Francophonie and commercial enterprises because of the lack of state funding, infrastructure and national incentives in the arts. Artists compete for space, funds, peer and media recognition. Private patronage also derives more prestige than state sponsorship in Mauritius.

I argue that while both projects contribute to the fetishistic memorialisation in place in the museum, they nevertheless do not reproduce the colonial ‘blame the victim’ ideology – that the dodo was doomed to extinction because it evolved into a ‘flightless’ bird – and present the bird as an animal of endearment, an indigenous/native/endemic species or a citizen of the island. Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry are however more critical of the representations of the dodo on the islands. The promotional poster (Figure 4.10) of ‘The Landing of the Dodo’ project, ‘Test Landing’, promotes a live performance by Firoz Ghanty, one of the artists commissioned by Arts Initiative to use the mould as a prop for an artwork. The poster was designed in a graphic kitsch style and subverts the glamorous postcard depiction of the island imaginary of Mauritius.⁷³ It promotes the venue which is a taxi stand located at a busy junction in one of the main towns, Beau Bassin, found outside popular commercial areas and tourist destinations. Ghanty’s artistic approach was to work on a performance, which he describes as not a performance *per se*, as he was more interested in provoking people and observing the

⁷² The IRS (Integrated Resort Scheme) is a government initiative for the sale of highly priced residential units to international buyers who are granted Mauritian residency after acquiring the property.

⁷³ Kitsch is read here, as political in the way dadaism, surrealism or pop culture were. The term used here is also a reaction to the notion of modernism prescribed by the critic Clement Greenberg in ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ (1939) in which he establishes a difference between Avant-Garde as a product of the European Enlightenment and Kitsch as a degradation of culture brought by industrialisation and consumption patterns of the working class.

reactions of the public (Ghanty, 2016).



Figure 4.10 Poster ‘Test landing’, The Landing of the Dodo Project, 2010. Photograph courtesy The Landing of the Dodo Project.

Part of pre-launching the project Ghanty proposed ‘Test Landing’ and initiated a stroll across town with the unpainted mould (Figure 4.11). This street performance brought the works of art to the streets and, therefore, represents the initial ethos of the project and establishes a critical dimension to the Arts Initiative’s public project.

His art piece aimed at engaging artists, as well as the public, to question the colonial representation of the extinct bird and contemporary depictions of the bird – in other artistic projects and in commercial endeavours – as happy, colourful, beautiful, cute or exotic. Ghanty also, in this sense, represents the tactical strategist who multiplies messages in formats and on platforms that the public can relate to.



Figure 4.11 Firoz Ghanty 2010, ‘Morisien Dodo Mwa Dimoun’ [Performance], Rose-Hill. Photograph courtesy The Landing of the Dodo Project.

As strategists have devised maps, chronometers, and other tools of administration and control, tactical strategists multiply messages deep into the social fabric by writing on money, using cab radios, speaking in the style of vendors on means of transportation, writing on walls [...] (Lugones, 2003, p. 225).

Unlike the glamorous commercial spaces and sites embedded with colonial history in which the birds were eventually displayed, Ghanty's live performance opposes the colonial and economic order of contemporary art by its atemporal, ephemeral, and embodied dimension. It is in this sense that Ghanty's projection of an 'art performance' in the streets represents a decoloniality of aesthetics. He uses 'techniques like juxtaposition, parody, or simple disobedience to the rules of art and polite society, to expose the contradictions of coloniality' (TDI +Transnational Decolonial Institute, 2011) – coloniality, in the case of the arts scene in Mauritius, is embedded in the production of work for the art gallery and the reproduction of a settler aesthetics and epistemology.

Ghanty casually strolled around town, pulling his unpainted fibreglass mould across busy congested streets, to the amusement and intrigued gaze of people, busy in their daily activities, who are not very familiar with art as performance (Figure 4.12). Part of his 'gig', characteristic of Ghanty's humour, was to also approach the public, to ask for charity money 'for his horse', and to perform getting on a bus and into a police station with the bird. I discuss how Ghanty's piece contributes to a 'performative historiography' (Fabião, 2012) as it performs (a decolonial) history. It is in this perspective that performance art in Chapter Four and sega 'performances' in Chapter Five are read as performing history which incorporates corporeality, affect and subjectivity and their endurance in the present in forms of contemporary adaptation, imageries and memories (Fabião, 2012).

Performance art, the artistic practice that forces representation toward unpredictable extremes, the paradoxical practice that dismantles strict separations between art and non-art, inspired rethinking modes of 'historiographing' (p. 121).

The artistic practice of performance 'dismantles strict separations between art and non-art' (Fabião, 2012, p. 121) and challenges the object-oriented focus in contemporary art. By pulling the mould like a burdensome pet across town, Ghanty dethrones the institutional symbol of extinction from a museum's pedestal and distances himself from victim-blaming the animal. He also removes the dodo, as art object, from the conventional art gallery and from a romanticised and nostalgic framing. In the performance and in a text which he attached to the final painted bird, commissioned to by Arts Initiative, Ghanty pertinently reiterates a continuous disassociation with the bird – 'I refuse to identify myself with the Dodo' (extract of text at the beginning of this

section). He questioned how an animal, made extinct during colonial rule, becomes represented as national emblem after independence.

To adore a specimen, exterminated by the Dutch coloniser and demised, as symbols on the national insignia, by English domination? ... if the *Homo Mauriciana* claims its ancestry from *Raphus Cucullatus* (Latin term for the dodo), then, I affirm that I came from my parents.

Really! No! I have nothing to do with this creature!' (Ghanty, 2010 (author's translation)).

Satire and dark humour form part of Ghanty's repertoire of stylistic approaches to intellectualise and subvert. Ghanty's text pinpoints the absurdity of using an animal of extinction as insignia and as self-representation. Ghanty informs us that the symbol of the dodo as national insignia was devised under English administration and maintained after the formation of the nation. The practice of art and writing, for Ghanty, are as much about intellectualising, poeticising, historicising and instigating recollection. Fabião recalls that

any writing inspired by actions proposed and enacted by performance artists, calls for a consideration of storytelling's political and poetic force (p. 123).

Fabião also remarks that the stark division between present and past, as presented in museum narratives, is a 'narcotic' essentialism of western historiography.

Art historian Amelia Jones explains that such performance and body-to-body engagement with the public disrupt the institutional tendency to contain 'the artwork as a discrete and knowable "object", [while] a consideration of the performative "de-contains" the work, reminding us that its meaning and value are contingent' (Jones, 2012, p. 12). For Jones, performance artworks

are often dramaturgically open and relational enough to leave space for as many reactions, interferences, co-creations, interpretations, and narrative-derived productions as the number of their spectators [...] performers don't want to communicate a specific content to be decoded but to promote an experience through which contents will be elaborated (p. 123).

The 'uncontainable' in performance instigates Ghanty to disrupt the colonial archive in the museum which displays the object as an item belonging to the ethnographic collection of the institution. Ghanty extracts historical misinterpreted information from the colonial archive and brings forward a different anarchival visibility (Foster, 2004). For Foster, anarchival artists feel the urgency, more than simply an impulse, to 'anarchive', to produce different narratives of history. Ghanty works with the intention

to anarchise (bring anarchy to) the colonial archive with provocative performance and insightful messages.

On the other hand, Hurry, as discussed in the next section, de-historicises the archive (Ernst, 2016) in the sense that he digs into untapped archives (researching how the dodo was depicted in historical texts) and bring visibility to un-historicised events (the cause of extinction and the history of colonisation). Both artists us the archive as a site of resistance and work against the uni-directionality of museum narratives. Furthermore, Ghanty and Hurry re-interpret historical archival works and disrupt the linearity and temporality of historical narratives by removing the bird from its iconic status of extinction and ‘vulgarising’ it as an everyday object. Their artworks are as much archival as anarchival in the sense that they draw on informal and formal archival material but produce an affective archive from a decolonial perspective.

In Figure 4.12, Firoz Ghanty is photographed at a busy bus-stop, in front of a supermarket catering for the nearby localities. He is wearing a cardboard sign around his neck with the word ‘human’ on it, and a sign with a stencilled text ‘Mauritian-dodo’ round the bird’s neck. In this performance, Ghanty is mostly concerned with coloniality in the postcolonial nation. *‘Morisien Dodo, Mwa Dimoun’* (*Mauritian are Dodos, I am human*) is meant to be an anti-Dodo performance, to question the popularisation of the representation of a bird, made extinct under European colonialism. He represents



Figure 4.12 Firoz Ghanty 2010, Dodo mould [Fibreglass, Height 1m], Maison Eureka, Moka. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

himself as *dimoun* (meaning a person, a human or in this case stressing that he is alive), while Mauritians are as dead as the dodos. In the final work which he paints (Figure 4.12) for the official launch, he writes a substantial explanation on the mould itself and elaborates on the performance.

He compares a nation which represents itself with an extinct bird as a necrodesire, a desire for death.

L’Homo Mauriciana reassures himself by idealising a bird which is mythicised and elevated as a legend, but which is, most problematically, steeped in a prehistory and represents death. The Mauritian is, thus, dead at some level.

Isn’t it a syndrome of Misoneism? Or symptomatic of a morbid desire to self-destruct? Self-mutilate? A societal masochism? Isn’t it a pathological sign of a wish for collective suicide? (Ghanty, 2010 (author’s translation)).

For Firoz Ghanty, the fetishistic memorialisation of the bird is a form of self-inflicted death. His reasoning can be ascribed on the museum which symbolises a deathscape and is reflective of a ‘societal masochism’ that is ‘symptomatic of a morbid desire to self-destruct’ or ‘self-mutilate’. His philosophical text pinpoints a specific situation of epistemic colonisation where the necro-aesthetics and necro-epistemologies of the state is normalised. The violence of colonisation is neutralised through an aestheticisation of its contemporary representations – national insignia, museum iconography and commercial artistic projects around an animal deemed unfit to survive in evolutionary standards.

[W]e must understand that most people, in this country, consider the Dodo as a national symbol. Ismet and I are the only one who developed an opposing discourse based on a critical historico-political analysis on the bird [sic]. Institutions and capitalist ventures capitalise on the fact that people consider the bird as national heritage and use the symbolical value of the bird to promote the island as a tourist destination. What is hilarious is that the Minister of Arts and Culture bought the mould which I painted and decided to place it in the yard of the Porlwi Museum (Ghanty, 2016 (author’s translation)).

Paradoxically Ghanty’s painted mould was bought by the Natural History Museum in Mauritius while the content of the artist’ critique of colonialism text was dismissed as insignificant by the museum. In his text, Ghanty confronted both the postcolonial state and the contemporary artists who reproduce colonial symbols. He described such artists as taking ‘a left leaning, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist position in their art practices while collaborating with institutions and promoting neoliberal ventures at the same

time' (Ghanty, 2016).

This chapter read Ghanty's work as a decolonial practice that reconfigure a settler aesthetics and epistemology. The next section analyses the anarchival narratives of Nirmal Hurry's dodo birds.

4.3 The spectral dump-yard dodo: 'Ti blié coument envolé', Nirmal Hurry

Nirmal Hurry was among the first cohort of students to join the department in the 1980s, despite his parents' scepticism who came from the rural Indian community and did not envisage the study of art as a professional career for their son. Hurry initially explored the three fields of Fine Arts (Painting, Sculpture and Printmaking) available at the department and specialised in sculpture. He was exposed to traditional material such as brass and marble. In 1983, Hurry received a scholarship and went for further studies in France, at L'École des Beaux Arts, where he created sculptures, for the first time, in cement. A decade later, Hurry followed professional training in India at the Jamma Millia Islamia (1996-1998) and was exposed to a long historical Indian tradition of sculpture in wood, stone and marble. The artist also became aware of the tension between Indian and European art in international contemporary art circuit. This allowed him to develop a critical art practice when he returned to Mauritius.

I delineate three broad trends in Hurry's art practice spanning over nearly four decades: sculptures of (mainly) birds built with ready-mades, scrap metal and recycled objects; secondly, conceptual art and installations made of various recycled materials complemented by texts/poetry in Mauritian Creole; and thirdly, commemorative monuments and museum dioramas, commissioned by the state-led institutions. Like Nagalingum, Hurry would be associated with the School of Fine Arts for his entire career and would, moreover, be acknowledged by successive governments for his public art projects. Hurry's body of work comprises of about one hundred sculptures and art installations, exhibited nationally, regionally in the Indian Ocean and internationally at several international biennales.⁷⁴ The artist has produced more than forty re-imagined sculptural birds, constructed out of ready-mades, scrap metal and recycled objects.

⁷⁴ Biennale of Cairo (2001), Biennale of Dhaka Bangladesh (2001), World Sculpture Park of Changchun (China), National Pavilion 56th Venice Biennale (2015), among others.

Hurry's birds are mostly interpretations of ground-dwelling species such as ostriches, peacocks, flamingos and cockerels which he re-imagines using metallic detritus, 'junk' and 'rubbish'; one example can be seen in Figure 2.6.



Figure 4.13 Nirmal Hurry (undated), 'Untitled' [Welded metal and found objects, Height 1m 20 cms], School of Fine Arts MGI, Moka. Photograph Manjoola Appadoo. In: *Nirmal Hurry: A Collection of Works*, Mauritius 2010.

Hurry reveals, in the conversation that we had during the seven years that we worked at the School of Fine Arts (2004-2011), that he was drawn to the aesthetics of the rural environment where he grew up. He was inspired by the domestic animals found in his back garden (a common small plot of land joining the houses in the village). Furthermore, Hurry reveals that the animals were an important part of the life of indentured workers in the colony. In this sense, his birds were conceived from the intimate space of a Creolised community which I argue indigenised the land and brought, in the colony, a tradition of raising animals such as cows, goats, chicken, dogs, cats and cockerels as pets, as well as subsistence and an alternative source of income. Hurry's work are, in many ways, memorial artefacts of a history of Indenture and slavery. In this context, unlike the settler aesthetics described in the previous section, Hurry aestheticises rural Mauritius without exoticising it. However, his birds are not realist representations but are re-imagined from the shape, form, intensity, strength and colour of the scrap metal and recycled objects that he hoards in his studio.

Hurry confessed that he was inspired by the recomposed artworks, made of compressed cars and other metal objects, of the French artist César Baldaccini, a follower of the New Realism movement. Hurry's ready-made objects have much resonance with the European New Realism (poly-materialism in Italy (Robinson, 2010)) movement in the late 1950s to early 1960s which influenced many artists, as a move away from consumption, one of the consequences of European modernity.⁷⁵ The use of recycled objects and scrap metal in art dates back to the anti-establishment art movement in post-WW1 Western Europe in the early 1900s, the term 'readymades' having been coined by the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp in 1912 to describe works of art that he made from manufactured objects. The New Realism movement prompted artists to use materials that were already available to produce art objects. This gave rise to what has been described as postmodern art preoccupied with trash (Yaeger, 2010) – what Patricia Yaeger calls 'detritus aesthetics', 'trash aesthetics' or 'rubbish ecology' theorised as 'material eco-poetics' (Morrison, 2015). A few more lines here

Hurry was also inspired by the sculptural works of the French artist Pablo Picasso and the sense of drama in the works of the English artist Francis Bacon. Both

⁷⁵ Between 1957-1962, contemporary artistic practices 'changed dramatically [...] art transcended the suffocation of canvas stretchers, museum walls, and traditional categorisations, and completely new forms emerged' (Robinson, 2010).

Baldaccini and Picasso made a brief attempt at figurative bird-sculpture. Picasso's *Coq* in bronze (1932) is emblematic of his experimental practice with traditional material, while *Crane* (1951-1952), a painted-bronze bird that has as a tail piece made of the end of an old shovel, was part of his few experimental works made of ready-made objects.⁷⁶ Baldaccini's repertoire of works includes two birds, *La Pachoulette* and *Fanny Fanny*, made of bronze, steel and recuperated metal objects in 1990-1991. Looking at the few animal-sculptures of Picasso and Baldaccini, it is possible to see how Hurry pushes the three-dimensional depiction of his birds in recuperated scrap metal further. Hurry's historical knowledge as well as his ornithological specialism and welding and sculptural skills enable him to create a variety of fantastical android animals. In this regard, I analyse two of his sculptures of the extinct dodo in Chapter Four. While colonial artists poeticised the Mauritian landscape with a subliminal realism of Nature, reflective of late eighteenth-century European Romanticism, or made exoticised or orientalist depictions of animals, I argue that Hurry's birds are poeticised in a waste aesthetics of everyday trash as a form of an everyday poetics or a poetics of the everyday.

Furthermore, one important aspect of Hurry's art practice is his decision to write poetic pieces in Mauritian Creole since 1988, so as to allow his conceptual pieces to be understood by a wider public outside the Francophone bourgeoisie or the academic elite who usually visit the art galleries in Mauritius. This is part of the second thread that I observe in his body of work.

Hurry recounts his experiences and observations of the changing aspects of Creole throughout the historical and cultural landscape of postcolonial rural Mauritius. With nostalgia, he remembers his youth when he would be encouraged to speak in Creole so as to 'succeed' despite the fact that his immediate family were Bhojpuri speaking. In his political poems, Hurry purposefully experiments with the oral and scribal aspect of the language, often using the creole 'd'antan' – expressions in an old Creole – which is rarely used by the young generation. His poetic pieces in the Creole mother tongue are political because they challenge the dominant language of the art gallery, French here, and invites the everyday man to enter into a dialogue with his work. In this sense, I look at his poetry in Creole as a decoloniality of aesthetics in Chapter Four and pushes the

⁷⁶ A full-scale retrospective mounted by the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, in conjunction with the Louvre and the Tate Gallery of London, and in 1980 by MoMA, brought Picasso's collection of earlier sculptures into the limelight

analysis further in Chapter Five by ‘listening’ to the Creole language as a decolonial practice. At the School of Fine Arts, Hurry is well known for his poetic commentary in Creole and his three-dimensional visual works that engage with social upheavals. He also often articulates a critique of the cultural institutions on the island. For example, Figure 2.7 is a replica of a shopping basket used by people on the island before the era of supermarkets and plastic on the island. In the poetic piece written in free verse together with rhymes in Mauritian Creole, Hurry reflects on the culture of consumption and waste and the increase in the standard of living. In the basket, the consumer items used are all locally produced and wrapped in recycled newspaper, as a comment to a sustainable life.



Figure 4.14 Nirmal Hurry (undated), ‘Mo tente’ (‘My shopping basket’) [Recycled objects], School of Fine Arts MGI Moka. Photograph Manjoola Appadoo. In: Mauritius: Nirmal Hurry: A Collection of Works, 2010

While Nirmal Hurry developed a critical art practice within the state’s institution, the School of Fine Arts being a public institution, artists like Firoz Ghanty opposed the bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of the arts that state patronage brought after independence. The second paradigm shift in the visual arts scene happened in parallel

with the cultural program of the new government to democratise the arts in the 1970s, and is called the golden cultural era (Harmon, 2011) during which post-independence artists regenerated new styles and genres within music (*sega angaze*), theatre (of protest), the visual arts and literature (in Creole).

How can an animal look you in the face? That will be one of our concerns (Derrida, 2011, p. 377).

Nirmal Hurry is a sculptor and poet with a repertoire of about a hundred bird sculptures in readymades, recycled objects and scrap metal. In a solo exhibition commissioned by a foreign investor in 2010, Hurry was requested to work on a sculpture of the dodo. Despite having worked on bird sculptures for more than three decades, Hurry explored, for the first time, the peculiar form of the extinct animal (Figure 4.14). In this section, two of his works will be discussed in terms of his ‘waste aesthetics’ – the aesthetics of trash – and his use of the Creole language as subversion.



Figure 4.14 Nirmal Hurry (undated), ‘Dodo baba’ [Recycled materials, Height 86 cms], Solo Exhibition, Anahita, 2010. Photograph Manjoola Appadoo. In: *Nirmal Hurry: A Collection of Works*, Mauritius 2010.

Both Ghanty and Hurry have not engaged with the theme of the dodo prior to 2010 because of the national and commercial value of the image in Mauritius. While Ghanty is eloquent about his disassociation with the bird, as discussed in the last section, Hurry was highly reticent to produce a sculpture of the animal at the demand of the patron of his first solo exhibition, despite his artistic fascination with birds. Figure 4.14 shows a sculpture of the dodo bird made of incongruous objects (from mainly motorbikes and bicycles), using his welding expertise and trademark of aestheticising scrap metal and ‘odd’ readymade objects conspicuously put together.

Hurry’s rendition of the iconic bird made extinct on the island is particularly relevant to this research. The roundness of the bird’s body was explicitly ‘carved’ out of an old ‘bloated’ rusty dissected gas tank of a bike (in chipped red paint with the brand name ‘DELTA’ still visible). It was shaped by old curved polished mudguards aesthetically representing the big size of the ground-dwelling bird. Spring suspensions added volume to the welded steel legs which were connected to thick metallic knobbly bird feet. A piece of a thick flexible stainless-steel exhaust pipe framed in more mudguards connected the swollen body to the head. The head was shaped from a bicycle sprocket, two cane knives and short bicycle fenders. Within the ornithological realm of his imaginative reconstructions, Hurry captured the essence of the big bird: a heavy-looking android creature standing erect, not in the same rendition of his collection of fantasised birds in rusty-coloured scrap metal (Figure 4.13), but as a futuristic robot emerging from a human dump-yard of discarded objects (Figure 4.14).

Hurry reveals (from our latest conversation in August 2018) that the objects that he uses, as incongruous as they look, are remnants of a history of colonisation. For example, the two used rusty cane knives, which shape the face and beak of the bird, were the type of agricultural tools used by sugarcane labourers on the plantation and the different parts of the bicycle and motorcycle imported in the colony and which became affordable to planters are evocative of social mobility in the colony.

For Hurry, objects not only hold specific memories of either colonial times or the culture of consumption but are metaphorically narrators with both a gaze and a voice to look and speak for themselves. Hurry’s sculptural birds are made alert from the strategic use of an array of discarded rusty nuts and bolts, which the artist collects and hoards, to represent the organ of sight, the eye, in each of his birds. In all dimensions, shapes, styles and finishes (polished, shiny, rusty; made of steel, copper, bronze), the discarded nuts and bolts which he uses are in no way representative of the physical shape or form

of the specific bird's eyes, found on the two sides of the birds' heads. Hurry confesses that he is particularly attentive to the hollowness of a bolt or the flatness of a specific washer which depicts the both round shape of the birds' eyes and their 'empty' gaze. I stress the android empty gaze from the metallic eyes of the 'trashy' birds to disrupt the ocularcentric modality of contemplating or being contemplated at. In this sense, Hurry's sculptural dodo was neither anthropomorphised (like in 'The Dodo Project'), nor romanticised (like in 'The Landing of the Dodo' Project) and represent a decoloniality of aesthetics.

Furthermore, in contrast with his first sculpture of the dodo, 'Dodo Baba' (Figure 4.14) made in 2010, I observe that his recent one, 'Untitled' (2016), break away from the swollen museum version of the fat, 'umpy, dowdy' dodo, as discussed in the previous chapter. Hurry revealed that the last work (Figure 4.15) was a personal project to challenge the representation of the fat bird as he believed, based on the seventeenth-century drawings of the live dodo (Figures 4.3 and 4.6), that the animal might have been more 'graceful' and 'noble' than it had been depicted in mainstream imageries. 'Dodo Baba', shaped by pieces of rusty pipes, bolts, specific scrap objects like stainless steel dishes and welded metal, delineate a bird that is much smaller, lighter.



Figure 4.15 Nirmal Hurry 2016, 'Untitled' [Recycled materials, Height 55 cms], Salon de Mai, School of Fine arts MGI, Moka. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

In this work, Hurry experiments with translating the hard material of metal into an optical illusion of lightness which I argue he achieves successfully. The artist focuses on the silhouette of the bird in contrast with his previous sculpture which was built from the premise of the size and the sense of volume of the dodo. Hurry was particularly interested in differentiating his work from the over-representation of the fat version of the extinct bird. In this sense, Hurry's narrative of the dodo aims at disrupting the representations archived by the museum.

Furthermore, this section also analyses the artist's second trademark: writing satirical poetry in Mauritian Creole. In the case here, the first sculpture of the dodo was exhibited with the following poem:

Dodo baba, dodo baba, dodo	Sleep baby, sleep baby, sleep
Banne mots qui pe encore faire eko	Words that still echoes today
Dodo baba, dodo baba, dodo	Sleep baby, sleep baby, sleep
Couma dire mo lors bato	Just like on a boat
Dodo baba, dodo baba, dodo	Sleep baby, sleep baby, sleep
Couma dire lors dilo ...	Just like floating on water ...
Ti ene gros zoizo, moi dodo	I, the dodo, was a fat bird
Ti blié coument envolé, moi dodo	I, the dodo, forgot how to fly
Ti couyon couma banne colon, moi dodo	I, the Dodo, was as stupid as the coloniser
Mo laviande senti pis	My meat smells
Prend six heures pou cuit	And it needs six hours to cook.
Zordi hollandais pe gagne constipation	Consequently, the Dutch is constipated
Français pe rod solution	The French is looking for relief
Anglais pé brillé l'attention	The English blows its own trumpets
Zistoire fini	While the story of history has ended
Rakonté resté	We can only tell stories
Nirmal Hurry 2010	Nirmal Hurry 2010 (author's translation).

In relation to the argument of this thesis, the act of writing in Mauritian Creole in the gallery space is a decolonial act as it disrupts the dominant paradigm of linguistic representation in the Mauritian context. Furthermore, in Hurry's work, the extinct dodo is not a nostalgic (voiceless) relic of the past (as an imperialist nostalgia) or a spectral taxidermy specimen/skeleton in the museum. The poetry acts as a commentary of

contemporary life. The artist projects the story of the bird's demise in a poem which questions the chronological framework of official history.

The poem also makes a satire of the textbook approach to Mauritian historiography based on a colonial historicity of continuity: Dutch, French and English colonisation ('The Dutch is constipated/The French is looking for relief/While the English blows its own trumpets' (Lines 12-14)). The anarchive for the artist takes the form of a hauntological archive; hauntology in the Derridean sense that the present and the future is and will be haunted by the residues of history. He refers to the historical stories around the demise of the Dodo by the Dutch as well as the representations which followed during French and English colonisation. Hurry's work highlights the historical temporality and linearity of colonial and national history.

At first, the narrator is the artist-poet who animalises himself in the skin of the bird and plays with everyday expressions in Creole on the dodo – *Dodo baba* (Sleep baby). He used metaphors and similes – 'Words that still echoes today', 'just like a boat', the lullaby of nursery rhymes and 'sleep' of the dodo, 'floating on water' – to evoke a state of indolence and status quo, which can be read here as a state of anaesthesia, following from the previous chapter. Secondly, Hurry uses the narrator's voice of the dead dodo in the poem. With sarcasm, the extinct bird denounces the stereotypical depictions ('fat', 'stupid', 'forgot how to fly', 'meat smells') produced by seventeenth-century travelogues and reproduced in the natural sciences.⁷⁷

In Hurry's poetry, the bird reveals the trauma of its demise as a result of colonisation and of being represented as 'fat', amnesic ('forgot to fly') and 'ignorant' in the colonial present. Although spoken in a playful tone, Hurry is not soft on his words ('Consequently the Dutch is constipated'). Hurry's dodo is ominous and reminds the audience that its spectre will stay present through poetic resonance and provoke a remembering of the past and its impact on the present.

In the last section, the 'expository agent's semantic makeup' (Bal, 2001, p. 27) represents a human oriented historicity from the perspective of the coloniser. In the case of Hurry's narrator's voice in the poetic piece in Mauritian Creole, the emphasis is put on the animal's point of view. The dodo itself makes an expose of the contemporary state of affairs of ex-colonial powers (the Dutch is constipated/ the French is looking for

⁷⁷ This has been deconstructed in the natural sciences by certain researchers, as discussed in section 4.1 (Live Science, 2014; Gold, Bourdon and Norell, 2016; Hume, 2017).

relief/ While the English blows its own trumpets). This is similar to the Creole translation of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* by the language activist, Dev Virahsawmy, which exposes the 'rotten' state of affairs from the protagonist' murdered father's point of view.⁷⁸ In the play, Hamlet's father appears as a ghost and demands to be heard: 'Ouver to zorey plito, ekout mwa' ('Open you ears instead, listen to me' from the original '... lend thy serious hearing/To what I shall unfold' (Act 1, Line 5)). The dodo in Hurry's poetry also instigates us to 'listen'. Hurry achieves this by putting emphasis on the narrator's voice, the I (I, the dodo, was a fat bird/I, the dodo, forgot how to fly). In this sense, Hurry's work on the bird, despite an artwork to be viewed and contemplated at, strays away from the exoticised object of display.

Furthermore, the first-person singular, as in '*moi dodo*' (I, the dodo) emphasises a narration in the first person and is a narrative technique, offers a subjective positionality to a usually peripheral voice like the dodo. A first-person narrator also speaks directly to the reader and acts as (or is) an honest witness to events. The 'impossible speech' (Hartman, 2008, p. 3) of the dodo, through the first person narrative voice in the poem, also presupposes a sonic resonance of the utterance of the live bird. The 'human voice' of the animal, in Hurry's poetry, is not a form of anthropomorphism but a social commentary on the colonial erasure of the sounds and songs of birds which were made extinct.

Birds and birdsong have received special attention in the inscription of island sonic cultures and 'their representation function prominently in discursive formations that mythologise New World beauty, colonial mimicry, Creole speech, and human subjection (Hill, 2013, pp. 8–9). Hill (2013) reveals how birds' species have 'fascinated canonical travel writers, even as imperial conquest and colonial settlement decimated bird populations, sometimes to extinction' (p. 9).

...extinction only functions to further cement the New World as the testament of an ancient world ... A palimpsest of mythological loss – extinct species, genocidal massacres of indigenous populations, Eldorados and Biblical paradises lost – forms the cadre to be filled by the imperial voice (p. 9).

If the sound of the dodo could be recreated, it would not be heard as 'songs' (taking the book *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in the age of Extinction* by David

⁷⁸ The play was written between 1599 and 1602.

Quammen (1996) as reference) but most likely as moans and shrieks of pain of the hunted bird, in the same way that Hartman, who writes about deciphering the ‘silences’ of the archives of slavery, explains that ‘the locus of impossible speech’ (2008, p. 3) is what is impossible to historicise, represent or enunciate, such as ‘the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law’ of the enslaved (p. 12).⁷⁹

According to Hartman, writing the history of slavery consists of highlighting the impossible speech, namely the screams transformed into songs, the shouts of victory, the anger, as well as ‘the rumors, scandals, lies, invented evidence, fabricated confessions, volatile facts, impossible metaphors, chance events, and fantasies that constitute the archive and determine what can be said about the past’ (p. 9). Kempadoo, in her construction of Creole in the Caribbean archive, draws from Fanon and Glissant and refers to the verbal delirium, the forced poetics or counterpoetics and the language of neurosis of Creole.

Screamed speech becomes knotted into contorted speech (2016, p. 32).

Creole cannot be murmured, it is the language of either the urgent whisper or the frenzied shriek (Dash, 1989, in Kempadoo, 2016, p. 32).

I draw from the works of the scholar Edwin C. Hill who writes on Francophone sound in the Black Atlantic. He establishes silencing as a colonial mechanism of erasure and control and takes the example of the voices and languages of Indigenous peoples across the Americas or Australia for example, Creole speech in the Caribbean (and the Indian Ocean as will be discussed in Chapter Five) or the sounds of animals of the pre-colonial world. Hill draws from Mary Louise Pratt, author of *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* to establish a link between the institutional knowledge produced by the natural history and oral and sonic epistemologies that colonial institutions are ill-equipped to decipher.

While ‘natural history conceived of the world as a chaos out of which the scientist produced an order’ (Pratt [, 1992, p.] 30, her emphasis), the soundscape represents all that the imperial gaze was ill-equipped or unprepared to orderly register (Hill, 2013, p. 3).

⁷⁹ Quammen’s book (1998) looks at extinction in island ecosystems. What captured my attention is the title *The Song of the Dodo*, which I argue depicts a nostalgic discourse of extinction, for example a yearning to hear the ‘song’ of the live animal in order to avoid a reflection on the colonial ordering of the non-European world which silenced the bird.

The natural sciences posit a distance with the sonic and auditory environment (Hill, 2013, p. 3). This distance is also ‘the blind visions of sound that emerge where the imperial gaze comes up against its own epistemological limits’ (p. 3). Sound is marginalised ‘as a function of both the overt scientific and “covert” imperial objectives’ (p. 3). While I discuss the hyper-presence (visual) of the death (taxidermy, skeleton, artworks of extinct animals) in the Natural Science Museum, the sound of the dodo, for example, cannot be recreated and if it would, it would not be in the soothing form of songs or music, but of moans and shrieks of the bird dying.

This reiterates what Kilomba calls ‘a long history of imposed silence’ (2010, p. 12) when she discusses the semiotics of the imagery of the facemask as ‘the brutal mask of speechlessness’ (p. 16). In Hurry’s poetry, the dodo breaks the silence and speaks of the trauma of its demise as well as the othering of his spectral existence that occurs with present representations. The poetic piece acts as a postscript to the art object and allows Hurry to make audible the voice from the past.

The decoloniality of aesthetics in Hurry’s poetry also lies in his use of ‘rough patois’, in contrast with the acrolectal and standardised Creole which is close to the French lexifier. Hurry’s Creole would be considered ‘rough’, ‘vulgar’, and ‘raw’. The ‘vulgarity’ of the oral language of Creole has also been articulated by Cooper in relation to how oral languages were considered ‘vulgar’ in contrast to ‘refined’ languages with a history of written literature (1993, p. 8). ‘Dilo’ (compared to the more urbanised ‘delo’ from the French term ‘de l’eau’, ‘water’ in English), ‘senti pis’ (in comparison to ‘senti move’ from the French ‘sentir mauvais’ – ‘stinks’ in English) or ‘couyon’ ('stupid' or 'moron' in English) are all terms and words that Hurry purposefully poeticises from the scribability of the language (particularly from the rural context of Mauritius) for impact. Cooper refers to ‘verbal maroonage’ (1993, p. 136) which is predominantly an oral verbal art form, in relation to the Jamaican scribal literary tradition of using the rude impulse of the language and reasserting it in contemporary forms.

Hurry uses the word ‘couyon’ (*Ti couyon couma banne colon, moi dodo* – I, the Dodo, was as stupid as the coloniser) – which means ‘stupid’ or ‘idiot’ in a slang patronising way – to blame the coloniser for bringing the dodo to extinction. He makes use of the rough and vulgar use of the Creole language, what I read here as ‘commanding’ and ‘forceful’ attributes of the language (Paugh, 2012), and turns it into a Creole poetics. Amy Paugh studied Dominican Patwa on the island of Dominica, which has similar language patterns as Mauritius, and found that the Creole speakers

themselves read the Creole language as more ‘commanding’ and ‘forceful’ and is better suited for emotional expression and transmission of embodied histories. In comparison, Paugh reveals that English was ridiculed for being ‘soft’ or ‘gentle’ (p. 119).

Hurry associates the forceful rough Creole language, such as ‘couyon’ – ‘stupid’ or ‘senti pis’ – ‘stinks’ with the angry tone of the bird to reinforce the condemnation of derogatory references imposed on the bird by Europeans. Sarcastically, he reverses the ‘rude impulse’ to question whether the settler was not more ignorant for eating a tasteless bird. The literal translation of *‘Ti blié coument envolé, moi dodo’* would be ‘I, the dodo, forgot how to fly’, but the most effective (and affective) translation in slang English would be closer to ‘You moron think I forgot how to fly, right?’. The ‘raw’ tonality of speaking in rough Creole changes what looks like a declarative clause (sentence which functions as a statement) – ‘I, the dodo, forgot how to fly’ – into an interrogative (rhetorical in the sense here) and imperative clause (which functions as command) – ‘You moron think I forgot how to fly, right?’. In this respect, I argue Hurry produces a decolonial poetics which positions the Creole language outside its colonial and national appropriation.

Hurry’s poetic practice echoes in many ways the political move of language activist Dev Virahsawmy to ‘vulgarise’ Creole.⁸⁰ Two different definitions of the verb ‘vulgarise’ are taken into consideration: to ‘popularise’ as well as to ‘debase and make less refined’. These two definitions of ‘vulgar’ summarise the political move of Virahsawmy since the 1950s to promote the Creole language as a national language and to produce creative writing, very often in a spoken ‘rough’ Creole. Virahsawmy is a writer in the ‘oraliterate’ (Cooper, 1993, p. 136) tradition and – from his linguistic background – commands the full breadth of the scribal/oral literary continuum. Furthermore, ‘spontaneous verbal wit illustrates how artistry in oral composition

⁸⁰ In the poem *Patwa grosie* (Rough patois) (undated), Virahsawmy denounced the prejudices towards the Creole mother tongue, defined as a rough and vulgar pidgin. He also refers to how Creole speakers are made to feel intimidated by the varieties, accents, rhythms and pitches in their spoken rural Creole.

Mauritian Creole	English translation
Patwa grosie	Rough Creole
Zot tou dir mwa mo koz grosie;	Everyone tells me I speak rough Creole;
Mo koz patwa ek sipakwa.	And that I just babble in Creole.
Mo bizen koz sivilize;	I need to speak civilized;
Pa fer kouma sorti dan bwa.	And not imitate those who came from the woods.
Mo ti telman entimide	I was so intimidated
Ki mo ti koumans vinn gaga.	That I started stuttering
Enn sans enn fwa enn ti pagla	Luckily, an insane person told me, once,
Ti dir mwa aret pran traka:	to stop worrying:
‘Enn diaman brit dan to labous	‘A rough diamond, from your mouth
Enn zoli bizou pou akous’.	Will become a precious jewel’.

functions – as in the written tradition' (p. 119).

Both Virahsawmy and Hurry subverts the literary genre of poetry with spontaneous rough Creole verbal wit, which is the art of the oral poet and is essentially formulaic (p. 120). Cooper quotes Walter J. Ong, a scholar who researched the impact of the transition from orality to literacy on culture and education:

‘formulaic style marks not poetry alone, but more or less, all thought and expression in primary oral culture. Early written poetry everywhere, it seems, is at first necessarily a mimicking in script of oral performance. The mind has initially no properly chirographic resources. You scratch out on a surface words you imagine yourself saying aloud in some realisable oral setting’ (Ong, 1982, in Cooper, 1993, p. 120).

While Virahsawmy as a linguist remains concerned with the challenges of writing with an oral language – literacy, literature, orthography, nationalisation – the visual artist Hurry approaches the oral/scribal literary continuum with what Cooper formulates as ‘a mimicking in script of oral performance’ (p. 120). Through the written text, the emphatic voice of Hurry, as well as the variety (rural) of his spoken Creole, is omnipresent. Hurry furthermore does not ascribe to the official orthography when writing poetry and texts in Mauritian Creole. His practice of ‘vulgarizing’ French is a subversion of the colonial ideology of ‘proper’ French or a purified Creole. Creole ‘vulgarity’ is theorised as a subversion of the imposition of ‘superior’ colonial languages as well as the imposition of a bourgeois Francophone Creole on the ‘wild tongues’ (Anzaldúa, 1987) of the streets. For Carolyn Cooper, the need to contest the vulgarity of the vulgar is itself necessary (1993, p. 8).

Listening (as decolonial method instead of reading the language) to Creole and the creative practices in the language involve moving away from reading the language as the ‘*parole* [speech] mimicking the dominant culture’s *langue* [language]’ and from ‘the burden of colonial education [which] makes bearers of the *langue* of Empire, both literally and tropologically [figuratively]’ (Cooper, 1993, p. 174). Hurry, moreover, avoids the official orthography by writing Creole with a French lexifier, as he confesses that it formed part of his ‘colonial history’ to have learned French grammar at school, while the Creole language he spoke at home was relegated to an oral form of communication.

Creole languages are also not monolingual as imposed by a colonial viewpoint of monolingualism or multi/bilingualism. In most creole societies, code-switching – speaking in two or more languages – is the norm. Other inherited European languages

(or in this case, ancestral languages from India) share the linguistic repertoire of the speaker, with the result that other commonly spoken languages are not discarded by creole societies. In this sense, Hurry's art practice challenges settler aesthetics, subverts the colonial appropriation of the language as discussed in the next chapter by positioning the scribability of Mauritian Creole in his poetry.

Hurry advocates for the refiguring of the self, outside the narrative of a nostalgia of the past as depicted by other artists. Hurry's intervention starts with the retelling of history, considering that history is in itself a form of narrative just like fiction stories are. 'While the story of history has ended/We can only tell stories' (Lines 9-10, in the poem above). Therefore, storytelling, which supposes an act of remembering so that telling can be done, is left to do. It is not about telling another story but retelling the story which has just ended, referring to the 'end' of a way of historicising an event. Firoz Ghanty puts across a similar point: 'The story of history is non-exhaustive. It will take me more than a lifetime to keep (re-)narrating everything' ('*Si pou rakonte mem, mo lavi fini, zistwar listwar ena ankor mem*') (Ghanty 2014). Hurry's poetic pieces bring the reader to the subjectivities of memory, entering a dialogue with objective history writing and its linearity.

For Hurry, as soon as the limitations of official history are recognised, the act of retelling or telling stories becomes a necessary act. Most importantly, Hurry makes vocal the extinct bird and 'imagine what cannot be verified' (Hartman, 2008, p. 12). In this respect, he deciphers the silences of the archive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I found Mignolo's decoloniality of aesthetics useful to frame the artistic works of Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry on the theme of the dodo. They both questioned the mainstream representations of the bird, which I argue are derived from the colonial memorial framework instituted by the museum of natural history in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Ghanty challenges the nationalisation of the symbol of extinction in Mauritius. This supports the argument developed in this research, that colonial representations are reproduced in the national culture and are deconstructed in the visual arts. This chapter sheds light on the alternative historiographies that can be

read from the works of the two artists. It is in that perspective that I introduce the term ‘performative historiography’ (Fabião, 2012) to discuss the last research question raised in this thesis: in what ways can an alternative historiography be constructed from a decoloniality of aesthetics?

This research also presented the scribal and sonic dimension of poetry in Creole – in contrast to the literary, formalist and linguistic aspect of the language – through the work of Nirmal Hurry. In his poem, he makes use of the Creole language as a political tool to challenge dominant artistic and linguistic paradigms. He used the ‘rough’ aspect of the language to question the contemporary narratives of extinction through poetry. While the decoloniality of aesthetics provided a conceptual framework to analyse contemporary art, it proved inefficient to discuss Creole and the music in the mother tongue. Mignolo, himself, warned that decoloniality is an option, not a mission (Gaztambide-Fernández and Mignolo, 2014). In this sense, the next chapter turns to Black and Caribbean Studies to build a genealogy of the Creole language.

In the ethos of Hurry’s spectral dodo, Chapter Five will look at the connection between the hauntological and the process of mourning in the sega performance, a creative practice in the Creole language. It aims at proposing a method of listening to language and understanding sonic cultures outside colonial epistemologies and paradigms of knowledge, hence building a decolonial historiography of colonisation.

Chapter 5. Autopoiesis: Singing in M‘other’ Tongues

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry used the Creole language as a political tool and developed a decolonial artistic practice. Chapter Five pushes this analysis further to answer the last proposition made in this research: how to construct a historiography that challenges the myth of origin of the colonial founders, as discussed in the previous chapters. Most importantly, this chapter proposes a method of looking at/listening to the sonic Creole culture as a practice of deciphering the plantation logic that, as argued in the Chapter Two, induce Mauritians into a colonial anaesthesia, which results in their lack of historical knowledge.

I contextualised the history of the language in the first section where I discuss how the Creole mother tongue is a vehicle for a sonic culture in the Indian Ocean. The methodology of thinking through sound and listening has been invaluable to propose an alternative historiography of mainland Mauritius. This chapter is about ‘listening’ to the Creole language and the sega (a performative art form consisting of dance, music, storytelling and song in the Creole language) as a method.

Furthermore, I question the epistemology that categorises the sega as ‘vernacular’, ‘primitive’, ‘oral’ or ‘folklore’ and reduces oral/aural practices to an inferior status by discussing the contemporary sega *angaze* and seggae as the micro mechanisms of autopoiesis. Caribbean theories and methods of analysing/writing were crucial to this chapter which focuses on the creative practices of the Black/Creole people. As explained in Chapter One, the scholarship on the Indian Ocean and the literature on creolisation as a process of mixture, have been insufficient to analyse the ‘autopoetic languaging living system’ (Wynter, 2007, p. 17) of the enslaved people, following the suppression of their original languages.

Sega and the Creole languages are read here as processes of self-creation and practices of rehumanisation that allow for new possibilities of sociality under regimes of oppression. Moreover, the seggae is discussed as a Creole futurity as I argue it represents the technologising of sega from the influence of the sonic, musical and political element of Jamaican roots reggae.

5.1 On Linguistic Violence and the Creole M‘other’ Tongue

[It] is the speakers, rather than languages themselves, who are the agents of language shift (Paugh, 2012, p. 3).

In music, dance, poetry, oratory, storytelling, acts of defiance and personal success, slave descendants in Mauritius, as well as the most impoverished and marginalised of the Indian Indentured labourers, continue to fight oppression and racial invectives (TJC, vol. 3, p. 604).

‘You know [Jamaican culture] is really a sonic culture’ – Stuart Hall to Julian Henriques (Henriques, 2011, p. ix).

Mauritian Creole (and its varieties, pitches and accents within the different islands as well as between the urban and rural areas) is the main language of communication across the Mauritius islands. The Creole language is also the mother tongue of seventy percent of the population of Mauritius, despite the official use of European languages and the cultural relevance of ancestral languages. It has, nevertheless, been stigmatised for its association with slavery (Boswell, 2006) and its history of orality and has been considered a derivative of the French culture. In this respect, the play word ‘m‘other’tongue’ is used to describe the othering of the mother tongue.

The present stigmatisation of Creole is a perpetuation of a long history of violence on, first, the mother tongues of people enslaved from the African continent, Madagascar and South Asia – suppressed under the system of slavery – and the Creole language developed by the enslaved. Within the framework of decoloniality, two stages of epistemic colonisation are delineated in relation to Mauritian Creole:

- (1) French slavery and linguistic violence on the languages of the enslaved people
- (2) colonial appropriation of the Creole language by francophiles under English administration in parallel with the strategic repression of Indian mother tongues.

For more than a century during French colonisation (1715-1810), the different languages brought by enslaved people, in conjunction with French – hypothesised as probably dialects from Brittany (Chaudenson and Mufwene, 2001) – provided the initial interface that impelled those whose mothertongues were suppressed on the plantation to develop a Creole language as a means of communication. Creole languages, with French lexicons and African and Indian syntax, were abruptly developed in both the

French Caribbean and southern states of the United States, like Louisiana, and the Indian Ocean and are differentiated from other pidgins and patois developed from English and Spanish colonisation (Glissant, 1997).⁸¹ While most languages usually developed gradually, Creole languages exhibit an abrupt break in the course of their historical development from what has been theorised as the ‘linguistic violence’ (Arends, Muysken and Smith, 1994, p. 4) or ‘linguistic terrorism’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38) provoked by the institutionalised violence of chattel slavery, where African (Malagasy and South/South East Asian in the context of the Indian Ocean) tongues of enslaved people were suppressed under forms of epistemic colonialism.

In this context, I establish a decolonial genealogy of the Creole language to reveal that the mothertongues of the enslaved were figuratively ‘cut out’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 34), demonstrative of the linguistic violence under the cultural domination of French settlers. I use the metaphor of tongues being cut out, by Chicano writer Gloria Anzaldúa, to express the viscerality of the violence of being made ashamed to speak in one’s mother tongue – ‘Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out’ (p. 34). Anzaldúa’s visceral writing on the epistemic colonisation of her ‘wild’ mother tongue (Chicano Spanish) - through shame, repeated attacks, discomfort, fear and guilt which diminish self-esteem throughout her life – which she delineates as linguistic terrorism – projects the epistemic colonisation on languages: ‘So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language ... for a language to remain alive it must be used’ (1987, p. 59).

In relation to enslavement and Creole languages, Degriff, a prominent Haitian linguist who was inspired by Frantz Fanon and C.L.R James, explains how the linguistic behaviour of the enslaved was viewed as abnormal or as a ‘linguistic monstrosity’ (2005, p. 535) – a term which he borrowed from Michel Foucault – to reflect on the way that the enslaved, not considered human under slavery, therefore a monster, could only produce a monstrous Creole language. This phenomenon is visible in many postcolonial nations where European languages have been adopted and valorised to the detriment of indigenous/native languages. Discourses on indigenous languages have also long fuelled postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, in relation to a system of knowledge which ascribed indigenous languages and cultural knowledge primitive status (Mignolo,

⁸¹ So far, linguists and historians have researched the influence of African and Indian languages on Mauritian Creole (Vaughan, 2005; Virahsawmy, in Mooneeram, 2009).

2009, p. 7). It demonstrates the epistemic violence on indigenous languages which caused either their extinction, a reduction in their usage or neglect from nationalist policies (Mignolo, 2009; Ngũgĩ, 1986).

In the context of Mauritius during the French and English colonial period (1715-1968), the term ‘Creole’ was used to distinguish settlers born in the colony from the metropolitan French (Police, 2005). The death of the mother tongues of the enslaved, hence cultural traditions which languages carry, caused the deculturation (Ngũgĩ, 1986) of the people, and in the process of a hundred years of bi-racial interaction (coercive or not), any attachment to the continents was severed. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, author of the seminal text *Decolonising the mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), elaborates:

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Ngũgĩ, 1986, pp. 15-16).

The different aspects of language use, ‘language of real life, language as communication in speech, and the written language’ (Ngũgĩ, 1986, pp. 13-15) is often inherent within the speaker’s mother tongue, which allows for a smooth transmission of the culture which the language carries.⁸² The mode of African integration into settler societies disallowed a process of what Rastafari scholar Robbie Shilliam calls ‘self-indiginization’, due to the forced uprooting of Africans (Shilliam, 2011, p. 91) under chattel slavery and the epistemic colonisation which followed the imposition of settler epistemologies (under Christianity, capitalism, patriarchy and racism).⁸³ Sylvia Wynter also makes a reference to Africans from the continent, in comparison to the African diaspora, who still managed to remain auto-centered and experience themselves as human within the terms of their own autopoiesis (Wynter, 2015, p. 27). While there were no Indigenous peoples on the Mauritius islands, the enslaved people were compelled to self-institute a Creole culture through the indigenisation and rehumanisation of the colonised landscape. Mauritian Creole originated from the new

⁸² Fanon’s psychoanalytical reading of the linguistic condition in Martinique, echoes a similar situation in Mauritius. ‘The children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children for using it’ (Fanon, 2008, p. 10). Similar to the experience of creole languages in the Antilles and in Mauritius, Ngũgĩ recalls the ‘humiliating experiences’ of being caught speaking Gikuyu in Kenyan colonial schools, where English was rewarded and native languages undermined.

⁸³ Shilliam developed his reflection on ‘self-indiginization’ after observing the Maori culture in New Zealand which he found is kept alive despite settler colonialism.

linguistic living systems and modes of sociality in the colony and forms part of the visceral history of enslavement.

After the suppression of indigenous languages in the Indian Ocean islands, a second erasure occurred with the denigration of the Creole language by French settlers, as well as the later appropriation of the orality and soundscape of the language when the islands passed to British hands, as I explain further down. In French Mauritius, when the ratio of settlers to the enslaved people and their children of mixed race began to preoccupy officials, the term ‘Creole’ was defined in marriage legislations to represent an emerging mixed population (TJC, 2011, p. 107).

It later became a reference to categorise people of mixed races – or to denote people of African, Malagasy or Indian origins – as a racialised marker of inferiority in the plantation colony. It was also closely related to the Creole language, which was consequently not considered as a full-fledged human language. The varieties in the Creole language were situated within the structural segregation of the enslaved people within a plantation logic (McKittrick, 2013, p. 11) – plantation creole, fort creoles, maroon creoles – which further erased the geographical origins as well as the visual, linguistic and sonic aspects of their ancestral culture after enslavement.⁸⁴

The varieties in the language are articulated, in linguistic terms, as ‘a continuum of speech-forms varying from the creole at one end of the spectrum (the basilect), through intermediate forms (mesolectal varieties), to the lexifier language (the acrolect)’ (Arends, Muysken and Smith, 1994, p. 5). For example, in the Atlantic, those enslaved to serve in the colonials’ household spoke an ‘acrolectal’ Creole, while those who escaped, according to Creolists, developed a ‘radical creole language extant today ... [due to] its subsequent isolation from other languages’ as they were formed their own communities far from the rest of the colony (p. 16).⁸⁵ In the twentieth century, ‘Creoles’ and ‘ti Crôoles’ (creoles of the rural working areas) in Mauritius have referred to people with African phenotype whose mother tongue is the Creole language (Boswell, 2006, p. 47), reproducing colonial paradigms in the postcolony.

Under the violence of eighteenth-century French slavery, an indigenised (I use the

⁸⁴ An afro-genesis has been proposed by the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission to retrace the African roots of enslaved people.

⁸⁵ There are different accents and pitches in the Creole language as spoken across the island. An acrolectal Creole is usually the one closer to the urban Creole and in the case of Mauritius closer to the French language in terms of accents. The acrolectal Creole is usually standardised.

term as a contrast to the term creolised) language of communication developed, which despite retaining close lexical links to the enslaver's tongue, subverted the French language. The coloniser's language, I argue, was indigenised and a Creole culture emerged around a new creative linguistic repertoire. According to Cooper's work on Jamaica, the Creole language is first placed 'at the centre of the theorising project' (1993, p. 174), in the same way that Cooper positions localised Jamaican texts at the centre of her writing project 'to discover what the texts themselves can be made to tell us about the nature of cultural production in our centres of learning' (p. 174). For Cooper, 'counter-colonising Creole tongues' involve seeing the reverse side of the coin that the Creole language 'africanise colonial languages [which] confirms the humanity of language creators as 'proactive bearers of culture, not mere zombies – passive receptacles of the will of the enslaving other' (1993, p. 174).

In both the French Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, people of mixed race adopted the European language as mother tongue for economic emancipation, which is a form of epistemic colonisation. French still remains the mother tongue of most of the Franco-Mauritians and later the rising urban bourgeoisie of Indo-Mauritians (Asgarally, 2015, p. 82), who use Creole only to communicate with Creole speakers. People of mixed race also cannot be homogenised, as skin colour, Caucasoid features and language varietal differentiation, together with class differentiation, mark a conspicuous divide between them and the Franco-Mauritians. The renunciation of Creole (or other respective ancestral languages) as mother tongue and the relegation of its usage to a language of communication, as well as the adoption of French as mother tongue, are all 'hostages' of a Francophile culture, reproduced later by the assimilation programme of the Francophonie (Derrida, 1998). Adopting the language of the colonial culture as mother tongue also implies mimicking the culture of the enslaver (Fanon, 2008; Ngũgĩ 1986). This reveals an 'inexhaustible solipsism' (Derrida, 1998, p. 1) which provokes the enunciator to defend the French language above his/her other linguistic and cultural (ancestral) traditions. He/She becomes 'a subject of French culture' (p. 1). Derrida reminds us that a dominant linguistic ideology occurs by choice or coercion (p. 32).

Coloniality also lies in the 'voluntary' decision to choose the European language as mother tongue. Within a psychoanalytical lens, Frantz Fanon states that 'there is extraordinary power in the possession of a language' and that 'the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards' (2008, p. 61). For Fanon, devalorising Creole languages is a reflection of a

complex of inferiority, which is derived from a ‘dependency complex’ (p. 61) of the colonised people, visible in the attachment of the colonised, to European languages.

Secondly, the appropriation of the orality and soundscape of the Creole language by francophiles under English administration, in parallel with the denigration of Indian mother tongues, is another aspect of linguistic violence and coloniality. Taking as example the first published poetry in Creole written by French settlers between 1822 and 1831, a decade after the French were dispossessed of their political and statutory privileges, Police (2001, p. 9) observes that ‘in their speeches, [there is] a certain attempt to legitimise symbolically – in language and music – their belonging to the administratively conquered territory’ (p. 10). In the literary field of the pre-Independence years, poetry in Creole was written by and for the petite bourgeoisie (Gauthier, 2017; Ramharai, 1993). Wynter is articulate about the sacrifice of languages which is normalised through the values of a Western bourgeoisie:

As an ‘underside’ reality, therefore, that would have to be subjectively experienced by him, as, the ‘chose maudite’, central to the ‘order of sacrifice and/or of language’ instituting of the normalcy of his proper self on the genrespecific model of that of the Western bourgeoisie (2007, p. 10).

In the first published poetry in Creole, *Les Essais d'un bobre africain* (1822), the author François Chrestien describes the language as a ‘naive patois of our favourable conditions’ (p. 1). The act of conflating naïveté to the Creole language, accentuated further by the ‘favourable conditions’ of the writer’s position, demonstrates a settler’s gaze embedded in an imperialist nostalgia. The abolition of slavery was imposed on French settlers by English rule and the nostalgia for an imperial past of slavery is revealed in the works of the poets in the colony.⁸⁶

The literature in Creole produced a space of escape for the once dominant group and became an ‘amusement for a francophone elite comfortably conscious of its own cultural and linguistic superiority’ (Mooneeram, 2009, p. 51). It is, moreover, based on the burlesque (pp. 50-51) as well as the textual structure of a French poetic model (use of conversation, rhymes and organised in couplets) in the format of song books (Police, 2001, p. 9). The history of Creole literature starting with colonial poetry, despite the

⁸⁶ During the French revolution, a Colonial Assembly was formed, in extremis, by Franco-Mauritian planters to oppose the abolition of slavery on the island. While slavery is abolished in France in 1794, slavery was restored by Napoleon, in 1802, to maintain the French colonies. Under English administration, slavery was officially abolished, in 1833, in the Indian Ocean islands.

process of ‘positivisation’ (Police, 2005), which it represents, informs the making of a colonial history.

The analysis of written or/and scribal Creole also reveals how colonial appropriation of the Creole language by francophiles under English administration ran in parallel with the strategic denigration of mother tongues brought by Indians during the system of Indenture on the island (Eisenlohr, 2006). The expansion of Creole to the younger generation whose mother tongue was initially Bhojpuri and other Indian languages, spread through schooling, socialisation and the urban-rural mobility, and brought an irreversibility to Creole as the main language of communication. The Creole language initially spread in Mauritius, across class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and did not overpower Bhojpuri and other Indo-languages, as witnessed in the rural areas in the nineteenth century (Eisenlohr, 2006).

At the time of independence, Mauritians spoke twenty-two ancestral/‘indigenous’ languages, with knowledge of a dozen more languages, identified as mother tongues of Indian ancestors. These languages still play an important role in the cultural, religious and ritualistic set up of the different communities. Mauritian Creole (and its varieties) is the main language of communication across the Mauritius islands, but depending on the urban or rural nature of the setting, any verbal interaction on the streets (the physical spaces of the streets but also in the intimacy of the home) occurs in Mauritian Creole or in Bhojpuri (Asgarally, 2015).

Similarly, in relation to the soundscape which is the object of analysis in this chapter, a genealogy of the rootsical sega reveals that the performative art form practised by the Creole people was prohibited in the Code Noir in 1723 (Police, 1998).⁸⁷ This was thirteen years into French settler colonialism on the island. The Code Noir prescribes rules to forbid the ‘festivities’ and the collectivising of the enslaved who, in the context of the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, left their respective plantation complex to gather in isolated areas of the island.⁸⁸ Segá was also undermined by people of mixed race and the Roman Catholic Church during both French and English colonisation.

⁸⁷ Different varieties of the Creole language and sega are present on the individual islands of Mauritius, as well as within the other islands in the Indian Ocean region. The *Moutia* from Seychelles, *Sega Tambour* from Rodrigues, Chagossian Segá with *makalapo* and *Maloya* from Réunion, for example, individually emerged from geographical contexts of enslavement, whose difference lies in relation to the different regions of Madagascar and Africa from where people were enslaved, and the process of indigenisation within each specific context.

⁸⁸ The Code Noir also made provision to caution colonists who were found to endorse and participate in the get-togethers (Police, 1998, p. 132).

Around independence, nationalist campaigns around language activism and movements of decolonisation promoted the Creole language as a tool for building national common denominators. In the 1950s, sega was popularised and commercialised by Franco-Mauritians and people of mixed race who were the main stakeholders of the media and culture.⁸⁹ In parallel with the bourgeoisie's endorsement of a commercial sega, a language consciousness was triggered from the 1970s onwards through the works of Dev Virahsawmy, a linguist of Indian origin, as well as language activists such as Ledikasyon Pu Travayer (an organisation actively involved in the standardisation of Mauritian Creole for literary and literacy purposes), and other language activists (Ah-Vee, Collen and Kistnasamy, 2012).⁹⁰ Five overlapping stages (Harmon, 2011) of 'positivisation' (Police, 2005) can be traced in the evolution of Mauritian Creole from around the time of independence until the language was eventually codified:

- 1) 1960s: nationalism around language as a marker of national unity;
- 2) 1970s: class struggle and trade unionism militating for the language to be employed for popular education and adult literacy;
- 3) late 1970s: the golden era when cultural militants used Creole to revitalise music (sega was regenerated into a sega *angaze* (protest songs) from several groups associated with the movement of decolonisation), theatre and the arts (with pioneers Firoz Ghanty and his brother Ismet Ganti);
- 4) late 1990s: an AfroKreol movement, regrouping Creoles who appropriate the language as ancestral identity, which gained momentum after the death, in the hands of the police, of seggae artist Kaya;
- 5) the codification of Mauritian Creole in 2004: a codified Mauritian Creole has since then been prescribed in certain schools, based on programs to facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills in the learner's mother tongue.

⁸⁹ For example, La Nuit du Séga (The Sega night) was organised by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism in 1964 to propel the sega 'nationally'. Joseph Ravaton, commonly known as Tifrer was a sega singer of Malagasy origin (whose father came to Mauritius after the abolition of slavery) and was crowned the 'King of Segá'. I argue that by crowning Tifrer as the 'King', and as such unique and above other sega artists, the uniqueness of choice of the Francophile bourgeoisie was promoted. It is also in this sense that I differentiate the sega *tipik* (the typical sega) to which Tifrer is associated with and which has been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, with the rootsical sega which is the sega of the enslaved. I however agree that Tifrer's voice, musical composition and instrumental prowess were, without any doubt, unique although the artist had been criticized for practicing a burlesque variety of sega with sexist lyrics about alcoholism, domestic violence and idleness in the colony (Paniken, 2011, in Assonne, 2013).

⁹⁰ Virahsawmy does not focus only on formulating Creole orthographies but also on producing creative literary works in Creole. He continues to produce a wide repertoire of poems, translations, newspaper articles, editorials and academic articles written solely in Mauritian Creole.

The use of Mauritian Creole was initially a tool for nationalist aspiration as well as propaganda, similar to the cultural movement of creole nationalisms (very often initiated by an urban intellectual elite) which occurred in certain Caribbean island societies such as St Lucia and Haiti, which has the world's largest Creole-speaking population, and the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean. Mother tongues have played a role in the postcolonial project of nation building and decolonisation in many countries (Said, 1993; Ngũgĩ, 1986). The contemporary use of Creole languages across many Creolophone societies reveals 'a response to or consequence of conditions of acute social inequality and symbolic domination' (Paugh, 2012, pp. 2-3).

In this sense, an analysis of creative practices in the Creole language (such as the rootsical sega, sega *angaze* and seggae) is made in the next sections to pinpoint what Lugones calls 'epistemologies of resistance/liberation' (2003, p. 208) which are, in the context of my research, embodied in the language of resistance/liberation of the enslaved and the Creole people. Segga *angaze* (protest songs) was developed from socio-political groups of artists in the 1970s involved in the campaign that proposed the Creole language as a symbol of national unity.

Seggae, another sub-genre of sega, was birthed in the 1980s from the influence of Bob Marley's political lyrics, Rastafari philosophy as well as the bass of roots reggae. The influence of Bob Marley and roots reggae on the Mauritian musical scene had an impact on many sega artists in the 1980s, particularly on Kaya, who was revered by the Creole community and embodied a status as legendary as Bob Marley in the Creole consciousness. Kaya was inspired by both the musicality, the political lyrics and the new soundscape of reggae music that spread across continents in the 1980s after the death of Bob Marley. I argue, in the final section of Chapter Five, that seggae remains philosophically closer to the autopoiesis of the rootsical sega and develops from the cartographies of struggle of the Black/Creole people, in the case here Roche Bois where Kaya and his family lived.

5.2 The Hauntological: Segá and the Possibility of Mourning

‘Le Morne’

Leritaz nou zanset
 nou oule nou pa oule
 toultan pou ena valer sa
 pran nou ravann
 si sega zoli zordi
 se parski nou pann les li tonbe
 parey kouma Lemorn
 zordi tann dir li menase
 somey gran dimounn
 ki ti pe repoze laba
 la rivyer disan pe fer tourbiyon
 dan mo lespri pe fer mwa rapel

Komye ena ti monte
 lao Lemorn laba
 prefere zete a koz kontan liberte
 fode pa nou blyie
 na pas finn zete pou naryen
 listwar ena valer me li la pou fer reflesi
 (2)

Twa desandan esklav
 to bizin na pa onte
 to bizin afirm to lidantite
 pran kont to pase
 napa less li pietine
 koumsa mem to pou kone ki to ete
 parey kouma Le Morne
 sekinn ekrir pann efase
 nou la po ena soley
 ki ti ne dan Lafrik laba
 nou ti sot la mer
 ti ena tourbiyon
 mo memwar vivan pe fer mwa rapel

Olale lalile, olala elala
 Tilale lalile olo laelala
 (Assonne, 2000, in Assonne, 2013)

‘Le Morne’

Our ancestors' history
 whether we want it or not
 will always be treasured
 our ravann
 if we still have segá today
 it's because we never stopped playing
 similar to Le Morne
 today we hear that it's unprotected
 our wise ancestors
 who are resting there
 rivers of blood keep swirling
 in my head and I remember

How many climbed
 the mountain of Le Morne
 chose to jump off and die to be free
 we should not forget
 that they did not take their life in vain
 history is important but should make us reflect
 (2)

Your ancestors were enslaved
 you should not be ashamed
 claim your history
 reflect on the past
 don't be crushed by it
 then you will know who you are
 similar to Le Morne
 what happened there has not been erased
 our skin carries the sun
 born in Africa far away from here
 we crossed the ocean
 and faced the storms
 I carry their memories and I remember

Olale lalile, olala elala
 Tilale lalile olo laelala
 (Assonne, 2000, in Assonne, 2013, (author's
 translation))

‘Le Morne’ (lyrics above) is a sega *angaze* by Cassiya, a group of sega artists whose album *Séparation: Zenfans perdi simé* (*Separation: Children who lose their way*) became popular in Mauritius in 1993.⁹¹ Its lyrics in Mauritian Creole cover the thematics of enslavement and reveal the ‘legendary’ story of Le Morne, which is about a group of maroon slaves who ‘chose to jump off’ (line 15) the rugged mountain of Le Morne (see Figure 4.2) to escape recapture.

Until recently, the story of Le Morne was mythicised as legendary through a colonial lens which ascribes stories and songs of the Creole people as fictional. During the years 2000/2001, Mauritian historian Vijaya Teelock – who became the vice-chairperson of the Truth and Justice Commission (set up in 2009) – demonstrated, through her archival research, that the tale of Le Morne was based on true stories transmitted orally from one generation to another for the last two hundred years (Assonne, 2013, p. 101). Archaeological excavation (that was necessary for the inscription of the site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008) revealed that the rugged landscape was protected by the mountain’s isolated, wooded and almost inaccessible cliffs and therefore provided a secluded place for the escaped slaves to form small settlements in the caves and on the summit. The contestation of the myth of Le Morne received media attention. There was a backlash from corporate promoters of a tourist resort project near the site, and the media, largely owned by Franco-Mauritians, maintained that the suicide was not a historical fact. The lyrics of ‘Le Morne’ were drawn from the work of Sedley Assonne, a prolific writer of poetry, short stories and plays in Mauritian Creole.

In this section, I discuss the poeticisation of death in the lyrics and demonstrate how the visceral narratives of death in the Creole sega is contrasted with the necro-aesthetic visual representation of the extinct bird in the natural sciences, as discussed in Chapter Three. I start by contextualizing the violence of slavery, with a focus on the death of captured peoples in the Indian Ocean, from the historiography of slavery (in this case, historians’ accounts and travel diaries). I note how the death of the enslaved is described within what Hartman describes as a ‘grammar of violence’ (Hartman, 2008, p. 4) or a ‘grammar of suffering’. Within the grammar of violence, the brutality of the gratuitous violence on the enslaved (beating, lynching, torture, whipping, hanging, burning, mutilation, rape, abuse, scorching, branding and imprisonment) have been documented

⁹¹ Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5FZbDreTu8>

and archived but are often abstracted from the viscerality and pain of violence.

The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past (Hartman, 2008, p. 5).

While Hartman mainly draws on the history of slavery of the Atlantic (which is arguably different from the history of slavery in the Indian Ocean), her work has benefitted the way I approached the historiography of slavery, particularly that of the Truth and Justice Commission, whose focus on trauma was discussed in Chapter Two. I examined the registers of suffering and the victim-centred approach to the atrocities of slavery approached from a psychoanalytical lens (through trauma or amnesia, for example), which had been prominent since the 1980s.

The killing and death of slaves in the colony of Mauritius that have been discussed by historians (Peerthum, 2012; Teelock, 1995, 1998; Vaughan, 2005) are: death on the ship from dysentery, physical exhaustion, starvation, untreated illnesses, torture (the cutting off of hands, flogging, scorched skin, the breaking of bones, red-hot iron marking) and lynching by hanging as a deterrent for rebellion. Vivid ethnographic descriptions of the violence of slavery by Europeans travelling to the French colony revealed that enslaved men and women found

refuge in the woods where they are chased by troops of soldiers, Black people and dogs. Some inhabitants even make it a hunting game to enjoy and release them again like wild animals to be hunted. When they cannot be captured, they are shot, their heads are cut and are brought back to the town like a trophy at the end of a stick. This is what I witness almost every week' (Saint-Pierre, 1773, p. 196).

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre – best known for writing the first novel set up on the island, *Paul et Virginie* (1788) – published his travelogue *Voyage à l'Isle de France, à l'Isle de Bourbon, au Cap de Bonne-Espérance, &c.: Avec des Observations nouvelles sur la nature & sur les Hommes (A voyage to the islands of Mauritius, (or, Isle of France), the Isle of Bourbon, the Cape of Good Hope, &c.: With observations and reflections upon nature, and mankind)* in 1773. In relation to suicide, he reported that enslaved men and women expressed joy and relief at their masters' decision to hang them after they escaped with organised groups of maroons. Saint-Pierre also wrote (under the moralistic viewpoint of 'infanticide' and victim-blaming) that '[enslaved] women become miserable mothers who prefer to kill their unborn child than give birth to them' (1773, tome 1, p. 194). With the distanced and privileged gaze of the eighteenth-century French writer in the colony, he also described slaves' suicide by hanging and poisoning.

Resistance to enslavement in the French colony took the form of organised maroonage and suicide and, despite an atrocious system of control and punishment put in place by the French Governor Mahé de La Bourdonnais (whose three-metre high statue still stands in front of the parliament today), the number of enslaved people escaping or taking their lives increased on the island (Boswell, 2006; Peerthum and Peerthum, 2004; Vaughan, 2005). Using Hartman's words, the 'libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents' (p. 5).

The lyrics of 'Le Morne' are not reduced to the two main registers of the historiography of slavery (suffering and violence) which adopt 'the orthography [that] makes domination in/visible and not/visceral' (Sharpe, 2016, p. 21). For Christina Sharpe who develops 'wake work' as an analytic and literary concept, to map the everyday resistance and mourning of Black people (p. 13), the 'orthography of the wake' (p. 29) presents events of violence and suffering 'within a logic that cannot apprehend [the] suffering' (p. 29). Sharpe pinpoints the writing of a history of suffering and violence where the viscerality of the experience of suffering and violence is not felt. In this section, I focus on the sega *angaze* 'Le Morne' as a re-enactment of the experience of enslavement and the creative practices of the enslaved. I analyse sega because it is composed of a visceral 'orthography' which projects how the pain of the enslaved and the Creole people is registered in the present.

Sega enacts the hardship on the plantation as well as the history of resistance to colonial oppression. The rootsical sega evolved in the spatialities of enslavement in French Mauritius, as songs of resistance ('Our ancestors' history [of resistance]/.../will always be valued (line 1 and 3)) and rehumanisation (in this case, through their act of refusing recapture) inform Black geographies of struggles, drawing from McKittrick and Wynter's work in *Being Human as Praxis* (2015).

The geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that, in fact, spatialize acts of survival (McKittrick, 2013, p. 2).

The space of survival for the enslaved was based on escaping the plantation and reimagining possibilities of life as free maroons. The site of Le Morne, where a group of men, women and children, who escaped their enslavement, 'chose to jump off and die to be free' (line 15) from recapture, can be also read as 'a spatial continuity between the living and the dead, between science and storytelling, and between past and present'

(McKittrick, 2013, p. 2). McKittrick refers to burial grounds where slaves were interred as spaces in the postcolonial geography ‘that incite a commonsense intermingling of scientific excitement and community mourning’ (p. 1) and as ‘plantation futures’ that can tell us about ‘the legacy of slavery and the labor of the unfree [that] both shape and are part of the environment we presently inhabit’ (p. 2).

The lyrics of ‘Le Morne’ position the site of Le Morne as what McKittrick calls ‘a location of black death that holds in it a narrative soundscape’ (2013, p. 2). The history of resistance to European enslavement and the collective death at Le Morne are symbolic of a politics of death embedded in self-inflicted violence and death, as a mode of using the body as a means of political resistance (Bargu, 2014).⁹² The enslaved people can only be free by becoming a political subject who ‘engages [in] self-destructive practices of resistance’ (p. 78) what political theorist Banu Bargu calls necroresistance. The sega ‘Le Morne’ evokes the necroresistance of the enslaved, in contrast with the necro-aesthetics of the earlier chapter. Bargu, who builds on Giorgio Agamben’s notion of ‘bare life’ – which for him represents lives which are made expendable by the sovereign state – reiterates that necroresistance is the politicisation of individuals who are reduced to bare life by the violence of enslavement and take their own lives that sovereign power impose itself on (p. 78). Referring to Mbembe, Bargu writes:

Mbembe alludes to how in spaces of exception death can become the mediator of freedom, the idiom of agency, inscribed in the ‘logic of martyrdom’ (p. 78).

The enslaved re-enacts the violence whose initial enactment upon their bodies was a pre-condition of their existence in the first place, and become the negation of a pre-conditioned death. ‘For death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also that space where freedom and negation operate’ (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39). The act of death also feeds ‘into the incessant movement of history’ (p. 14), as can be witnessed by the story of Le Morne, transmitted through oral stories and deemed ‘legendary’ by a colonial epistemology of erasure. Here, the martyr bears witness (as a testimony – which is also the etymological root of ‘martyr’) to the violence of erasure through the

⁹² Bargu, in her seminal book *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (2014), refers to immolation and starvation as practices of necroresistance (hunger strikes as forms of protest, for example) by individuals who are reduced to bare life. Her focus is specifically on the Turkish setting in the 1990s.

self-annihilation of the body.⁹³ Furthermore, the memorialisation of the martyrs in the ‘Le Morne’ lyrics, ‘we should not forget/that they did not take their life in vain’ (line 16-17), bears testimony, two hundred years later, to that act of martyrdom. The re-enactment of history reproduces, outside the temporality and causality of historical events, the testimony of the martyr, or the martyrdom of that embodied testimony, through the performance of sega.

Songs about Black death and Black trauma – using Sharpe’s terms (2016) – are embedded in an epistemology of resistance as well as in the hauntological mourning. The ‘Le Morne’ song presents the act of dying in a ‘longue durée’ – the fear of death, the decision to die, the wish not to die, the apprehension of the fall, the impact of dying, the mourning of those who died, for example. For Sharpe, Black death is followed by a process of collective mourning where Black people can come together and celebrate the life of the deceased through rituals (p. 11). Sharpe draws from an article by the poet Claudia Rankine, ‘The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning’ (2015), to demonstrate that mourning for Black people is to ‘mourn the interminable event’ which is embedded in the afterlives of slavery (Sharpe, 2016, p. 8). In this sense, Sharpe problematises the memorialisation of the ‘already dead’, in the same way that I challenge the necro-aesthetic museum displays of the extinct dodo in Chapter Four.

If museums and memorials materialize a kind of reparation (repair) and enact their own pedagogies as they position visitors to have a particular experience or set of experiences about an event that is seen to be past, how does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still? (2016, p. 20)

Black death in the diaspora, according to Sharpe, is ‘produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery’ (p. 8). Black trauma is informed by a continuous mourning of Black life in the present or mourning as rituals in the wake: thinking about the dead and about our relations to them, rituals through which to enact grief and memory (p. 21).

Assonne wrote the lyrics of the sega ‘Le Morne’ as ‘a work of haunting’ (Philip, 2008, cited in Sharpe, 2016, p. 38) to trigger a process of mourning. Sharpe, drawing from the poems of NourbeSe Philip in her work, *Zong!*, discusses how mourning is embedded in the making of creative work in which ‘the spectres of the undead make themselves present’ (Philip, 2008, in Sharpe, 2016, p. 38). In this sense, Assonne

⁹³ One of the definition of ‘martyr’ is ‘a person who bears witness for a belief, especially the Christian faith’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

rearranged the story of suicide on Le Morne from suicide as an end (death) to suicide as a ritual of mourning ('rivers of blood keep swirling/in my head and I remember' (Lines 11-12), 'I carry their memories and I remember' (line 30)). The reiteration of 'I remember' twice (line 11 and 30) emphasises on mourning as remembering and conjuring the dead in the present.

The 'Le Morne' sega also 'deranges' (Hartman, 2008) the 'not/visceral' colonial archive by re-enacting, through music, the stories of suicide which represent what Sharpe calls 'encountering a past that is not a past' (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13). For Hartman, the voice of the archive performs a truth which cannot be questioned by the slave, whose orality has been lost and whose voice undergoes an impossibility of archiveability. Furthermore, personal stories of those enslaved and dislocated from Africa in the transatlantic slave trade, and later across the Indian Ocean, are scarce. Therefore, reconstructions through music, poetry and other creative practices, in the way of Hartman's 'critical fabulation' (Hartman, 2008), propose a visceral retelling of history through the rearrangement of historical 'facts'.

Hartman proposes to be the second voice in the same way that contemporary engaged artists revive the sega of the enslaved and retrieve unspoken archives, which question the modalities of truths established by the supposedly factual and objective archive. Informed by Michel Foucault's works on power, Hartman states that

The archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence. This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power. (p. 10).

In the official archives of slavery, the voices, music and sound are not heard and therefore symbolise the silences in the archives which cannot be filled by historical facts and colonial records. Hartman's 'dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us' and 'not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified' (Hartman, 2008, p. 12) from the documents of the archives. In this sense, legal documents, historical records, statistical data, for example, bring the enslaved to enter history from the confines of the colonial archive. For Hartman, the practices of the enslaved and their resonance in the present consist of a historical archive of stories. In this sense, the sega angaze, as a form of critical fabulation, positions the narrator's voice of the silenced slave. Hartman rearranges and deranges the archive:

impossible writing which attempts to say that which cannot be said [...] It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history with and against the archive (p. 12).

There is an urgency in the ‘Le Morne’ sega of making audible the hauntological re-enactment of history through storytelling, music and sound. This is well articulated in the lines of Cassiya’s repertoire of socially-engaged sega: ‘Our ancestors’ history/whether we want it or not/will always be valued/our ravann/if we still have sega today/it’s because we never stopped playing/.../what happened there has not been erased’ (Lines 1-6, 25). The poeticisation of death in ‘Le Morne’ is rooted in the hauntological mourning of the death of the enslaved and the afterlives of slavery – in the perpetuation of racialized geographies, racism, economic inequalities and prejudices against the Creole people (TJC, 2011).

In December 2001, the song was voted ‘Sega of the Year’ in the annual competition organised by the national broadcasting channel and became the first sega song to be released as a single (Assonne, 2013, p. 101). Assonne, the composer of the song, attributed the popularity of ‘Le Morne’ to the consciousness of a rootsical sega in the lyrics which – unlike *sega vitrine* (commercial sega, for entertainment) – carries or re-narrates the history of enslavement of people. He also praised the musical talent of the group Cassiya who toured across the Indian Ocean. In this sense, I argue that hauntological mourning is conveyed through both the lyrics and the musical (and sonic) dimension of sega. The ‘Le Morne’ sega song has a languid tone and rhythmic soulful beat and embodies a ‘visceral experience of audition’ (Henriques, 2011, p. xv). The next section proposes to investigate the beats, refrains, sounds and the element of performance which according to Eleanora Fabião (2012) are potential rhizomatic enhancements and are historiographic. I present how the ‘Le Morne’ song can produce a genealogy of the enslaved from their ancestral connection (‘what happened there has not been erased/our skin carries the sun/born in Africa far away from here/we crossed the ocean/and faced the storms/I carry their memories and I remember’ (lines 25-30)). This genealogical narrative echoes Wynter’s ontological work on autopoiesis, discussed in the next section.

5.3 Performative Historiography and Autopoiesis

I start this section by giving a description of the sonic dimension of the sega which I draw from the work of anthropologists, musicians, ethnomusicologists, sega practitioners and cultural researchers (Andon and Bastien, 2014; Déodat, 2011; 2016; Gauthier, 2017; Manuel, 1998; Police, 2001). From the description of sega, Creole is predominantly a sonic culture. I further discuss the creative practices of sega as a process of autopoiesis and a history through performance: a performative historiography.

Sega is composed of the sound of the pulsating rhythm of the *ravann* and any other improvised instruments such as the tinkling of a metal spoon, the rattling of seeds or sand in a tin or the clapping of hands. The *ravann* is a hand percussion instrument of about 60 cm in diameter and 5 cm in thickness, in the shape of a shallow circular frame tambourine (without the discs). The typical *ravann* has a stretched membrane made of goatskin and is heated next to a fire to tune it. It is a member of the membranophone and the idiophone family: membranophones encompass instruments which produce sound by hand strokes on a stretched membrane, such as a drum; idiophones regroup instruments which vibrate to produce a sound when shaken or scraped, such as a tambourine). Henriques, who draws from observation of the Jamaican sound systems and the dancing body in the reggae dancehall, places sounding at the centre of enquiry and explains that

[s]ounding always require kinetic movement, with the corporeal agents of sonic bodies – whistling, clapping or singing; blowing, scraping, banging or otherwise playing a musical instrument (2011, p. xxviii).

I draw from Henriques method of ‘thinking through sound’ which involves listening and ‘working through the *medium* of sound as thought’ (p. xviii). It allows me to understand the ‘sonic aesthetics’ (Voegelin, 2014, p. 6) of sega and conceive a ‘sonic possible world’ (pp. 2–3) which is about thinking music through a sonic sensibility.

For instance, the essential elements of sega consist (in part or in whole) of the call of the *ravann*, given by a soloist who motivates people to gather around the instrumentalists. Secondly, the song, which is originally improvised with simple and

repetitive lyrics, is of antiphonal or responsorial form.⁹⁴ The sega is embodied in, what Paul Gilroy calls the call-and-response ritual (1993, p. 138). The response is either sung in unison or in parallel intervals of fourths or fifths. Thirdly, the roll, which is danced by the assembly, is punctuated by acclamations. The *choul*, the rhythmic cry of the singer (usually male), raises the tempo of the dance and elicits the response of the dancers and the participative audience to increase the rhythm of their movements.

The *ravann* player(s) also change(s) the beat to what is considered the basic sega meter which is approximated a fast (Western) 6/8 although it does not conform neither to a 6/8 nor a 4/4 (Manuel, 1998).⁹⁵ The *ravann* adds a distinctive syncopation (a disturbance or interruption of the regular flow of rhythm) by usually elongating the first and third beats and playing a loud, open stroke on the second and fifth beat. While the main *ravann* player gives the tempo (*premie tanbour*), the others will play on the edge of the *ravann* to give a high-pitched sound (*sizone*). The dance which usually starts with the gentle swaying of the hips of the dancer (usually female) while the feet are grounded in slower motions, is in response to the solemn tune which gradually rises to a tempo.

Furthermore, this sonic atmosphere of the sega performance creates an immersive auditory environment (Bull, 2016) which elicit the response of dancers and audience to become participative ‘sonic bodies’, a term I borrow from Henriques (2011). For Henriques, sonic bodies ‘produce, experience and make sense of sound’ (p. xvi-xvii) and are ‘immediately’ immersed in the experience. Depending on the range of rhythm from trance-like slow music with a focus on the vocalist to very rhythmic beats, the sega dancers increase their movements by bending the knees and lowering the body gently downwards while swaying the hips to the rhythm. The upper body, especially the thighs, are stirred vigorously, bringing both artists and audience into a participatory and visceral (sonic and visual) experience. The climax of the performance is reached when the dancer’s knees touch the ground and the body is swayed either forward or backwards and is almost in parallel with the ground. The playing of the *ravann* stops

⁹⁴ The antiphonal effect consists of a sentence set by a soloist and repeated by the audience or of two sets of voices singing alternately. The responsorial element is the enunciation of a series of sentences by a soloist that are answered by the audience.

⁹⁵ The ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel explains that listening ‘to sega rhythm [...] poses a particular sort of challenge to the foreign [European] ear, as it often seems to resist classification as a triple or quadratic meter. Segá rhythm, indeed, illustrates the inherent problems in applying Western analytical concepts to non-Western musical practices’ (1998, p. 113)

abruptly with a last loud stroke to the instrument.⁹⁶

The sonic bodies are the *ravann* players, the soloist, the dancers and the participative audience, who are immersed in the auditory imagination and the sonic atmosphere of the sega performance. The ‘Le Morne’ sega revealed that ‘our *ravann*/if we still have *sega* today/it’s because we never stopped playing’ (Lines 4-6). The immersion into a sega performance is sonic, brought forward by the syncopated sound and ‘vibratory frequencies’ (Henriques, 2011, p. 23) of the *ravann* and the *choul*, often a high-pitched sound from the soloist, which invigorate the dance. The other sonic element is the improvisation of simple and repetitive lyrics in the Creole language by a soloist which are either echoed or answered in unison by the audience – understood as the call-and-response ritual.

It is in this sense that thinking through sound and the sonic body (Chude-Sokei, 2016; Henriques, 2011) allows me to understand how the Creole culture is fundamentally sonic. Unlike listening to sega or observing the practice as a spectator which puts the body outside sound, sega singers, dancers and audiences have their bodies ‘placed inside sound’ (Henriques, 2011, p. xvi). According to Henriques, listening, as a decolonial method, allows for the production of an ‘auditory epistemology’ (p. xviii) based on the examination of the intangible audibility of the music and the sonic registers of the songs in comparison to the literary reading of the lyrics. Sounding, on the other hand, incorporates longitudinal waves such as the timbre (or sound ‘colour’), amplitude (or volume) and frequency (or pitch) and impacts the sonic bodies (p. 28).

Furthermore, Henriques offers three registers to examine the sonic dimension: material, corporeal and sociocultural wavebands. The material waveband is specific to the mechanics (electromagnetic waves and sound propagation) of sound systems. Thinking through the corporeal and sociocultural waveband is productive here in the case of the ‘folk’ sega (which does not incorporate the material waveband which stems from digital technologies). For Henriques, ‘the corporeal medium of sounding is fleshy’ (p. 23) as sonic bodies are ‘the flesh and blood’ of the sound system crew, the dancehall audience or the MC (or DJ) and his booming voice.

⁹⁶ An example of a reconstruction of the rootsical *choul* by the group ABAIM (2015) can be listened to/viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AacmAgoWrFY>

The vibratory frequencies of the corporeal waveband [...] include the embodied kinetics of all kinds, such as the beating of percussive instruments, bowing and plucking of strings, and the blown vibrations of reeds and brass. Bodily frequencies consist of all manner of pulses and bodily rhythms, including breathing and heartbeat (p. 23).

The sociocultural ‘vibes’ are ‘built’ from the crowd’s knowledge, understanding, appreciation, sensitivity, expectations and so on, often accumulated from the experience of attending dancehall session (p. 25).

I discuss the sociocultural waveband of sega in relation to the sonic body of the dancers who use the space to enact a resistance to colonial cultures and coloniality of the present. I draw from eighteenth-century romanticised descriptions of sega, which revealed two forms of dance rhythm: harmonious, nostalgic, soft with love and romance (Saint-Pierre, 1773); and secondly, suggestive and exuberant where men and women are natural dancers (Avine, 1801 in Selvon, 2005; Assonne, 2013). Segá was referred to as ‘Chéga’ or ‘Tséga’ (Assonne 2013, p. 36; Police, 2001, p. 7). In the Bantu language, sega means ‘to play’ and in the southwest Indian ocean, varieties of the sega dance are found (Lee, 1990, in Vaughan, 2005, p. 298). An essential component of the second form of rhythm of the rootsical sega, as described above, is the specific ‘suggestive and exuberant’ dance which moves according to the sonic register of the music.

From the description of the sega dance, it can be said that sega creates a heterosexual space in which both men and women dance close together without necessarily touching each other. The bending of the knees and the lowering of the body downwards while swaying the hips to the rhythm as well as the climax, when the dancer’s knees touch the ground and the body is swayed either forward or backwards have all the elements of a suggestive sexual or erotic performance. In this sense, the sega dance has been plagued by terms like ‘erotic’, ‘sensual’, ‘sexual’, ‘noisy’, ‘rough’, ‘raw’, ‘vulgar’, ‘burlesque’, ‘carnivalesque’, ‘provocative’ or ‘slutty’. These terms, used in a pejorative sense, are articulated, as Carolyn Cooper explains, through a ‘Judeao-Christian definitions of appropriate behaviour’ (2007, p. 3), determined in this case by a dominant settler mode of regulating taste (here the white bourgeoisie and the conservatism of the dominant population of Indian origin). Cooper questions the aesthetic value that determined what is considered vulgar and attributes it to a pre-conceived sense of taste (1993, p. 8).

Dance, for Cooper, is also ‘a mode of theatrical self-disclosure in which the body speaks eloquently of its capacity to endure and transcend material deprivation’ (Cooper, 2005, p. 1). From Cooper’s reading, I discuss the sonic body as a ‘resistant container’

(p. 1) that resists the conservative social norms and etiquette of the ‘respectable’ body. On the other hand, Henriques makes a comparison with the gendering of the sound system in patriarchal societies, where ‘the gendered voicing of sound associates bass with male and the positive values of strength and authority, with conversely the higher pitched woman’s voice being associated with hysteria and other psychological disorders’ (2011, p. 15). Until more research is undertaken on the ‘erotic’ aspect of sega, Cooper offers a productive line of thought to read dance as breaking the ‘scarifications of history’ (2007, p. 3). For Cooper, dancehall provides a site for women to reclaim the sensuousness of their bodies and celebrate sexuality and fertility in dance rituals. The freedom of women to claim a self-pleasuring sexual identity may be explicitly homoerotic and could only be performed through the theatricality of dance under the rhythm of a trance music.

The performative element of sega is best understood as a potential a praxis of resistance to colonial servitude, correctness and ‘purity’ in the colony, as well as a participatory performance, which brings both dancer and audience in a poetic moment of intimacy and urgency. Segá is a visceral experience of rhythm, beats, sounds and dance which produce decolonial archives of feelings and sensations, built on modes of expressions and aesthetics which subvert the objective historical archive and the settler aesthetics in place. Segá dance disrupts settler aesthetics, practices and epistemologies, and hence becomes a carrier of decolonial knowledges.

Furthermore, the segá dance was rooted in the auto-instituted practices of the enslaved people by the French in the eighteenth century. Segá – in its poetic forms, musical and sonic arrangement, instrumental range, the dance performance and the function of storytelling – was carried forward by the Creole people when they left the servitude of the plantation, after the abolition of slavery. In this sense, segá practitioners transmit stories of the enslaved through performance. This is read here through the lens of ‘autopoiesis’ and ‘performative historiography’, terms that I developed in the conceptual framework in Chapter One. Autopoiesis, according to Wynter, is a space of self-generated creation that makes possible the praxis of creating possibilities of life and culture under regimes of colonial oppression, and finding alternatives of ‘being human’ under the crude mechanics of capitalism that arose from a plantation economy (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015) or a plantation logic (McKittrick, 2013, p. 11).

Autopoiesis, for Wynter, is related to the capacity of enslaved Africans and Black/Creole people to self-generate creative practices and create ‘their own still genre-

specific mode of mythically or cosmogonically chartered auto-institution' (Wynter, 1984, p. 11)

it is by means of our cosmogonies, or origin stories that we tell the world, or ourselves who we are, we are able to do so only because it is also by means of them, that we are enabled to behaviorally autoinstitute and thereby performatively enact ourselves as the who of the we (or fictive mode of kind) that we are (Wynter, 1984, p. 9).

Wynter's notion of cosmogony describes the kosmos (cosmos, universe) and genos/genea (race, family, genealogy, genesis) or gonos (offspring) of a specific community, race or society – in simpler terms, the 'who we are, where we came from, how we came here, what we lost on the way and assimilated under systemic oppression, what we can now pinpoint as systemic colonisation within a "safer" space, in the sense that we have the language' (Serynada, 2015, para. 4).

Sega is embedded in a process of 'autopoiesis', described as 'forms of self-inscription or self-instituted genres, with each form/genre being adaptive to its situation' (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3, in McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). The Creole language is rooted in an 'autopoetic languaging living system' (Wynter, 2007, p. 17) of the Creole people, following the suppression of original mother tongues. Sega and the Creole languages are, therefore, processes of self-creation and practices of rehumanisation of spaces that are embedded in coloniality. This practice is manifested in origin stories and cosmogonies that are the storytelling ground that enable the slave to be rehumanised as Wynter's *homo narrans*.

Storytelling is in the aural and sonic element of sega, a practice that has left its mark throughout three centuries. Creative practices fostered by those under enslavement and their descendants are read here as self-instituted processes around finding humane alternative modes of sociality under the violence of the French regime. In this sense, the sega practice and the Creole language constitute 'an autopoetic languaging living system' (Wynter, 2007, p. 17). This knowledge system is informed by a Creole cosmogony – 'the origin stories we tell the world' (p. 9) which transgresses our present order of knowledge (p. 27), making visible the way people auto-institute stories in everyday practices that indigenise, rehumanise and technologise the colonial landscape (this is discussed in the next section). The aim of retracing Creole origin stories is a critique of the Indian Ocean exceptionalism and the myth of origin, as discussed in Chapter One, that Europeans were the first to migrate to uninhabited islands which

entered modernity with colonisation. A Creole cosmogony disrupts this narrative and proposes to see a process of rehumanisation as the historiography of the uninhabited islands of the Indian Ocean.

Creative practices such as sega and its contemporary genre, seggae, allowed the enslaved and the Creole people to imagine and rebuild lives through a process of rehumanisation. Singing and dancing in the mother tongue inform a ‘performative historiography’ (Fabião, 2012) as the rootsical sega is re-enacted in the contemporary sega as an everyday sonic practice of performing history. For Fabião, the body generates movement through mnemonic connections to history and to ‘nonsequential forms of time’ in non-linear storytelling ‘that may be invisible to the historicist eye’ (p. xi). For Fabião, a performative historiography

is not a discussion on fictive vs. non-fictive aspects of historiography but rather, an experience of the perception of history and the phenomenology of narrative, which takes the body as paradigm (Fabião, 2012, p. 124).

In this sense, the lyrics, the music as well as the sound resonate from the sonic body, which perform the history of the enslaved. Fabião explains that performative historiography is about ‘words’ and ‘lingua’ (2012, p. 121) because in the Portuguese language lingua means ‘both language and tongue; its double meaning relates word and flesh, writing and muscle, speech and taste’ (p. 121). In the same way, *lalang* in Creole means ‘tongue’ and ‘speech’ in slang patois (*lalang sal* – ‘dirty tongue’ means ‘dirty language’). Singing in the intonations of the Creole language and dancing to the tempo of a rootsical sega is an experience which is situated in the sonic historiography of the Creole tongue. The sega performance and its endurance in the present produce a visceral history that incorporates the affective aspect of an embodied/corporeal/bodily knowledge.

In the next section, I look at how a sonic historiography is reproduced through the technologising of the sound of sega. I build an argument by looking at how seggae, a sub-genre of sega developed in the 1980s influenced by Bob Marley’s political lyrics and Rastafari philosophy, was constructed on the sonic resonance of the bass guitar from Jamaican roots reggae. The next section draws a parallel between the cartographies of struggle from which roots reggae in downtown Jamaica and seggae in Roche Bois evolved. Seggae represents what Wynter calls ‘post-aesthetic creative practices’ (1992, p. 240), produced from a cartography of Creole struggle.

Built from the sound of reggae, I argue that seggae technologises the folk sound of

sega. The aim of this final chapter is to envision the Creole language and the rootsical sega as technological transformation, drawing from the Creole language as software (Brathwaite, 1995b) and the sound of sega as technological interaction (Chude-Sokei, 2018). It follows the argument of this thesis which proposes to look at creative practices in the Creole mother tongue as decolonial knowledge. I finally argue that they also represent what McKittrick calls a ‘decolonial future’ (2013) and, in the case of this research, a ‘Creole futurity’ (Chude-Sokei, 2018).

5.4 The Struggle of Creole Futurity: Kaya’s Seggae

Mo la mizik

Mwa kan mo ti tann zoue reggae par la vwa
Bob Marley
ti enn evolisyon lamizik Caraibe ti met enn
nouvo lanpler
isi nou lamizik pa reggae sega ki nou lamizik

Mwa mo pe fer li vinn enn emancipasyon
misik morisien yeah yeah
la mo pe zoue
sa mo lamizik seggae ki mo pe sante si to le
leve danse
sa mo lamizik sega ki mo pe fer li seggae yeah
yeah
sa mo lamizik seggae pou liberasyon mantalite
kaptivite
sa mo lamizik seggae pou egeye tou kalite
nation ki to ete

(Kaya and Racinetatane, ‘Seggae nu lamizik’
1989)

My music

When I heard reggae through Bob
Marley
which was a momentous evolution in
Caribbean music
here, our music is not reggae, our music
is sega

I am making it an emancipation of
Mauritian music yeah yeah
I am now playing
my music seggae that I am singing
please get up and dance
my music sega is becoming seggae yeah
yeah
my music seggae is for freedom from
mental slavery
my music seggae will enliven your
nation

(Kaya and Racinetatane, ‘Seggae is our
music’ 1989)

The lyrics above are from the first album, *Seggae Nu Lamizik (Seggae is our Music)*, of the group Kaya and Racinetatane (1989) which was incorporated in a seggae compilation in 1998 (one year before Kaya’s death). In the song ‘Mo la mizik’ (‘My music’), Kaya sings about the transformation of Mauritian sega, through roots reggae,

into the new genre, seggae.⁹⁷ He was inspired by Bob Marley's reggae (line 1), which he describes as 'a momentous evolution in Caribbean music' (line 2). Kaya explains that he produces seggae 'for freedom from mental slavery' (line 8) which in the context of Mauritius refers to the coloniality in place.

In this section, I discuss three of Kaya's songs – 'Mo la mizik', 'No Woman No Cry' and 'Ras Kouyon' – in this chapter, to situate the 'cartographies of struggle' (borrowing the term from McKittrick (2006)) from which the artist's work evolved. Secondly, I analyse the influence of reggae on sega and draw a parallel between downtown Kingston, where reggae took shape, and the ghettoised area of Roche Bois from which Kaya developed seggae. I finally discuss the new sonic landscape that seggae represents and argue that it technologises and futurises sega.

The sonic landscape of seggae emerged from Roche Bois, a residential area on the urban periphery of the industrialised capital city of Port Louis, stigmatised for its impoverished Creole community. It has historically been demarcated by colonial boundaries set up during the development of the cityscape centered around the strategic port (to trade sugar) under French colonialism – as discussed in Chapter Two. Camp Zulu, one part of Roche Bois, has been closely associated with the living area of male Creole and Indian residents who work as stevedores and labourers and became one of the significant impoverished ghettoised spaces, marked by governmental neglect (Boswell, 2006, p. 141). These ghettoised spaces are what McKittrick calls black 'cartographies of struggle' (2006) where, in this case, the Creole people struggles on a daily basis while being marginalised and criminalised for the rise of substance abuse, sex work and violence (Boswell, 2006, pp. 135-168). McKittrick explains that such spaces of struggle are 'uneven racial geographies' (2013, p. 3) and represent 'spaces of otherness [...] incongruous with humanness' (p. 6) and a 'human geography that is not human at all but an unlivable space occupied by the racially condemned' (p. 7).

In many senses the plantation maps specific black geographies as identifiably violent and impoverished, consequently normalizing the uneven production of space. This normalization can unfold in the present, with blackness and geography and the past and the present enmeshing to uncover contemporary sites of uninhabitability (p. 9).

These spaces pinpoint 'geographic workings of dispossession' (2006, p. 5) which she explains position 'the ways black life and black histories link to postslave

⁹⁷ Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHq29eTWszY>

conceptualizations of geographic violence' (p. 4) and produce 'antiblack violence and dismal futures' (p. 4). McKittrick mainly draws on the history of racism and police brutality in North America (which is arguably different from the history of racism in the Indian Ocean region). However, her work has helped me situate the condition in which Kaya died in police custody in 1999 and understand how the ghettoised community of Roche Bois was marginalised further.

Kaya's seggae evokes the coloniality in place and the settler mentality in Mauritius from his line (8) 'my music seggae is freedom from mental slavery', reiterating Bob Marley's own line 'Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery' from the lyrics in 'Redemption Song' (Bob Marley & The Wailers 1980). Seggae took shape from the marginality of Roche Bois, Bob Marley's politics, the bass and beat of roots reggae and the Jamaican Rastafari, in the same way that roots reggae evolved from the marginalised Trench town of Kingston and was rooted in Black Power, the works of Marcus Garvey, Rastafari and postcolonial/nationalist politics (Cooper, 2012, p. 3), as well as from rocksteady, ska and sound system.⁹⁸

In many ways, the rise of seggae bears many similarities with the various phases of innovation that the music scene in Jamaica went through since the 1950s. For example, Jamaican ska was influenced by African-American Rhythm and Blues (and Jazz) and developed into a local pre-and post-independence musical and sonic landscape that was already rooted in the sound system – a unique Jamaican phenomenon from downtown Kingston, as referred to by Henriques. Ska, like the rocksteady genre which followed, also appealed to the lower class who, unlike the urban bourgeois middle class, was not prejudiced into looking at American music as a model (Henriques, 2011, p. 16-17). In parallel, roots reggae emerged from Studio One, the first recording studio and communal space for artists opened by a Black Jamaican, Clement 'Coxsonne' Dodd, from where Bob Marley and the Wailers were discovered and promoted. Furthermore, the afro-centric influenced beats and rhythm played by Rastafarians who since the 1930s had developed a pan-African aesthetics in downtown Kingston became an integral part of the Jamaican music scene.

In the Mauritian context, sega, which is rooted in three hundred years of practitioners since slavery was regenerated into a new genre of seggae from the influence of roots

⁹⁸ Trench Town in Kingston can be compared, to some extent only, to the criminalised area of Roche Bois in Mauritius.

reggae. The central ideological concern of radical social change and resistance to ‘Babylon’, which represented Jamaica’s then-dominant British colonial culture (Cooper, 2012, p. 1), was imparted to sega artists through the songs of Bob Marley. Seggae emerged from a self-reflective process of transposing the musical, instrumental and political attributes of roots reggae onto sega, what Cooper (2012) theorises as the ‘glocalisation’ of reggae, which is the music’s global dispersal and adaption in different local contexts of consumption and transformation. It is then adapted by local musicians and, as the Jamaican influence gradually fades away, they bring a new landscape of sound to the culture, as ways of creating possibilities of life under coloniality.

Kaya and other sega artists on the Indian Ocean islands were also introduced to the Rastafari philosophy and notions of *Black nationalism* promoted by Marcus Garvey.⁹⁹ The philosophy of Rastafari is a unique culture/religion that emanates from the Jamaican periphery and consists of following an Ital dietary convention, adhering to a pan-African politics, together with the most visible aspects of growing dreadlocks, smoking ganja, playing/listening to reggae music and subverting the middle-class appropriation of the colonial English language in Jamaica (Pollard, 2000).¹⁰⁰

Seggae is thus not simply a fusion of sega and reggae, but the echo of inspirational creative practices of resistance and an extension to the indigenized sega that is energised through Jamaican roots reggae. Kaya was influenced by Rastafari philosophy, and his political seggae of protest contributes to an epistemology of resistance to residual colonialism in the context of Mauritius. The line (9) ‘my music seggae will enliven your nation’ in Kaya’s seggae ‘Mo La Mizik’ alludes to a Rastafarian notion of the ‘outernational’ as a fluid communal space, where the open flow of music becomes a metaphor for a borderless nation and unsettles a postcolonial and nationalist Babylon. Kaya implies that seggae, despite being ‘our’ Mauritian music emerged out of a specific marginalised communal space of creativity but ‘will enliven your nation’ (line 9). In 1989, Kaya’s album *Seggae Nu Lamizik* propelled him into the next decade of authenticating the reggae music in the local socio-political context, before his death at the hands of the police in February 1999.

⁹⁹ Rastafari scholar Robbie Shilliam explains the un-developmental episteme called ‘livity’ which is ‘a new iteration of transmitted and transmuted practices by enslaved peoples to carve out an insurrectionary space of righteousness and sanctified living despite the mental, physical and spiritual deathliness of slavery’ (2012, p. 340).

¹⁰⁰ The general principle of the Ital diet is to consume food that are natural and free from artificial additives. The primary goal is to increase livity.

In Kaya's 1998 compilation, *Best of Kaya – Seggae Experience*, the last song 'Ras Kouyon' ('The Stupid Race') that opens up the documentary-film produced by Vuillermet (2000) is one of his most popular seggae and was initially performed as a reggae in Mauritian Creole in 1986 (Yip Tong, 2017).

Ras Kouyon	The Stupid Race
Oh....Oh....	Oh....Oh....
Ki satima novo zot pe inflize	What is the next punishment inflicted on us
Kan to miltiplie to revolte	As we collectivise and protest
La ter entie malad	The planet is unwell
Leker soufran	Our heart is in pain
Ki la lwa pou servi parmi enn bann rebel?	What laws serve the rebels?
ENN bann syntetik enn bann ras viper	The synthetic race, the race of vipers
Pe viv artifisiel	Who live in an artificial world
Zot kont naturel	That is against our nature
Ase konfie to namm avec bann ras viper	Do not trust your soul to this race of vipers
Noun fini fini fini fini devoster	We have been indoctrinated
Avec foss kiltir ek siperstisyon	By a deceptive culture and its myths
Oh...Oh...	Oh....Oh....
Oh....Oh....	Oh....Oh....
Lesclavaz finn sanze finn vinn mizer noir	Slavery takes new forms; see our condition of distress
Tou dimoun pran plezir a fer le kontrer	Everyone rejoices in wrongdoing
Pran bon pou pa bon	Turn what is good into what is not good
Pran pa bon pou bon	Turn what is not good into what is good

(Kaya, 'Ras Kouyon', 1998).

(Kaya, 'The Stupid Race', 1998).

Kaya's lyrics refer to the sickness of the earth, the suffering of people, the fake culture of a superficial synthetic life and the darkness and misery of post-enslavement (line 14).¹⁰¹ This can be read through the coloniality of power in Mauritius, reflected in

¹⁰¹ Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nyzbqKSy5Y>

the plantation mentality that marginalises certain communities based on colour, race, class or ethnicity. It brings into focus what McKittrick explains as the socioeconomic logic of the plantocracies that is linked to “persistent underdevelopment” and “persistent poverty” of black life’ (2013, p. 3). This plantation mentality lingers long after the movements for independence and defines many aspects of postslave life (p. 3).

Kaya, as well as other musicians such as Ras Natty Baby who came from Rodrigues Island and settled in Roche Bois and who still promotes reggae and seggae, sings about the commonality of roots reggae and seggae. For Ras Natty Baby, the new musical genre seggae brings a ‘new vibration’ and a ‘new vision’ of Mauritius (see the lyrics below), often referred to (within nationalist narratives) as the rainbow nation. However, drawing from the title of Paul Gilroy’s *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), it can be stated here that Black/Creole people are not represented in ‘the colours of the rainbow’ (line 1 and 2 from the album Ras Natty Baby’s *Nuvel Vizion (New Vision*, 1990) as the nation still marginalises the Creole people. In this sense, reggae and seggae bring a Black perspective to the rainbow nation.

nouvo lamizik	nouvo vibrasyon	new musical genre new vibration
nuvel vizion	kouler larkansiel	new vision of the colours of the rainbow
Morisien ek Zamaiken	finn zwenn ensam	Mauritian and Jamaicans have met
nou apel sa	seggae sega-reggae	We call it seggae sega-reggae
zot kouma de frer		They are like two brothers
nou ti separé	[SEP]zordi zot finn zwenn	We were, once, separated. We have finally
‘Nuvel Vizion’, (Ras Natty Baby 1990)		met
		‘New Vision’ (Ras Natty Baby, 1990)

Through ‘Nuvel Vizion’, from the album of the same name, Ras Natty Baby spreads an ethos of friendship and solidarity between the two islands, symbolically joined to the African continent through the Atlantic and Indian Ocean (‘Mauritian and Jamaicans have met/We call it seggae sega-reggae’, lines 3-4). The eventual bonding of sega and reggae (line 7) refers to the Creole people as Africans who were separated during enslavement and have now created solidarities through music. Following the argument in the previous section, The Creole solidarity between roots reggae and seggae – hence the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean – is brought forward from the ‘origin stories’ found in the creative practices of seggae.

Furthermore, Ras Natty Baby’s more militant seggae album, *Léve mo pep (Rise, my*

people) defines the optimistic sonic landscape that his seggae is known for. This is clear in the refrain ‘Leve do mo pep/Pran konsians/Pran konsians realite’ (‘Rise, my people/Develop a consciousness/Develop a consciousness of your reality’), which incites the people to rise up and develop a consciousness of their harsh reality. The second aspect that I discuss here is the technological and sonic transformation that sega went through to produce the new genre of seggae. Playing seggae involves a different technology of sound and perfecting a sonic landscape that incorporates a creative exploration and synchronization of instruments and sound, distinct to reggae rhythm.

I discuss Ras Natty Baby’s hit album *Nuvel Vision* (New Vision) as a form of optimistic seggae with the similar vibes of the much-remembered Bob Marley’s ‘One Love’ (from the *Exodus* album, 1977). Kaya’s song ‘Mo la Mizik’ (1989), as discussed above, and Ras Natty Baby’s second track ‘Rastafari’ in *Nuvel Vizion* (1990) carry a strong seggae imprint through chords of the keyboard alternating with the rhythm guitar, bass and drum, with Ras Natty Baby using a more up-tempo and optimistic vibration than Kaya.

Seggae was, for Kaya, a musical synthesis between the beat of Mauritian sega (6/8 or 4/4 as I explained in the previous section) and the two-beat music of roots reggae from Bob Marley’s body of work which he confesses was ‘not very difficult’ to arrange (Vuillermet, 2000). Yip Tong, who was Kaya’s first artistic director and producer of *Seggae Nu Lamizik* (1989), explains that seggae includes the heavy bassline (from bass guitar) of reggae and the characteristic reggae ‘one drop’ and skank from the rhythm guitar and keyboard (2018) while keeping the fast beat of sega. I deduct from the conversation with Yip Tong (2018) that the sonic landscape of the ‘folk’ sega is transformed, in seggae, by the bass (and base) culture of roots reggae. Henriques explains that reggae incorporates

a bass culture in terms of the pumping lower frequencies of the Reggae bass line, but also a base culture as a popular street culture (2011, p. xxi).

Furthermore, Kaya’s seggae doesn’t show the slow ‘riddim’ of Bob Marley’s ‘Natural Mystic’ (Bob Marley & The Wailers, 1977) or ‘Redemption Song’ (Bob Marley & The Wailers, 1980) for example. Nevertheless, some of his songs, such as ‘*Ras Kouyon*’, introduced above, reveal an attempt at experimenting with the amplification of sound and different instruments to create a more ‘haunting’ sonic atmosphere. Kaya experimented with refining rhythmic patterns and simplified chord progressions to reach a meditative feel and to make visceral the lyrical content. He

synthesised and experimented with an array of musical instruments for ‘Ras Kouyon’ and adopted a much deeper and resonating vocal register for this song which starts with the crisp sound of the sitar and smoothly blends into the slow beat of percussion, acoustic guitar and a keyboard arrangement. The eerie sonic atmosphere is, then, broken by the vibrating strum of the guitar which is overlapped by the sharp ting of a finger cymbal before opening to the haunting meditating voice of Kaya who starts on a long and deep ‘Oh....’ over the slow beat of the tabla. It is a hauntological, in the same way as the sega ‘Le Morne’ which, as discussed in the first section, aestheticises the death of slaves without abstracting it from the viscerality of violence and pain.

According to Weheliye (2005), Sonic beginnings – as well as repetition and recurrence in music, which are also integral parts of sega – have the potential to launch new soundscapes which futurises the music and amplifies the messages in the texts. Weheliye reiterates that Black culture engages with sound technologies and ‘[helps] recalibrate the identity-subject gulf by calling attention to their mutual interreliance’ (p. 13). For Henriques, sound reproduction – from the production of music and sound since the time of slavery – always implies social relations among people, machines, practices, and sound (2011, p. 31). The sonic is granted ‘a privileged place within Afro-diasporic formations because of its ability to convey the horrors of slavery via its primarily nonrepresentational attributes’ (Gilroy in Weheliye, 2005, p. 20).

In this sense, I listen to ‘Ras Kouyon’ which has a slower tempo than his usual seggae arrangements, with the song finishing on the lamenting sounds of the Indian violin. Kaya transforms sega and seggae with studio technologies, incorporating an experimental mixture of both African and Indian sonic compositions. The trance atmosphere of music also triggers moments of humanisation essential to marginalised communities who, as Wynter reminds us, are found outside the culture and civilised humanity of written literature, settler aesthetics and epistemologies.

Furthermore, in Kaya’s remake (1995) of Bob Marley’s ‘No Woman No Cry’ (1979), the transposed seggae’s beat and faster 5/1 tempo on his crisp vocals is a change in the sonic atmosphere of the original song. Marley’s Jamaican accent, slower tempo of the reggae and the contextual lyrics open up a way for Kaya to develop a Mauritian Creole sonic geography based on the reggae soundscape. Bob Marley’s introductory lines ‘Cause—cause—cause I remember when we used to sit/In a government yard in Trenchtown/Ob—observing the hypocrites’ becomes Kaya’s ‘I rem—mem-ber when we used to sit/In a government yard in Mau-ritius/Ob—serving the hypocrites’. Lyrics,

beat and tempo go through a process of sonic renewal and that Kaya glocalises roots reggae by rearranging its musicality and sonority with the faster beats of sega. In this regard, he produces a quintessentially Mauritian sound with politically engaged lyrics that have resonated within the Indian Ocean Region before being acknowledged in Mauritius.

When Kaya reiterates that ‘here, our music is not reggae, our music is sega’ (line 3) in ‘Mo La Mizik’, he is referring to the soundscape of the Creole language which is the common denominator between sega and seggae. It is in the same way that the speech of Rastafari, or Rasta talk/dread talk subverts the colonial culture by normalizing Jamaican Creole through reggae (Pollard, 2000, p. 31). The political lyrics, as well as the sonic and musicality of the Mauritian Creole language, are determining features of seggae, as language and music provide the platform and the vehicle for new soundscapes of protest to emerge.

In ‘Ras Kouyon’, Kaya uses the repetitive rhythm that is typical of expressions in the Creole language and in sega, ‘Pran bon pou pa bon/Pran pa bon pou bon’ (‘What is good is not good/What is not good is good’) (line 16), in forms of rhyme in the refrain. He thus explores the soundscape of the language to create emphatic lyrics. Cooper explains that the verbal creativity in Creole languages, such as double entendre, metaphor, proverb and riddle in Jamaican patois (as well as in Mauritian Creole), is a characteristic element of everyday oral discourse that constitutes the heightened language of orature (1993, p. 119). According to Cooper, Bob Marley’s songs ‘illustrate the fusion of scribal and oral literary influences – the former, largely derived from the Bible (as interpreted by Rastafari), which is admittedly, often transmitted orally; and the latter, originating in “Jamaican philosophy”’ (p. 117). She emphasises that the ‘emotive musical context’ (p. 118) of Bob Marley’s songs in the ‘energising reggae beat and the pulsating melodic line [...] normally extend the meaning of the performer’s words’ (p. 117).

The reggae songwriter’s art is a dynamic process in which words, music and dance are organically integrated within an afrocentric aesthetic. The composition and performance of lyrics is multi-modal; by contrast, artificial transmission of the reggae songwriter’s lyrics as transcript is monologic and thus somewhat counterproductive. The lineal act of writing down lyrics distorts the performance process (Cooper, 1993, p. 117)

The act of interpreting the meaning and significance of the music or ‘sound’ of a culture is critical to avoid the ‘ordering academic enterprise’ that, as Cooper eloquently puts it,

'can become another bastion of establishment Babylon that must be chanted down' (p. 117).¹⁰²

Therefore, the lyrics, when using songs as literary texts, cannot be decontextualized from the sound and the emotive, embodied, musical and sonic context of creative practices in the language such as the rootsical sega and seggae.¹⁰³ 'Ras Kouyon' takes seggae to a different level of sonority and sonic experience, while Kaya's lyrics in Creole remain politically charged and loaded with a Rastafari philosophy of planetary love and humanity.

In analysing Creole and creative practices in the language as technological transformation, I draw from Weheliye (2005) and Chude-Sokei (2016; 2018). Weheliye, whom I introduced in Chapter One, looks at the sonic topography of Black music and positions Black culture's engagement with sound technologies as 'both central to and outside of Western modernity' (p. 5). I particularly draw from his reflection on language and the sound of language. He argues that while language is not usually registered as technology, sonic technologies incorporate the sound of language that 'transmit intensities, which belong to the realm of expression rather than content' (2005, p. 69). Moreover, Weheliye explains that sound technologies are also often not regarded as technological at all and he recommends locating Black cultural production beyond the pale of what counts as technological (p. 2). Brathwaite, on his side, looks at the rhythm and the syllables of language as the 'very software, in a way, of the [Creole] language' (Brathwaite, 1995b, p. 311). Brathwaite is referring to the technical range of sonic resonance within Jamaican English that is lost with language in its written form. He develops a model of reading the sound of language – the shape of intonation, the intervalic pattern of the voice or the use of dactyls instead of the iambic pentameter for example (p. 312). Brathwaite explains that the new language incorporates an internal technology, 'rather than the technology outside themselves' (p. 312) which gives the specificity of the sonic resonance of language. Until more research is undertaken on the technical aspect of the sound of the Creole language, Brathwaite offers a productive line of thought to read Creole as a technological vehicle for the formation of a sonic aesthetics.

¹⁰² Sound being the timbre, amplitude and frequency whereas music being the rhythm, melody and harmony (Henriques, 2011, p. 28).

¹⁰³ Sound, in this case, encompasses the accents and pitches of the Creole language, or the 'visceral experience of audition' (Henriques, 2011, p. xv).

My research is also informed by the work of Chude-Sokei who draws from Glissant and Du Bois to propose a reading of the ‘spirit’ (Glissant, 1997) or ‘soul’ (Du Bois, 1903) of Black music as technology (Chude-Sokei, 2018). Chude-Sokei argues that the enslaved, just like machines, were/are not considered to have a soul (or a humanity). However, he argues that technology (techniques of engineering sound, modes of listening that makes possible new music) has become the primary method and space where Black roots, history and futurity becomes possible, as an interface. Following Weheliye’s and Chude-Sokei’s reasoning, I read the sound of language as technological transformation. This socio-technology of being human as praxis is negotiated by seggae artists like Kaya, for whom the storytelling of their origin stories through technologising sega or amplifying the sound technologies of the Creole language and sega, provide new ways of narrating a process of humanisation.

As with the rootsical sega, Kaya’s seggae re-centres knowledge, embedded in the Creole language, around the local context. In this sense, his music is produced from the sonic technologies of cultural production which provide ways of narrating history. In this sense, a reading of seggae as being recognised as a genre of its own through its sonic innovation has allowed me to situate the conditions in which sega and the Creole language were auto-instituted by the enslaved and the Creole people. As discussed in the previous section, autopoiesis, for Wynter, is about the ability of the homo narrans, a languaging being and storytelling species, to self-generate creative practices and rehumanise its social condition.

This brings me to the end of my argument that seggae represents what Wynter describes as a post-aesthetic creative practice generated through a technological transformation of culture from the racialised geographies of Black/Creole people. For Wynter, post-aesthetic creative practices developed from spaces of marginalisation (1992) and have at its core ‘being human as praxis’ (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015). I draw from McKittrick’s imagining of Black geographies ‘as the sites through which particular forces of empire [...] bring forth a poetics that envisions a decolonial future’ (2013, p. 5).

Our future modes of being, if tied to the plantation and empire and violence, might not necessarily follow our late-modern necropolitics of the present into future-misery, wherein freedom is lifeless and racial terror is the act of realizing this freedom (p. 5).

The act of realising freedom allows possibilities of reimagining the future from the colonial present. Chude-Sokei, on his side, refers to a ‘Creole futurity’, based on the ‘sonic alternative or alternative soundscape to modernisation’ (Chude-Sokei, 2018) embedded in the culture of merging.

The notion of decolonial futures is also reiterated by Wynter. Wynter draws from creative practices which ‘embody a dually *Underclass* “high-risk area” and Black popular point of view’ (1992, p. 238) and proposes rethinking aesthetics by freeing oneself from our addiction to the ‘opiate of aestheticism’ (p. 240) ‘to “uncover” the working of these ‘counter’ practices, which are not purely oppositional but present narratives of the future’ (McKittrick, 2013). It involves locating post-aesthetic creative practices and understanding the condition of coloniality in which the artists inhabit, rehumanise and resist.

Post-aesthetic creative practices do not necessarily inscribe themselves as futurity in the same way as artistic practices such as Ghanty and Hurry’s, which are generated out of a conscious need to anarchive dominant aesthetics, inscribe their contemporary art practice as innovative and popularise their thoughts in a determined art circuit. Rather, post-aesthetic creative practices are ‘post’ in the sense that they do not visibly demarcate themselves as futuristic, particularly because they are strongly set in ancestral practices and histories. The challenge with post-aesthetic creative practices is that they are inscribed in the technological transformation of the most precarious conditions of being human, that of enslavement. In the case of my research, the development of the Creole language and the sega represent the backbone of post-aesthetic creative practices like seggae, which brings forward this origin story in the present.

In this sense, the process of epistemic decolonisation or challenging coloniality implies ‘a practice of decipherment’ (Wynter, 1992, p. 238) which questions the racialised hierarchies of labour, built upon a colonial plantation logic. In the context of Mauritius, this logic is reproduced in the present structure of the state that contributes to the ghettoisation of Creole artists while promoting their music as national culture. McKittrick explains that

Deciphering a plantation logic, then, works across three thematics: it identifies the normalizing mechanics of the plantation, wherein black subjugation and land exploitation go hand in hand and shepherd in certain (present) death; it notices our collective participation in and rhetorical commitment to reproducing this system as though it is natural, inevitable, and a normal way of life; and it imagines the plot-

and-plantation as a new analytical ground that puts forth a knowledge system, produced outside the realms of normalcy, thus rejecting the very rules of the system that profits from racial violence, and in this envisions not a purely oppositional narrative but rather a future where a correlated human species perspective is honored (2013, p. 11).

I analysed the three thematics, proposed by McKittrick, and identified the colonial structures which are normalised in the postcolony within a national discourse of progress, hence our ‘collective participation’ to reproduce the system. The third followed Wynter’s proposal for a practice of decipherment which requires listening to the ‘undecipherable songs’ (Hartman, 2008, p. 3) that embody visceral knowledge. It also amplifies Black voices from the ghetto, as Wynter proposes in her article ‘Rethinking “Aesthetics”: Notes towards a deciphering practice’ (1992).

Wynter’s theorisation of a deciphering practice allowed me to develop a method and approach of locating and uncovering post-aesthetic creative practices that, as she argues, move ‘beyond our present “human sciences” to that of a new science of human “forms of life” and their correlated modes of the aesthetic’ (p. 240). In this sense, Wynter questions colonial constructs of aesthetics from the academic disciplines of the humanities (Art History or Literature, for example) and proposes to move ‘After Criticism ... Towards a Deciphering Turn’ (p. 261). She rethinks aesthetics and proposes a practice of decipherment as a progression on, and extension of, post-aesthetic critical practices and interpretations ‘within the context of an imperatively needed “rewriting” of the human’ (p. 241). For Wynter, a new science of human discourse involves the inscription of the human story in the disciplines where history becomes the collective story (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 3).

This chapter attempts to place the human story of the enslaved in the historiography of slavery as a collective story of present coloniality. It is in this sense that my research was written with the ethos of a deciphering practice, as will be reiterated in the general conclusion of the thesis.

Conclusion

This final chapter built a genealogy of practices in Creole since the time of slavery. It read (or ‘listened’ to, as a decolonial method) the rootsical (enslaved) sega as well as

the 1970s political sega *angaze* and Kaya's seggae of the 1980s outside the paradigm of a European aesthetics and system of knowledge which defined and classified the practice as 'folklore', 'past-time' or 'entertainment'.

Primarily, this chapter demonstrates that the process of decolonisation involved not only spaces of deconstruction – as discussed in Chapter Three and Four but consists of a set of practices of deconstruction and methods of reconstruction at the level of epistemology, ideology, historiography and ontology. What the last chapter proposed was a methodology that aimed at writing about the consequences of traumatic events such as slavery in a language that can still be analytical yet visceral. The terms 'critical fabulation' (Hartman, 2008) and 'performative historiography' (Fabião, 2012) allowed me to position art, songs, prose or performance as decolonial processes of producing visceral knowledge about the history of enslavement and its consequences in the present.

Decolonisation is a longer period of resistance against colonisation and coloniality. This chapter also centers the Creole language outside the linguistic, anthropological and sociological lens that had been used before or outside the music as a case as studied in field of ethnomusicology. In this sense, I drew from Henriques's 'thinking through sound', and Wynter's notion of 'autopoiesis', which opened up productive lines of enquiry to understand how the Creole culture is predominantly sonic and is an autopoetic languaging living system.

Finally, thinking seggae through the technologising of sound was explored not only as an undoing of colonial narratives but primarily as a way of building knowledge from a point of origination which breaks away from colonial epistemologies and genealogies. Seggae is a music genre that stems from Mauritian sega and Jamaican roots reggae and evolved from the cartographies of struggle of the Creole people. The reggae soundscape allowed artists to claim spaces of rehumanisation through music, in a world in which their lives continue to be oppressed by institutions of power. I conclude that sound technologies of seggae (the viscerality of the rootsical sega and the technologising of the sound of reggae) futurised sega, which is read here as representing the technological software of a Creole language.

Conclusion: A Practice of Decipherment

'Decolonising Dodoland: From Colonial Anaesthesia to Autopoiesis in Creative Practices on Mainland Mauritius' aimed at answering the initial question of this research, whether Mauritians did not know their history because of cultural amnesia. I proposed the metaphor 'colonial anaesthesia', which refers to the process of being induced into a paralysing state of unfeeling. In the case of this research, I demonstrate that there is a form of 'organised forgetting' (Connerton, 1989, p. 14) or 'induced amnesia' that is produced by the apparatus of the state by not engaging critically with institutions of knowledge. I also use the postcolonial geography to show how the impact of colonial demarcation of space has seeped into a slow violence. The metaphor of colonial anaesthesia is developed to show that the erasure of history is induced and that the pathological process of cultural amnesia does not consider the impact of mechanisms of power, such as the nationalisation of colonial institutions.

The second aspect of this research moves to the propositional. It identified coloniality through the cultural geography of Mauritius and proposes the decoloniality of aesthetics as a framework to build an alternative historiography. The works of visual artists Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry on the dodo provided a platform to discuss how contemporary art can challenge an officialised historiography. Last, by looking at the sonic Creole culture, I showed how processes of decolonisation ran through creative practices in the Creole language since the time of slavery and how they continue to manifest themselves in the present as a hauntological mourning. In this sense, this research is written with the ethos of a deciphering practice, articulated as part of envisioning a decolonial future in which Sylvia Wynter's 'being human as praxis' is paramount to a rethinking of existing aesthetics and epistemologies. In this sense, a practice of decipherment allowed me to look at creative practices beyond the institutionalisation of aesthetics and knowledge.

As I explained in the Introduction, I refer to the mainland as 'dodoland' as a pun which carries two meanings: firstly, it situates the history and location of the extinct dodo; secondly, as discussed in Introductory Chapter, 'dodoland' implies the land that has fallen asleep ('dodo' means sleep in the Mauritian Creole language) under a metaphorical anaesthesia induced by coloniality. '*Decolonising Dodoland: From Colonial Anaesthesia to Autopoiesis in Creative Practices on Mainland Mauritius*' fundamentally looked at possibilities of decolonising knowledge in Mauritius and

offered a critique of a settler historiography, proposing instead an alternate history from the visual and sonic landscape of Mauritius.

In **Chapter One**, I developed methods, concepts and approaches around five thematics related to a decolonial conceptual framework. The interweaving of these themes and methods forms the backbone of this research. These were:

1. unpacking the decolonial option/turn in academia;
2. discussing Wynter's concepts of autopoiesis and indigenisation in relation to the usage of the term 'creolisation' in the field of linguistics, literature, Creole studies, history and anthropology;
3. drawing from the field of critical geography and the work of Katherine McKittrick on cartographies of struggle to build a critique of the postcolonial geography of Mauritius;
4. working with the term 'performative historiography', which I draw from Eleonora Fabião, to understand how a corporeal and performative historiography can produce visceral histories;
5. thinking through sound, drawing from the work of Julian Henriques and Louis Chude-Sokei, in order to listen (as a decolonial method) to the sonic Creole culture and understand how it represents a technological transformation and a Creole futurity.

Chapter One also elaborated on the methodology used for this research and introduced the main secondary literature, namely the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission and the limitations of the Indian Ocean model before expanding on visual ethnography and contextualising the primary source of the research material.

Chapter Two contextualised the history of colonialism in the Indian Ocean and positioned the histories of the Indian Ocean islands within the wider history of European colonialism. Part of the deciphering process was to establish a connection between the cultural history of the Indian Ocean islands and the Caribbean as well as the history of European colonisation of the Americas since the fifteenth century. The aim was to deconstruct narratives around the Indian Ocean exceptionalism promoted by national institutions in Mauritius that present Europeans as having 'migrated' to 'uninhabited' islands. This narrative is exacerbated by the post-independence political discourse that Indians 'arrived' on the island during indenture and laboured on the sugar plantations and, therefore, contributed to the economic progress of the colony.

Chapter Two also drew from the conclusions of the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission that Mauritians know very little about their history and proposed the term 'colonial anaesthesia' to explain how people in the postcolony are induced into a

cultural amnesia or constrained into a paralysing state of anaesthesia by the non-acknowledgement of the violence of colonisation and coloniality by the apparatus of the state. I then made a detour through Frantz Fanon's experience of racism in the streets of Paris to examine racialised spatialities as slow violence – a term I borrowed and adapted from Rob Nixon. This chapter situated two aspects of the postcolonial geography of Mauritius: the grid-like cartography of the capital city of Port Louis and the leftover monuments such as sculptures of settlers.

In **Chapters Three, Four and Five**, I offered three sites or objects of analysis: the colonial institution of the Natural History Museum, which was nationalised after independence; the extinct bird as a national symbol and as thematic for decolonial contemporary art; and the performative and sonic historiographies of creative practices in the Creole language. Each chapter acted as a turning point and contributed to what I discuss, a practice of decipherment. The deciphering process moved from a critique of coloniality towards a construction/acknowledgement of decolonial knowledge produced in the colony and the postcolony in the following chapters.

Chapter Three presents the Natural History Museum as a colonial archive which contributes to the reproduction of a glorified history of colonisation. This chapter situated objects of colonial significance – appropriated as national symbols in Mauritius – in order to analyse how the post-independence city and its institutions are representative of the violence of colonial occupation and administration. Analysis of the last exhibition room of the museum is dedicated to the representations of the extinct dodo as a signifier of colonialism (extinction), coloniality (the bird iconised by the national Natural History Museum nationalised after independence). This chapter demonstrates how a colonial epistemology is reproduced by the state apparatus.

In **Chapter Four**, I highlighted decolonial narratives, as part of the process of decipherment, from the works of visual artists Firoz Ghanty and Nirmal Hurry. This chapter first discussed the paradigm shift in the culture of the island (the 'golden age' in which artists, musicians and writers used the Creole language as a tool for political propaganda, building national unity and for literacy purposes) after independence. It then offered a critique of the politics of display (of the Dodo Gallery) and the colonial narratives and representations of the extinct bird were read in juxtaposition with the a decoloniality of aesthetics that I discuss inform Ghanty and Hurry's works on the bird. Ghanty's performance and works on the dodo reconfigured a new approach to the fetishistic memorialism of the animal as a national symbol, while Hurry's sculptures of

the bird and poetry in Mauritian Creole offered a different representation and a critique of how extinction is framed in the museum. Coloniality is questioned and challenged in the postcolony through the works of the artists.

Chapter Five drew from Wynter's notion of 'being human as praxis' (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015) and her reflection on post-aesthetics creative practices (Wynter, 1992). It pinpointed the settler aesthetics of the bourgeoisie in the context of Mauritius, the colonial appropriation of the Creole language and the commercialisation of the sega. The aim was to reconstruct visceral histories, in the line of thought of Christina Sharpe (2016) and Saidiya Hartman (2008), who propose methods of writing about the trauma of colonisation in the present without making the domination of the system or the pain and violence inflicted 'in/visible and not/visceral' (Sharpe, 2016, p. 21). Here, I focused on the 'sonic bodies' – a term I borrowed from Henriques – to define:

1. the flesh and blood of Creole speakers who explore the musical and sonic aspect of their mother tongue;
2. sega practitioners who create new music with the sound of different hand-made instruments;
3. the main singer who instigates the call and response of the dancers;
4. the dancers and participative audience who are immersed in the auditory environment and sonic atmosphere of the performance; and
5. seggae musicians, who explore sound technologies to futurise sega.

This final chapter proposed to envision Creole sonic culture as embodying sound technologies that represent what Chude-Sokei calls 'a Creole futurity' (2018).

This research acted as a journey to rethink aesthetics through post-aesthetic creative practices. While it focused on Creole/Black music and sound because this is what was/is created on the Mauritius islands, this research does not undermine other indigenised practices (from people of Indian and Chinese descent for example) that can offer similar decolonial avenues of seeing, living and being human as praxis. In this sense, it drew from Caribbean theories and scholarship from the Black Caribbean mainly (instead of the Indo Caribbean which share more similarities with Mauritius) to look/listen at the Black/Creole creative practices which had been presented as folklore or vernacular from the literature on the Indian Ocean. The differences between the Francophone, Anglophone, Creolophone, Indophone worlds of the Caribbean and the similarities that can be drawn with the Indian Ocean is a potential subject of research that would build a bridge between those two basins.

This research functions as a ‘deciphering practice’ built on a foundation through which the visual and sonic aesthetics can be analysed as performing history and carrying decolonial knowledges. Within an ocularcentric, hypervisual and literate institutional logic of thinking, sonic landscapes in particular are not usually considered as carriers of knowledge. They however consist, as Henriques (2011) explains, of a corpus of knowledge handed down through generations of practitioners. They are therefore ‘knowing’ and transmit knowledge.

Beyond summarising the main gestures of each of the chapters, the aim of this conclusion is also to draw attention to some of the many layers that could be developed further, especially in relation to Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s argument that decolonisation is not a metaphor (2012). I started my research from the perspective of a dominant settler visual culture and, in this sense, a practice of decipherment is also a process of unpacking other political, social and economic layers that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

This research raised two preoccupations of mine that require deeper analysis:

1. The racialisation of space and ghettoisation of the Creole people. I elaborated on the racialised areas of Roche Bois where Kaya developed his music seggae in Chapter Five. In terms of further development, it would be worth examining the structures of power which reproduced racialised geographies and hierarchies of labour in Mauritius, as already pinpointed by the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission. This also touches racism and police brutality in Mauritius which is not a preoccupation of the government. Following Kaya’s death in the hands of the police, I propose that there is an urgency to research the Mauritian police as an inherited institution of control and discipline. Although I do not elaborate on this aspect in this thesis, the following questions demand responding to: (a) How might we imagine a politics of care which brings the police – an apparatus of the state – accountable for the violence that had been inflicted on Kaya and how to dismantle systems of control, such as the police and prison complex inherited by plantation structures of power, in the context of Mauritius? (b) How to decolonise a settler mentality which is embedded in asymmetrical relations of power where differences based on class, race/ethnicity/caste, gender, ability and sexuality are institutionalised?

2. Secondly, the question of land is a contemporary issue which I only partially raised in this research. While I drew form Indigenous scholarship to repatriate the

history of the extinct dodo, I am very aware that ‘being human as praxis’ or rewriting of the human involved a solidarity, drawing from the work of María Lugones, with those who are still alive today and who are dehumanised by the settler politics (of Hindus in the case of Mauritius). The Truth and Justice Commission dedicated one volume (out of four) to the question of repatriating land to the Creole people. Since the abolition of slavery in 1833, the Creole people have been disadvantaged after leaving the plantation and the post-abolition apprenticeship put in place which gave them no access to land ownership and no means of accumulation.

I discuss a settler mentality value either those who laboured in/for the progress of the colony or the ‘hard work’ that brings economic progress to the post-independence state (a common narrative used to describe the labour of Indo-Mauritians who laboured in the plantation after the abolition of slavery). In this context, I raise a concern about the recognition of the creative labour of artists, especially those producing what Wynter articulates as ‘post-aesthetic creative practices’, as forms of imagining new possibilities of life and culture. Unlike the settler conception of value and labour, the purpose of creation, as discussed in this thesis, is associated with the rewriting of the human and a process of rehumanisation under dominant regimes.

Following Tuck and Yang’s argument that decolonisation is about the repatriation of land, I cannot end this thesis without mentioning the fifty-year-old struggle and legal battle of the Creole Chagossians to ‘return home’. About two thousand islanders, descendants of those who were enslaved, were displaced from the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean when the biggest island, Diego Garcia, was excised illegally from Mauritius by the British Government in order to be leased to the United States as a military base in 1968. The Chagossians’ most recent legal demand (on the 3-6 September 2018) for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice in The Hague, to take the United Kingdom to court for breach of international justice, was supported by a majority of voters (International Court of Justice, 2018).

In their plea to return, the Chagossians evoke a powerful narrative which demonstrates their attachment and sense of belonging to their islands: the umbilical cords of their ancestors have been buried there for the last three hundred years. The repatriation of land in Indigenous scholarship is another fundamental process of decolonisation which needs investigating in the Indian Ocean context where islands are exploited and militarised for their strategic position and vulnerable people made expendable. This loops in with the introduction of this thesis where I showed how

islands are depicted as uninhabited paradises from the distant view of the coloniser's gaze. The land as indigenous problematises two correlated problems: the privatisation of land, property and other natural resources under a colonial-imperial-capitalist regime that establishes hierarchies of power based on accumulation; and the question of militarisation which was the strategic reason of the UK and US for acquiring the Chagossians' island. The Government of Mauritius's agenda of decolonisation does not include demilitarisation and focuses on a claim for sovereignty over the Chagos with an interest to capitalise from the lease with the United States. In this sense, I conclude that decolonisation is about formulating and deciphering knowledges that look at the indigenisation of land as the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human organisms and their physical geography, outside of a regime of exploitation, settlement, accumulation and militarisation.

It is in this regard that a discussion about what a Creole island futurity entails is necessary. A decolonial future necessitates, first of all, the deciphering of a settler epistemology; this, I believe, might open ways of rethinking politics through 'being human as praxis'.

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