

REORIENTING THE UTOPIAN ISLAND: TROPES, TOPONYMY AND
TRANSGRESSION IN TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INDIAN
OCEAN AND CARIBBEAN FICTIONS

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Fields like postcolonial studies widely deploy terms like multiculturalism, *métissage* (mixing) and *créolité* (creoleness) to describe the multiplicity of identity and heritage found in the regions of the global South. These terms tend to have positive connotations; however, in this dissertation I argue that although they valorize the diasporic identity and racial mixing of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, they also reinforce an aestheticized representation of these spaces that reproduces the trope of the “utopian island”—a trope that has recurred throughout literature, travel narratives and tourist brochures. These representations often rely on the illusion of successful multicultural coexistence that obfuscates the racial stratification that continues to persist in these creole archipelagic regions.

My dissertation explores a series of narratives that challenge these tropes—both of the utopian creole island and postcolonial multicultural success. In these alternative narratives, twentieth and twenty-first century authors from the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and France use tropes, toponymy and transgression (of normative expressions of gender, race and class) to depict how subaltern bodies—undocumented migrants, “low-caste” and “no-caste” individuals, and sex workers—destabilize the neoliberal logic of the economies in which they participate through their embodied and affective actions.

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I. INTRODUCTION: UTOPIAN FANTASIES AND NEOCOLONIAL REALITIES

*“Nous avons décidé de ne pas résister à ses multiplicités
pas plus que ne résiste le jardin créole aux formes des ignames qui l’habitent.”*
-Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant¹

*“Mais, cet après-midi, quand je rentre enfin après vingt heures au poste,
ce jardin me semble une imposture, un cliché, une carte postale pour touristes.”*
-Nathacha Appanah²

In Nathacha Appanah’s 2016 novel, *Tropique de la violence*, the policeman Olivier returns home one afternoon to find that his garden, that once gave him a sense of well-being and belonging, has become an “imposture.” After spending the day dealing with the aftermath of a murder, Olivier no longer finds solace in his garden—a garden that beforehand, seemed to share much with the “Creole Garden” found in Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant’s *L’Éloge de la créolité* (1993). Like this Creole Garden, Olivier’s garden does not “resist its multiplicity”—it is filled with diverse flowers, insects and perfumes—and, on most mornings, the garden gives Olivier the illusion of belonging, or of “taking root” (*prendre racine*) (Appanah 159). After learning the tragic story of how one young man, Moïse, took the life of another young man, Bruce, Olivier goes into his garden, looking for emotional release and consolation: “Je vais dans le jardin et, sous le soleil métallique et brûlant, j’attends d’être ému, j’attends d’être lavé... j’attends d’être apaisé, j’attends d’être consolé” (160). However, he waits in vain and instead finds that his garden is nothing but “a postcard for tourists” (160).

The “postcard for tourists” evokes the idealized fantasy of tropical island getaways (locations usually found in the formerly colonized world, now referred to as the Global

¹ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Mohamed Bouya Taleb-Khyar. *Eloge de la Créolité* [1993]. Gallimard, 2006. (28)

² Nathacha Appanah. *Tropique de la violence*. Gallimard, 2016. (160)

South) that are marketed for Western public consumption. These regions were left out of critical and scholarly debates for centuries; however, in the years following the widespread decolonization of the 1960s, new academic fields of study emerged that began to specialize in the literary and cultural production of these formerly colonized regions. Today, fields like postcolonial studies are firmly established, and they widely deploy terms like multiculturalism, *métissage* (mixing) and *créolité* (creoleness) to describe the multiplicity of identity and heritage found in these regions. These terms tend to have positive connotations and seem to have little in common with the aforementioned “postcard for tourists.”³ In this dissertation, I argue that although these terms valorize the diasporic identity and racial mixing of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, they also reinforce an aestheticized representation of these spaces that recalls the trope of the “utopian island”—a trope that has recurred throughout literature, travel narratives and tourist brochures. Furthermore, these representations often rely on the illusion of successful multicultural coexistence that obfuscates the racial stratification that continues to persist in these creole archipelagic regions.

My dissertation examines the novels of five writers—Nathacha Appanah (Mauritius), Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe), Ananda Devi (Mauritius), Marguerite Duras (France) and Barlen Pyamootoo (Mauritius)—that take place in the Indian Ocean and Caribbean. These writers craft alternative narratives that unravel the tropes of both the creole utopian island and postcolonial multicultural success. Furthermore, they depict groups marginalized by the colonialist past and continuing neocolonialist present. I argue that *tropes*, *toponymy* and *transgression* create three analytical categories through which to explore how these

³ Françoise Lionnet. *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*. Institut Français, 2012 (17). Lionnet describes the contradictions between Mauritius as a utopian tourist paradise with the island’s lived reality.

alternative narratives both destabilize and participate in neoliberal and neocolonial power structures.

For example, tropes like the “tropical garden” and “postcard for tourists” reinforce an aestheticized image of the archipelagos of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. The authors of my corpus exploit the inconsistencies inherent to these tropes to subvert and pervert the fantasy of the utopian creole island. Toponymy, the study of place names (toponyms), refers to my analysis of the colonial practice of naming cities in the colonized region after European sites, and of the postcolonial practice of renaming these cities with their more original or “authentic” versions. Finally, transgression refers to the strategies of resistance and disruption that marginalized groups employ. Broadly speaking, I use the term “neoliberal” to indicate political and economic systems that promote unrestricted trade and unlimited profit for corporations and the extremely wealthy and are accompanied by little to no social safety-net. By “neocolonial” I mean the continued practice of oppression and subordination of the Global South by the Global North despite the supposed end of colonialism that came with widespread independence.

“Utopian island,” refers to the trope of the island paradise that recurs in literary representations, films and travel brochures. A well-known example comes from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s iconic eighteenth-century novel *Paul et Virginie*⁴ whose two main characters grow up in idealized innocence on the island of Mauritius.⁵ Mauritius represents a place of lush, unspoiled vegetation and child-like purity that nature produces and that the corruption of European “civilization” spoils. The same utopian fantasies can also hide within more contemporary narratives of multicultural success like *L’Éloge* which, while valorizing creole literary production, also aestheticizes and reifies the concept of *créolité*—with the subsequent

⁴ Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. *Paul et Virginie* (1737-1814). Henry Holt and Co., 1925.

⁵ See Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain* (18, 30)

risk of its being packaged for sale and consumption. By contrast, the divergent narratives that I examine expose the continuing exploitative economic conditions that sustain the racial, sexual and cultural hierarchies established by slavery, indentured labor and colonization. By considering how twentieth and twenty-first century authors from the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and France depict marginalized groups like undocumented migrants, “low-caste” and “no-caste” individuals, and sex workers, I argue that they “reorient” this utopian fantasy so that it exposes the dystopian reality of the most precarious and often invisible subjects. Drawing from scholarship on the politics of sensation,⁶ I further claim that the authors of my corpus depict marginalized groups whose embodied and affective micro-actions destabilize the neoliberal logic of the economies in which they participate.

Methodology

This dissertation’s corpus and theoretical framework reflects the hybridity and multiplicity of creolized regions. I explore more primary texts than are often customary to one dissertation. As such, I isolate themes central to each primary text and offer close readings to illuminate thematic connections between the works and throughout the corpus. The theoretical perspectives I engage with are similarly diverse, reflecting the central claims in each chapter as well as the central claim of the dissertation: that the authors of my corpus “re-orient”—with all of the spatial, geographic and literary wealth that “orient” conjures—the myth of successful, postcolonial, multicultural utopia. To support these claims, I draw from Sara Ahmed’s theoretical engagement with the concepts of inheritance and orientations in her 2006 book *Queer Phenomenology*.⁷ In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed describes migration in terms of orientations: “Migration could be described as a process of

⁶ See Judith Butler, David Panagia and Jacques Rancière

⁷ Sara Ahmed. *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke UP, 2006.

disorientation and reorientation: As bodies ‘move away’ as well as ‘arrive,’ they reinhabit spaces” (9). This formulation of migration privileges the body and its position and direction as it moves and leans toward spaces and inheritances. In Ahmed’s work, following a phenomenological model, the subject is formed through its emotions, affect and desires that pull it toward and push it away from objects and others, effectively creating the body’s orientations, sexual and otherwise (2). These orientations are both inherent and the product of work—they are both the product of “being” and “becoming” (93).⁸ As a result of these orientations, spaces in Ahmed’s work become racialized. Some objects and spaces are placed within reach of the mixed-race body, for example, while others are out of reach, thus shaping both the desires of the body and determining what the body can access. Furthermore, Ahmed deploys the term “orientations” both to describe proximity and directionality: at the same time, she emphasizes the “orient” in “orientations” (3).

Stuart Hall’s work reconceptualizes diaspora to account for divergence in the Caribbean:⁹ Gayatri Gopinath offers formulation of queer diaspora.¹⁰ Each provides further insight into the formation of diasporic identity. Both authors problematize utopian conceptions of the homeland and point to the complexity that the term “homeland” has for creole and queer subjects. Gopinath examines South Asian cultural production in the United Kingdom and Hall primarily discusses the Anglophone Caribbean. Additionally, Edouard Glissant’s foundational theorization of creolization¹¹ in the Caribbean and Françoise Lionnet

⁸ Ahmed uses Judith Butler’s reference to “going off the Yale to become a lesbian” to establish the fact that one is already a lesbian at the same time that naming oneself a lesbian concretizes this orientation: “Naming oneself as a lesbian is thus an effect of being a lesbian (in a certain way), which itself produces the effect of being a lesbian (in another way)” (93).

⁹ Stuart Hall. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Blackwell, 2003. 233-46. Keywords in Cultural Studies.

¹⁰ Gayatri Gopinath. *Impossible Desires*. Duke UP, 2005.

¹¹ Edouard Glissant. *Le Discours antillais*. Gallimard, 1997.

and Shumei Shi's more recent engagement with the "creolization of theory"¹² elaborate a contextual framework through which to interrogate Caribbean and Indian Ocean subjectivities and to push back against the hegemony of theory itself. Multiplicity, hybridity, métissage and creolization are all concepts that recur throughout the primary texts that I engage with. The term "creole" has multiple meanings in different contexts, and the primary texts of this corpus reflect the distinction between creolization as process and *créolité* as a more essentialized state.

Reading for "tropicalization," following Srinivas Aravamudan,¹³ unmask the power dynamics that enabled the global North to define the inhabitants and spaces of the global South, just as Edward Said's *Orientalism*¹⁴ helps to explain how contemporary Indian Ocean and Caribbean literature recuperates tropes to de/dis-"orient"-alize its subjects, spaces and narratives. I understand the term neoliberalism through the works of Michel Foucault, Anita Chari and Verónica Gago: that is, neoliberalism as an inversion of classical liberalism, its top-down as well as "bottom-up" iterations and the subversion of neoliberal structures via neoliberalism's own mechanics.¹⁵

Finally, the work of Judith Butler, Davide Panagia and Jacques Rancière¹⁶ allows me to engage with the embodied and performative aspects of my corpus. I specifically turn to Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" to point to moments in the texts in which the

¹² Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shi. *The Creolization of Theory*. Duke UP, 2011.

¹³ Srinivas Aravamudan. *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency 1688-1804*. Duke UP, 1999.

¹⁴ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. Pantheon, 1978.

¹⁵ Anita Chari. *A Political Economy of the Senses*. Columbia UP, 2015. Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*. Picador, 2008. Verónica Gago. *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*. Duke UP, 2017.

¹⁶ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990 and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Harvard UP, 2015. Davide Panagia. *The Political Life of Sensation*. Duke UP, 2009. Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliot. Verso, 2009, *The Politics of Literature*. Trans. Julie Rose. Polity, 2011, and *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. Bloomsbury, 2004.

invisible becomes visible or the “untouchable” touches. These individual textual moments of rupture disrupt the “distribution of the sensible” internal to each text, while, externally, the grouping together of these texts dismantles the idea of a literary genealogy

These diverse theoretical concepts, terms and approaches intersect to provide an interdisciplinary framework through which I formulate an alternative narrative genealogy that challenges the norms of Francophone literary history. However, I do not intend to conceive a literary genealogy that tries to establish these writers as canonical or as a kind of alternative canon. Instead, I assert that their work fundamentally destabilizes the very notion of the canon by questioning the biological and chronological norms that underpin the hierarchies that the notion of a canon fundamentally implies. Furthermore, I do not attempt to create or bring to light an alternative and more inclusive contemporary version of Pascale Casanova’s “République mondiale des lettres.”¹⁷ Rather, I argue that the texts individually and the corpus collectively disrupt the “distribution of the sensible” inherent to classifying, periodizing and defining literature, and that this disruption is itself a political act.

Critical Literature

This dissertation explores primary texts from both well-known and lesser-known authors to U.S scholarship and readership, and the critical literature available reflects this disparity in popularity. Marguerite Duras for example, has been widely studied for both her oeuvre and for her role as pioneer of the *nouveau roman*. Bettina L. Knapp’s edited volume, *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*,¹⁸ brings together essays that look at Duras’s work through psychoanalytic theory, feminist theories, poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. Sharon Willis explores the body and its iterations throughout Duras’s oeuvre in her 1987

¹⁷ Pascale Casanova. *La République mondiale des lettres*. vol. 607, Seuil, 2008.

¹⁸ Bettina Knapp. *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*. Simon and Schuster, 1998.

classic, *Writing on the Body*.¹⁹ Indian Ocean scholar, Julia Waters more recently examines the anticolonialism found in Duras's novels about Indochina.²⁰

Condé shares such canonical status, if more within the space of Francophone Caribbean literature. Condé is both the subject of numerous scholarly works and the author of fiction, theoretical and critical literature. Dawn Fulton²¹ explores Condé's fiction as a tool of postcolonial criticism while Jeannie Suk²² focuses on the inconsistencies and paradoxes within her work. Condé herself responds to debates around the difference between créolité and creolization with her 1995 edited volume *Penser la Créolité*.²³

Indo-Caribbean and Indian Ocean studies now comprise a robust field of research, theory and critical literature. Renowned Mauritian academic and theorist Lionnet helped to establish Indian Ocean Studies in the U.S. academy and has popularized the work of Mauritian authors Appanah and Devi. Lionnet has written extensively about Indian Ocean and Caribbean authors throughout the span of her career: from her early work *Postcolonial Representations* (1995) to *Writing Women* (2012) and *Creole Cosmopolitics* (2012).²⁴ Her 2016 article with Bruno Emmanuel Jean-François,²⁵ investigates the challenges of publication

¹⁹ Sharon Willis. *Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body*. UP of Illinois, 1987.

²⁰ Julia Waters. *Duras and Indochina: Postcolonial Perspectives*. Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies, 2006.

²¹ Dawn Fulton. *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Condé and Postcolonial Criticism*. University of Virginia Press, 2008.

²² Jeannie Suk. *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé*. Clarendon, 2001.

²³ Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage. *Penser La Créolité*. Eds. Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, Karthala, 1995.

²⁴ Françoise Lionnet. *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*. Institut Français, 2012. *Postcolonial Representations*. Cornell UP, 1995. *Writing Women and Critical Dialogues: Subjectivity, Gender and Irony*. Institut Français, 2012.

²⁵ Françoise Lionnet and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François. "Literary Routes: Migration, Islands, and the Creative Economy." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 131, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1222–1238.

for global South authors and looks at the migrations of these authors and their works from periphery to center and back again.

Ritu Tyagi wrote the first full-length monograph dedicated to Devi's work,²⁶ marking Devi's importance as a postcolonial Francophone fiction writer. Tyagi discusses the diegetic complexity of Devi's novels as well as their subversion of heteronormative desire. The edited volume, *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité*,²⁷ comprises a wide range of essays dedicated to women writers from Mauritius.

Véronique Bragard is a specialist in Indian Ocean literature and has written extensively about Appanah, Devi and Pyamootoo.²⁸ She explores how the authors expose the globalization that has destroyed the island regions of the Global South, making these spaces "paradis perdus" for their inhabitants as the divide between the rich North and poor South continues to grow (246). In addition to her work on Duras, Waters examines marginalization and exclusion in Appanah and Devi.²⁹

The authors with whom I engage defy the normative, classificatory logic that dictates genre, period and subject. Duras's oeuvre, despite being classified as French literature, also belongs to the world *colonized* by the French, as she grew in poverty in the former French colony of Indochina. Although many scholars have examined the works of Devi, Condé, Appanah and Pyamootoo through the lens of Francophone and postcolonial studies, to my knowledge, no scholars look at Duras in conversation with these authors. Thus, this assemblage of authors makes my dissertation a "de-linking project" that decolonizes knowledge by upending the norms, or "anchors" that reinforce coloniality (Mignolo 450).

²⁶ Ritu Tyagi. *Ananda Devi: Feminism, Narration and Polyphony*. Rodopi, 2013.

²⁷ Véronique Bragard and Srilata Ravi. *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité*. Harmattan, 2014.

²⁸ Véronique Bragard. "Regards croisés sur la mémoire coolie des Antilles aux Mascareignes." *Nouvelles Études Francophones*. vol. 21, no. 2, 2006, pp. 163–180.

²⁹ Julia Waters. *The Mauritian Novel: Fictions of Belonging*. Liverpool UP, 2018.

Throughout these chapters, my methodology utilizes close readings of the selected primary texts to analyze the thematic and textual elements of these works, which in turn dialogue with a wide range of current theoretical scholarship on the politics of sensation, decoloniality, subaltern studies, feminist affect theory, and queer phenomenology.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter II “(Re) turning toward Imagined Pasts,” proposes that four female authors from different geographies and generations, Appanah, Condé, Duras and Devi,³⁰ generate a non-normative literary genealogy that chronicles the embodied and sensorial experiences of diaspora. This alternative, non-hierarchical genealogy disrupts what Hall calls “the backward-looking conception of diaspora” that seeks to reconstitute an essentialist and pure diasporic origin (235). This genealogy also privileges the stories of women who do not reproduce the family line and whose “queer desire” unsettles the patrilineal norms of diasporic remembering that restage the father/son relationship (Ahmed, Gopinath).

Chapter III, “Naming the Diasporic City: Reproduction and Replication,” considers how the names of colonial cities imply, reproduce and make visible the unequal dynamics of power in Duras’s *Le Vice consul* (1966), Appanah’s *Tropique de la violence* (2016), Pyamootoo’s *Bénarès* (1999)³¹ and Devi’s *Indian Tango* (2007).³² Duras, self-consciously deploys fictional representations of India to critique the mechanisms of colonialism that homogenize and flatten out the space of the colony. Appanah’s novel plays with geographical names and duplications to make visible the geopolitical forces that silence the migration

³⁰ Nathacha Appanah. *Tropique de la violence*. Gallimard, 2016. Maryse Condé. *Traversée de la Mangrove*. Mercure de France, 1989. Ananda Devi. *Le Sari vert*. Gallimard, 2009. Marguerite Duras. *Le Vice-consul*. Gallimard, 1977.

³¹ Barlen Pyamootoo. *Bénarès*. Seuil, 1999.

³² Ananda Devi. *Indian Tango*. Gallimard, 2007.

crisis in the Indian Ocean. Pyamootoo writes of the Mauritian B  nar  s, which, although it carries a name that evokes the holy city of Varanasi (Benares, Banaras) India, was named by French colonists before the arrival of the first indentured servants (Mehta 48).³³ B  nar  s reappears in Devi’s *Indian Tango* as the setting for forbidden desire. The pervasive practice of giving a new name to a colonized city implies ownership, conquest and patriarchal dominance. How toponyms are replicated, deployed and imagined sheds light on the historical processes of colonialization, migration and diaspora. The novels in my corpus exploit and invert the colonial practice of naming a city after its European counterpart to point out ongoing neocoloniality in these eponymous cities in the global South.

Chapter IV, “Subverting, Perverting and Repurposing the Remains of Failed Capitalism,” interrogates how the characters in Devi’s *  ve de ses d  combres* (2006)³⁴ and Pyamootoo’s *B  nar  s* reappropriate sites of failed capitalist production. In these authors’ texts, the characters reclaim sites that once produced sugar and garments, both of which were industries that first profited from the Mauritian labor force, made up of descendants of indentured laborers and enslaved peoples, and when the industries failed, led these same workers to economic ruin. Devi and Pyamootoo refashion these sites that once represented European hegemony and capitalist exchange into sites that privilege local practices and manners of expression.

Chapter V, “Sensorial Subversion, Sex-Workers and Subaltern Bodies,” delves into how marginalized subjects apprehend cultural and economic capital through affective and embodied actions in Appanah’s *Les Rochers de Poudre d’Or* (2003),³⁵ Devi’s *Indian Tango*

³³ Binita Mehta. “Memories in/of Diaspora: Barlen Pyamootoo’s B  nar  s (1999).” *Esprit Createur*. Vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 46-62.

³⁴ Ananda Devi. *  ve de ses d  combres*. Gallimard, 2006.

³⁵ Nathacha Appanah. *Les Rochers de Poudre d’Or*. Gallimard, 2003.

and Pyamootoo's *Bénarès*. In these texts, the sensorial realm allows subaltern bodies, sex-workers, low-caste female servants and indentured workers, to access privileged goods and spaces, fundamentally altering the "distribution of the sensible" that makes these goods available to some but not others (Rancière 8).³⁶ At the same time, the patriarchal power structures that perpetuate sexual violence and rape inform the choices that marginalized women are able to make, calling into question the "agency," or illusion thereof, that sex-workers enact. In the three texts, we see examples of erotic agency, sexual transgression and sexual violence, all enacted within societies defined by male dominance and the subjugation of women. This chapter investigates the limits of "erotic agency" represented in the corpus.

The chapters move through a series of theoretical orientations that dialogue with the thematic elements that I explore from each novel. Select chapters begin with an analysis of a work of art by Nalini Malani. Malani is an artist whose work illuminates the disjuncture between the idealism of India's post-independence policies with the lived poverty of its slums, in dialogue with the authors of my corpus. Malani's artistic oeuvre—paintings, installations, video and film—visually represents the narrative themes that each chapter seeks to address. Close literary analysis in conjunction with an interdisciplinary theoretical approach allows me to demonstrate how these narratives create a politically subversive grouping that challenges preconceived ideas about diaspora, authenticity, gender and race.

³⁶ Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

II. (RE) TURNING TOWARD IMAGINED PASTS

Tracing a genealogy from the French writer Marguerite Duras to the contemporary fiction of Guadeloupian writer, Maryse Condé, and then on to the contemporary works of Mauritian writers, Nathacha Appanah and Ananda Devi pushes the boundaries of how we classify literature. Literature is classified in myriad ways—we might think of periodization, genre, and region as some of the most common of these methods of classification. Classification influences how we study literary works, which works we compare and even where we find these works. In a library or bookstore in France, we could easily locate Duras’s works in the general and the very large sections of “littérature” or “lettres modernes.” However, we would be unable to find the other three authors sharing shelf space with the well-known playwright, filmmaker and writer of the *nouveau roman*. Although they write in the same language, Appanah, Condé and Devi would be located in the much smaller and spatially separate section of “littérature francophone.” This spatial and classificatory hierarchy of the library and bookstore’s space demonstrates how Duras is firmly established within the canon of French literature, while Appanah, Devi and Condé are recognized as important writers who use the French language but are very much still “other” in the sense that they write from formerly colonized regions, and are thus not quite part of “French” literature.

Duras is unusual in belonging to the French literary canon but also writing from the colonies, if from the perspective of a white French woman versus that of a woman of color. Although many scholars have examined the works of Appanah, Condé and Devi through the lens of francophone and postcolonial studies—separately and in comparison, with each other³⁷—few studies look at Duras in conversation with these authors. This chapter

³⁷ Françoise Lionnet for example works extensively on Maryse Condé, Ananda Devi and Nathacha Appanah: *Postcolonial Representations, Autobiographical Voices, Writing Women, Creole Cosmopolitics*. Julia Waters studies both Duras and Devi and has written extensively about Mauritian writers. To my knowledge, she has not yet written about Duras in conversation with Devi or Mauritian writers.

investigates the works of these four female authors who write from different geographies and generations to demonstrate how their respective works articulate a literary genealogy of the non-normative, embodied and sensorial experiences of diaspora. This genealogy deploys multiplying lines that move forward and back, and it is a genealogy that undermines both the notion of the essentialized subject and the established canon. As Devi explains, “the true literary family, the one from which one’s writing emerges and in which it finds its place [...] includes writers from different eras, different continents, different languages and transcends all categories” (145).³⁸ As such, this chapter does not seek to create an “alternative canon” of contemporary female writers or attempt to induct these women writers into *the* “canon” however one might understand the concept; rather, I argue that these writers’ works destabilize the systemic notions of hierarchy that canon implies and thus create a genealogy that resists both labels and temporalities.

This alternative, non-canonical genealogy highlights representations of the mechanisms of colonialism, indentureship and slavery and disrupts what Hall calls “the backward-looking conception of diaspora” that seeks to reconstitute an essentialist and pure diasporic origin (235). This genealogy privileges the stories of women who do not reproduce the family line and thus unsettles the patrilineal norms of diasporic remembering that restage the father/son relationship and posit an authentic “origin” that must be reproduced and disseminated elsewhere (Gopinath 3). Additionally, the “queer desire” of these female characters further upends the “backward looking gaze of diaspora” (3). Although separated by time, geography and origin, these women writers trace these non-normative experiences of diaspora in colonized or formerly colonized Francophone spaces to create a literary genealogy that subverts the very idea of genealogy. This genealogy fundamentally inverts or

³⁸ Ananda Devi and Thomas C. Spear. “Ananda Devi: Literary Talks Series.” *Alliance Française. Île en Île*. 18 March 2009. <http://ile-en-ile.org/ananda-dvi-literary-talks-series/>

perverts the typical family tree that genealogy implies—both chronologically and biologically. Furthermore, this genealogy privileges the sensorial and the embodied experiences of diaspora to trace inheritance affectively.

Each author describes diasporic populations from multiple narrative and subjective positions. In Appanah's *Tropique de la violence* (2016), five characters narrate alternating chapters in the first person. These characters belong to different racial categories and occupy different social classes, and they all describe a series of events that take place on the island of Mayotte. Condé's novel, *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989) describes the arrival of mysterious Francis Sanchez to the small Guadeloupean town of Rivière au Sel. Her characters have Indian, European, Creole and African heritage—each of these distinctions blurred by the island's heritage of racial intermixing. Devi's *Le Sari vert* (2009) tells the story of an abusive father in his own voice, as the first-person narrative goes back and forth between the doctor's past memories and his tormented present as an invalid confined to a bed and to the care of his daughters. The novel is set on the island of Mauritius, "the Creole Island," whose population comprises the descendants of enslaved peoples, indentured workers and colonizers, and has no "natives."

Duras is French, both Devi and Appanah are of Indo-Mauritian heritage and Condé is Guadeloupean of African descent. These authors, with varied heritages, write of characters who experience diaspora from multiple vantage points—some from positions of seeming power and others from decidedly subaltern ones. Duras, who writes a generation before, offers the perspective of a white woman of French descent who experienced the line of identity between the colonizer and the colonized by virtue of her upbringing in French Indochina. Appanah, Condé and Devi all write about archipelagic or island spaces. Condé's novel takes place in Guadeloupe; Devi and Appanah's works are set in, respectively, the

Mascarene and Mayotte archipelagos of the Indian Ocean; while Duras' *Cycle Indien*³⁹ comprises a series of novels and plays that feature recurring characters and that have a connection to colonial India: *Le Vice-consul* (1966) and *India Song* (1973), are set in what was then Calcutta (now Kolkata).

Dismantling the myth of the “homeland”

The diasporic communities of Guadeloupe, Mauritius and Mayotte, although comprising different ethnic heritages, all share the legacy of a French educational system. In French colonies—from Indochina to Martinique—the colonial system of education inculcated young school children with French republican values. Of course, this ideal of universal liberty, equality and brotherhood for all those living on French soil was quickly belied by the lived experience of the colonial subject in the metropole as Frantz Fanon explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*.⁴⁰ In the introduction to the book, Fanon explains how “white civilization and European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black man” and he develops this “existential deviation” when he describes the reaction that the Black man receives when he leaves his “home territory” (xv, 89). The white civilization that has promised belonging within the *civilized* society of democratic values rejects the colonial subject:

In the twentieth century the black man on his home territory is oblivious of the moment when his inferiority is determined by the Other...And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze (90).

³⁹ The India Cycle comprises six works: *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), *Le vice-consul* (1966), *L'amour* (1971), *La femme du Gange* (1973), *India song* (1973), *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976). Lucy Stone McNeece. *Art and Politics in Duras' India Cycle*. UP of Florida, 1996.

⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove. 2008.

It is at the moment of arrival in the European city that the Black man hears, “‘Dirty n*****’ or simply ‘look a negro’” (89). The white gaze negates what the colonial subject was encouraged to think—that the French were his ancestors, literally (school children were taught to recite “nos ancêtres les Gaulois”). Of course, this French heritage shared space with other heritages and inheritances. For the African and Indian diasporic populations, both sites of origin took on mythic proportions as imagined homelands, although the legacies of enslavement versus indenture were vastly different. For the diasporic populations of the archipelagos of the Indian Ocean and Caribbean, the idea of “homeland” is not only problematic, but often impossible to articulate in singular terms.

Authors from these regions not only problematize the “homeland” by destabilizing myths that posit a utopian and unified country of origin for the scattered members of a diasporic population, but also by questioning the stories of the colonial past and postcolonial present. To demythologize France as both a protective and paternalistic colonial father figure of the past and as a modern compassionate country of administration, Duras’ *Le Vice-consul* and Appanah’s *Tropique de la violence* highlight the extreme violence and abuse that characterized the colony and continue to characterize the postcolony and D.O.M. Specifically, Duras’s Indian imaginary perverts the myth of French colonial paternalism by depicting an obscene caricature of the French values that colonial school children studied (and that school children still study in D.O.M.s like Mayotte and Guadeloupe) in which the colonial administrators massacre the most vulnerable of their subjects. Similarly, Appanah’s novel portrays the extreme violence of one of the poorest regions of “overseas France” and the struggles that both its legal and migrant populations face. Although the migrant crisis in the Indian Ocean garners less media attention than the crisis in the Mediterranean, large numbers of African migrants die, or are turned away, trying to reach islands like Mayotte to reach French soil.

“Douce Colonisation” in Appanah and Duras:

In 1996, Indian artist Nalini Malani created the installation *‘Free’ Trade* to “de-idealize the idea of trade” and reframe it as an exploitative practice, evoking the slave trade and highlighting the unequal trading relations between economically advantaged and disadvantaged countries.⁴¹ The materiality of Malani’s work not only conjures trade through her choice of a shipping vessel as container for her installation, but also through her use of media: gold dust, the trace of the precious commodity that incentivized imperialist expansion; coin, with its implication as exchange currency; and thread, symbolic of the garment industry and its exploitative labor practices. Her work challenges the narrative that endows free trade with the properties of moral goodness—a discourse that justified the expansion of empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that continues today.

Duras’s *Le Vice-consul* (1966) and Appanah’s *Tropique de la violence* (2016) reveal how diplomacy and volunteerism function similarly to the free trade that Malani critiques—they claim to spread modernity and equality while reinstating the hierarchies that divided first the colonizer and colonized and now, the global North and South. Appanah and Duras’s fictive narratives disclose how forms of soft-power—diplomacy and volunteer work—masquerade as morally good social, political and economic interventions while simultaneously imposing the values of “developed” countries onto spaces considered to be in need of development, calling into questions the teleological idea that underpins “development.” Under the guise of beneficence, “consensual colonialism”⁴² and more contemporarily, aid to the poor and marginalized, the texts suggest that diplomacy and

⁴¹ www.nalinimalani.com/installations/freetrade

⁴² Agnani refers to Diderot’s interest in the possibility that “colonialism can be consensual,” an idea that Agnani will call “douce colonisation” (26). Sunil Agnani. *Hating Empire Properly: The Two Indies and the Limits of Colonial Enlightenment*. Fordham UP, 2013.

volunteer work profit from misery while reinforcing the same hierarchies that sustain this misery—ultimately commodifying and packaging human suffering into the entries of a diplomatic dossier or the bullet points of a volunteer’s curriculum vitae.

Although Appanah and Duras come from different generations and geographies, reading their work together uncovers connections between power, diplomacy and foreign intervention. Appanah, Mauritian by birth, belongs to the newest generation of Francophone writers and her lucid style of prose clearly defines both plot and character. Duras is canonic within French literature, associated with the *nouveau roman* and known for her use of experimental and non-linear forms in both text and film. Duras’s literary and filmic production investigates the effects of fragmented subjectivity, silence and absence, and extensive work has been done on the interpersonal relationships and the psychological complexity of trauma present in Duras’s works (Tison-Braun; Willis).⁴³ More recently, many scholars read Duras as a profoundly anti-colonial writer: Trista Selous asserts that, in *Le Vice-consul*, Duras’s critique of the entire colonial system can be found within the “blanks” of her writing (50); Marilyn Shuster, in reference to Duras’ comments about a film adaptation of her novel *The Sea Wall*, writes, “Her [Duras’s] ‘work’ is not to settle the colony, but to unsettle it” (41); and the premise of Lucy Stone McNeece’s *Art and Politics in Duras’ “India Cycle”* is a rereading of Duras that takes into account the cultural and political transformations that Duras’s oeuvre spans, from the colonial to postcolonial eras.⁴⁴ As McNeece points out, Duras’s work can inspire “polemical reactions both inside and outside the academy” and can be read as a “critique of rational humanism from within” (4-5). I read

⁴³ Micheline Tison-Braun. *Marguerite Duras*. Rodopi, 1984.

⁴⁴ Marilyn Schuster. “Coming of Age in Indochina: *The Sea Wall* and ‘The Boa.’” *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*. Ed. Bettina L. Knapp. Simon and Schuster, 1998. 36–47; Trista Selous. “The Blanks.” *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*. Ed. Bettina L. Knapp. Simon and Schuster, 1998. 48–87.

Duras for her critique of colonialism, and I focus on narrative moments in which she articulates this critique both explicitly and implicitly. Although unlike Appanah, Duras is considered a French rather than Francophone author, Duras spent her childhood in the French colony of Indochina, and her writing grapples with identity that exists between the worlds of the colonizer and colonized, as she herself identified more with the Vietnamese than she did with the French settlers.⁴⁵ Despite her familiarity with Indochina, Duras often casts an imaginary India as the site for her novels and the place from which she unleashes her anticolonial critiques (Schuster 36). After the abolition of the slave trade,⁴⁶ the French, like the British, imported Indian indentured laborers to their colonies in the Indian Ocean and Caribbean to replace the formerly enslaved people as workers on what were then primarily sugar plantations. Mauritius, Appanah's place of birth, was a primary destination for these indentured laborers and Indo-Mauritians comprise a large number of the island's current inhabitants.⁴⁷

Appanah's narratives focus on the multicultural, postcolonial island space, with its continuing inequalities that belie the utopian island. The Francophone islands of Mayotte and Mauritius are two examples of such contested spaces.⁴⁸ She exposes the dystopian realities that exist on the "other side of the postcard"⁴⁹ and her novels deal with the themes of violence, abuse, poverty and trauma. Appanah and Duras mobilize India as a symbol to

⁴⁵ "Colonialism and the colonial mentality permeate most of [Duras's] work, but are displaced onto an imaginary Indian landscape or small provincial cities in France" (Schuster 36).

⁴⁶ The second, official end to slavery in the French colonies was in 1848. Slavery was abolished in 1794, during the Revolutionary period, but reinstated by Napoleon in 1802. In Mauritius, slavery was abolished in 1835.

⁴⁷ See Megan Vaughn. *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius*. Duke UP, 2005.

⁴⁸ Appanah's *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or* (2003) and *Le dernier frère* (2007) are two examples of her novels that complicate the utopian island (Lionnet 17).

⁴⁹ See Jean Anderson. "The Other Side of the Postcard: Rewriting the Exotic Beach in Works by Titaua Peu, Chantal Spitz (Tahiti), and Nathacha Appanah (Mauritius)." *Dalhousie French Studies* 94 (2011): 5–12.

signify both colonialism and anti-colonialism. Thus, I find that the imaginary India that Duras deploys to critique the historical processes of colonization, slavery and forced migration finds echoes in the contemporary Indian Ocean fictions that Appanah crafts to comment on the continued effects of these same historical processes. Finally, both authors expose the exploitative aspects of the goodwill practices of diplomacy and volunteer work.

Exploitation masquerading as goodwill is certainly not a new phenomenon. In reference to both the British and French eighteenth century imperial projects, Sunil Agnani coined the expression “douce colonisation”⁵⁰ to describe what Denis Diderot imagined could be a “consensual” colonization (26). Diderot equates consensual colonization with interbreeding, population and settlement, and Agnani explores how these two ideas, “douce colonisation” and *métissage*, serve as justification for empire:

Interbreeding, in this sense, is one answer to the crisis caused by the growing antislavery movement. Humanitarianism in France is akin to liberalism in Britain, slavery akin to coercive aspects of empire. Just as arguments against slavery are shown to have a more practical basis in political economy, so do arguments against empire (e.g. Adam Smith’s anticolonialism moved between a moral argument and an argument concerning efficiency). Both humanitarianism and political liberalism served as alibis for empire by providing a degree of moral legitimacy. (40)

Agnani argues that humanitarianism and political liberalism are deployed as moral justifications for the economic imperatives of empire. Diderot imagined a beneficial and non-coercive colonialism that would result in racial intermixing, which would in turn produce a productive and fruitful society. “Consensual” breeding would be a softer, non-violent way to colonize that could counter the cruel methods used by the Spaniards in the New World (44).

⁵⁰ Agnani plays on Albert Hirshman’s term *doux commerce* (Agnani 199).

Following Diderot, greater population equated greater wealth, and breeding could bring out the best genetic traits in both the colonized and colonizer (27). Agnani investigates this trope of portraying the inhabitants of the tropics as more natural and therefore sexual than “civilized” Europeans in Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*.⁵¹ Diderot’s critique is complex and multilayered, and although it does not reduce the “native” to an irrational and animalistic subject, it does celebrate his or her health, vigor and sexuality (28–29). These contradictions in Diderot’s thought constitute the “limits” that Agnani explores in his analysis.

Agnani exposes such limits of Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot, who, despite being radically anticolonial in certain senses, are still subject to the constraints of their time and whose anticolonialism is always qualified by these limits. Of course, Agnani’s theorization of “douce colonisation” applies to the eighteenth century.⁵² In the current neoliberal and postcolonial era, “soft colonization” no longer occurs actively in the way that Diderot imagined. However, neoliberalism continues to redeploy arguments of eighteenth-century classical liberalism even as the neoliberal state undermines these arguments, or as Foucault writes: “The neo-liberals had to subject classical liberalism to a number of transformations” (131). Following Foucault, Chari defines the “neoliberal inversion of liberalism” as follows:

Neoliberalism has inverted the liberal relationship between the state and the economy. The neoliberal state takes a strong role in the economy, yet manipulates the economy from a remove, through economic policies that obscure the unequal distributional consequences of its policies in the context of low growth. By contrast, liberal

⁵¹ Denis Diderot. *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. Project Gutenberg, 2004.

⁵² For the nineteenth century see Uday Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. UP of Chicago, 1999.

governmental rationality entails a laissez-faire relationship between the state and economy. Yet, I argue that although neoliberalism entails an inversion of the state and the economy, neoliberalism continues to legitimate itself using liberal frameworks. (8)

Although an in-depth analysis of political economy is outside the scope of this chapter, I find Chari's theorization of neoliberalism useful because she demonstrates how liberal economic rationality reappears in today's neoliberal political discourse. In this sense, one liberal argument that neoliberalism inverts and deploys is to champion the moral benefits and progress facilitated by unrestricted free trade. This leads us back to both Malani's critique of free trade and to "douce colonisation," with its valorization of commerce. Just as liberal economic discourse has given way to neoliberalism, formal colonialism no longer exists; however, the unequal power dynamics of ongoing coloniality perpetuate the exploitation of the global South.⁵³ In Duras and Appanah's texts, "soft colonization" has in a sense rebranded itself into the institutions of diplomacy and foreign aid. In both texts, we find global systems of intervention, diplomacy and foreign aid, in which "developed" countries send volunteers and diplomats to help "less developed" countries, thereby reinstating the same assumption of Western superiority that once fueled "soft colonization" and the notion of progress as teleological. I argue that this problematic assumption, that the primary goal of the underdeveloped regions of the colonies/global South is to "develop," with its implications about time and progress, or become like the more "advanced" regions of the colonizer/global North, is a contemporary form of "douce colonisation" that subtends the diplomatic corps and the aid organization's mission in both Appanah and Duras's novels.

In Duras's novel *Le Vice-consul*, the eponymous main character commits mass murder by firing indiscriminately at a group of lepers during his posting in Lahore. As punishment, his superiors send the Vice-Consul to Calcutta where he goes on weekend

⁵³ See Quijano; Mignolo; Martínez-San Miguel

excursions and attends balls with the other members of the French community in India. The reader knows nothing of the Vice-Consul's crimes at the novel's opening, but the text hints obliquely to a mysterious and troubling history. The events take place in colonial Calcutta during the 1930s prior to Indian independence in 1947, and Duras imagines the scope and space of the French diplomatic service in what was then primarily British India through her characterization of a community of French citizens living in Calcutta, or what she refers to as "l'Inde blanche."

Duras unmaskes the hyper-colonialism of diplomacy through the two narrative arcs that develop simultaneously in the novel. The writer/character Peter Morgan's novel (a novel within Duras's novel) focuses on a young woman whose family banishes her from her native town (somewhere in what was then Indochina) and who "walks" to Calcutta, eventually becoming a beggar who loses her mind. The other "Calcutta" narrative describes the European inhabitants of colonial Calcutta: the Vice-Consul (Jean-Marc de H.), Anne-Marie Stretter, Peter Morgan, diplomat Charles Rossett, and the ambassador (Anne-Marie Stretter's husband). Despite the seeming break between the two narratives, the beggar woman haunts the characters of the Calcutta narrative, self-consciously drawing attention to the fictiveness of the text and playing with chronological assumptions.⁵⁴ Duras weaves together these two narrative arcs—one about the frivolity and corruption of the French diplomatic service in India and the other about the abject suffering of the colonized subjects—to expose the violence of colonial era diplomacy.

Diplomacy, as an institution of state, suggests the use of non-combative techniques and goodwill practices to manage international relations. As an alternative to military intervention, a state might use diplomatic tactics to achieve its ends, and diplomats enjoy

⁵⁴ Duras also directed the film, *India Song* (1975), based on her screenplay. The scope of this dissertation does not allow me to develop a comparative analysis of the film.

special status in foreign states. Diplomacy connotes a way of interacting with others that is effective, yet unarmed, and it does not bring to mind direct violence. Diplomacy is a discursive power, a power of persuasion through words, and yet it is also inextricably tied to a state's armed forces in what Foucault calls the "military-diplomatic apparatus."⁵⁵ In Duras's novel, diplomacy not only imposes a type of "soft colonization," but also enacts direct violence. Her novel reveals this direct violence slowly, building suspense as the plot progresses toward the moment when the Vice-Consul's past reveals itself. The first mention of the Vice-Consul's "difficulties" and his subsequent move to Calcutta suggests annoyance, but does not foreshadow the severity of the crime: "Il vient de Lahore où il est resté un an et demi en qualité de vice-consul et d'où il a été déplacé à la suite d'incidents qui ont été estimés pénibles par les diplomatiques de Calcutta" (34). That the authorities find the "incidents" "pénibles" implies that the Vice-Consul's actions caused them difficulty and embarrassment, but the phrase emphasizes the *diplomats'* unease rather than the consequences of the Vice-Consul's "troublesome" actions. The tame, understated and vague verbs, nouns and adjectives in the passage, "estimer" "traîner" "incident" "pénible" and "difficile," all evoke feelings of annoyance and bureaucratic unease rather than violence and terror. Whatever mysterious "difficulties" the Vice-Consul has experienced, that he embarrassed his superiors remains the most meaningful consequence of his actions.

The suspense created by the ambiguity of Duras's language sustains the mystery surrounding the Vice-Consul's removal from Lahore and transfer to Calcutta, and the next textual clue to the mystery appears in a conversation between the French Ambassador and Charles Rossett, a young civil servant, as the two men discuss the Vice-Consul's file. They talk of his past, of letters that testify to his character and of the Vice-Consul's own written

⁵⁵ See Foucault's discussion of *raison d'État* (3-10).

explanation of his actions (37–39). Although the dialogue does not yet fully reveal the Vice-Consul’s actions, this textual interchange recounts a more sinister explanation for the Vice-Consul’s presence in Calcutta than the deliberately glossed over “difficulties” that the former passage alluded to. After consulting the files, the two men converse:

—La folie n’est-elle pas retenue?

—Non, la dépression nerveuse seulement. Bien qu’il ait recommencé souvent on a dit: ses nerfs ont lâché. Il n’y a eu des plaintes que très tard.

—On a d’abord cru, explique l’ambassadeur, que c’était un farceur, un maniaque du revolver et puis il a commencé à crier la nuit [...] et puis il faut bien dire, on a trouvé des morts dans les jardins de Shalimar. (39–40)

Even when the dialogue exposes that the Vice-Consul’s “difficulties” are in fact multiple murders, indicated by the plural “morts,” the characters fail to recommend that he be punished. To uphold the status quo that the good appearance of the colonial authority triumph over the lives of the disposable, in this case lepers, no further disciplinary action will be taken. The two men choose words to refer to these human beings who have been killed, the “dead” or “the dead bodies,” that deny them the individuality and humanity that naming them would imply. Furthermore, the passage refuses to attribute the deaths to the Vice-Consul directly. “*On a trouvé des morts*” (emphasis mine): the conversation does not state that the Vice-Consul killed these unnamed people, but either that the impersonal “one” or “we” or even the anonymous English “they” have *found* the bodies, and this language conceals the violent act of killing by deploying the more emotionally neutral and bland verb “trouver.”

In her analysis of *Le Vice-consul*, Selous argues that the text’s use of euphemistic language indicates that the Vice-Consul’s crime is “too awful, or impossible, to name” (67). This euphemistic language that refuses to name the Vice-Consul’s crime also mirrors the language of diplomacy. The pronoun “on” obfuscates the actor/subject in a phrase and is an

intentional grammatical ambiguity that amplifies the strategies of the diplomatic service that wishes to hide the agent responsible for these deaths. It is not that the indiscriminate murder of lepers is too awful to name, but rather that their lives do not have enough value to be worth naming.

Duras's narrative illuminates a political regime that makes certain political subjects visible and others invisible. Rancière explains how the "distribution of the sensible" functions:

It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (8)

The colonial regimes of Lahore and Calcutta dictate that the French Diplomatic Service *hear* the Vice-Consul. He is "un maniaque [qui] a commencé à crier la nuit" (41), because he has the capacity to speak within this regime. However, the lepers are neither heard nor seen, and they cannot speak (see Morris and Spivak). Rather, their bodies are simply found. Through repetition, Duras disturbs the colonial "distribution of the sensible," making the dead bodies visible as the narrative reveals the Vice-Consul's massacre.

If the earlier passages imply the disposability of certain individuals like lepers within the colonial structure of power through bland vocabulary and impersonal pronouns, the content of the conversations at the diplomat's ball make this point explicitly. At the ball, held by the ambassador's wife, Anne-Marie Stretter, the reader overhears a conversation between two unnamed guests:

On dit, on demande: Mais qu'a-t-il fait au juste? Je ne suis jamais au courant.

—Il a fait le pire, mais comment le dire?

—Le pire? tuer?

—Il tirait la nuit sur les jardins de Shalimar où se réfugient les lépreux et les chiens.

—Mais, des lépreux et des chiens, est-ce tuer que de tuer des lépreux et des chiens?

(90)

Here, the unknown voice, “on,” explicates the previously implied policy—a policy that gives value to European lives, but views the native population of lepers as disposable. The speaker “on” gives to lepers the same status that he gives to the stray dogs that inhabit the Shalimar Gardens, and neither has enough inherent value to ruin the career of a young diplomat, nor by extension the reputation of the diplomatic service in general. Even though the speaker refers to the act of killing as the worst “pire” type of crime, when the victims have no status or worth within the colonial hierarchy—these are the most precarious of subalterns who have no voice and whose disease inspires fear and disgust—the crime of killing no longer counts as murder.

Duras’s elliptical language deliberately flouts the linearity of the realist novel, making plot subordinate to the characters’ inner processes and complexity, and the multiple narrative arcs of *Le Vice-consul* are never fully revealed. As Willis explains, meaning in Duras’s work is contingent on the other works in a given cycle—thus *Le Vice-consul* is doubly difficult to apprehend in isolation (3). Duras’s text is also purposefully hard to decipher as she does not indicate who is speaking and the characters’ voices sometimes seem to slide seamlessly from one to the next. Duras’s elliptical text replicates the diplomatic discursive strategies found in the Vice-Consul’s dossier—a type of double-speak that purposefully obfuscates the truth. However, unlike the diplomatic language of obstruction, Duras’s language leads the reader toward rather than away from the violent truth of the Vice-Consul’s massacre.

At the same diplomat’s ball, the French Ambassador proposes a solution to the Vice-Consul: “Si vous restez ici [...] le temps ne pourrait que jouer en votre faveur” (113). What is

left unsaid in the ellipsis that interrupts the phrase suggests that if the Vice-Consul just bides his time, if he waits, the diplomatic service will forgive his crimes because “l’Inde est un gouffre d’indifférence dans lequel tout est noyé” (113). In other words, the ambassador and “l’Inde blanche” excuse and cover up the Vice-Consul’s crime and the “douce colonisation” of diplomacy seamlessly morphs into the hyper-colonial violence of mass murder.

In today’s postcolonial global economy, rather than lepers being a group emblematic of the most marginalized, it is migrants without papers who live one of the most precarious existences. In *Tropique de la violence*,⁵⁶ Appanah makes visible these often invisible migrants through the story of a young *clandestin*, Moïse. His mother Marie, an Anjouan woman without papers, disembarks from the *kwassa-kwassa* to mainland Mayotte to receive medical attention from nurse and legal resident Marie. The *sans-papiers* abandons her son, Moïse, who incarnates his mixed-race heritage with his different colored eyes: one green and one black, symbolizing the two worlds from which he comes. For his biological mother, the eyes are a curse, “lui porter malheur avec son oeil,” but for Marie, who adopts Moïse as the child she has longed for, his eyes evoke beauty, “c’est ce vert incroyable qu’ont parfois les arbres de ce pays” (23). Moïse is trapped between two worlds: although he speaks and acts like a “Blanc,” if Marie had not adopted him, he would have belonged to the community of *clandestins*. Once Marie shares the truth of his birth with Moïse, he explains that Marie’s well-meaning actions have made it impossible for him to fit in with the other boys who share his race, ethnicity and heritage: “Il [Moïse] me dit que je l’ai élevé comme un Blanc, que je l’ai empêché de vivre sa ‘vraie vie,’ que son destin n’était pas celui-là” (30). However, from Marie’s point of view, she saved Moïse from the precarious existence of a migrant child—a migrant child who was not wanted by his birth mother. Marie raises Moïse with her values and beliefs to save him from his own past and heritage, but this education ill-prepares him for

⁵⁶ See chapter III for a discussion of the novel’s title in relation to toponyms throughout the corpus.

entering the world of Mayotte's *clandestins*. Marie's intervention into Moïse's life propels the eventual tragedy that leads Moïse to murder and suicide, an example of what Sylvia Baage points out as Appanah's critique of "l'intervention du Nord" (10).⁵⁷

A consequence of this foreign intervention, Mayotte's status as a French overseas department drives its deep-seated inequality. Migrants flock to the French territory, creating conflict between bodies who have legal status and those who live on the precarious margins of society.⁵⁸ Butler explains: "'Precarity' designates the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death" (*Notes* 33). In this "differential distribution of precariousness," certain bodies have more or less value, and in Mayotte, the bodies of the *clandestins* are the most precarious (33). The most precarious, like Duras's lepers, are also those who cannot speak and cannot be seen within a given political regime. However, the subaltern *clandestins* in Appanah's novel use violence to be heard and to be seen—this violence making them visible in the same global political system that allows their bodies to disappear into the ocean.⁵⁹

The two characters, Moïse and Bruce, exemplify this distinction between legal and illegal, visible and invisible, resident and migrant. While Moïse grew up the protective embrace of his adoptive mother Marie, Bruce rebelled against his strict Muslim Mahorais upbringing to exist on the fringes of society as the leader of a gang of young *clandestins*. Unbeknownst to the other young gang members, Bruce is a legal resident of Mayotte with a French passport. Appanah deploys Moïse and Bruce's converging stories of homicide and

⁵⁷ Silvia U. Baage. "Regards exotiques sur deux portes de l'Europe: la crise migratoire à Lampedusa et à Mayotte dans *Eldorado et Tropicque de la violence*". *Carnets*, 2017, 1–11.

⁵⁸ One quarter of the population of Mayotte is undocumented (Golembeski 448). Dan Golembeski. "Mayotte: France's New Overseas Department in the Indian Ocean." *The French Review*. Vol, 85, no. 3, 2012, pp. 440-57.

⁵⁹ Undocumented migrants from neighboring Anjouan flock to Mayotte for better economic opportunities. They migrate in overfilled small boats, *kwassa-kwassas*, and many drown (Golembeski 448).

suicide, to make the violence in Mayotte, and consequently in France, personal and explicit. Mayotte's citizens are French citizens, yet the people who live on the island, many illegally,⁶⁰ are invisible and unheard by the French government. Bruce emphasizes the stark differences between the two countries:

C'est Mayotte ici et toi tu dis c'est la France. Va chier! La France c'est comme ça? En France tu vois des enfants traîner du matin au soir comme ça, toi? En France il y a des kwassas qui arrivent par dizaines comme ça avec des gens qui débarquent sur les plages et certains sont déjà à demi morts? En France il y a des gens qui vivent toute leur vie dans les bois? En France les gens mettent des grilles de fer à leurs fenêtres comme ça? En France les gens chient et jettent leurs ordures dans les ravines comme ça? (97)

Not only are they invisible, but they lack the conditions that provide basic human dignity: they live in the woods, their children lack access to education, and survival trumps ecological concerns as their habitat becomes defiled through lack of sanitation. Bruce and his gang of *clandestins* use violence because it is a highly effective means to make themselves *visibles*. Unlike the migrants who arrive half-dead on the beaches of Mayotte, Bruce's name is known throughout Gaza: "Même le vent disait mon nom et c'est comme Gotham qui appelle Batman" (93). Bruce lives outside the law, yet he identifies with the hero rather than villain of the American comic Batman, and this identification points to the agency that Appanah gives Bruce over his own life. In fact, Bruce uses this agency, his status as "chef de Gaza," to incite politically motivated protests and riots. Although he insists that he has no commitment to any political cause and that he cares only for himself and his pleasure, he is nonetheless a catalyst for political action, able to rally all classes, "les adultes, les fonctionnaires, les

⁶⁰ Undocumented Anjouan migrants make up one quarter to one third of the population of Mayotte (Golembeski 448).

vendeurs, les syndicats,” against economic inequalities—they yell “non à la vie chère” (93). It is Bruce who “allume le feu et, quand il décide, il éteint le feu lui-même” even as he claims to have no interest in any cause but chaos and destruction (93). Despite his disavowal of political activism, his role as “chef de Gaza” nonetheless confers Bruce with political visibility that enables him to provide for himself and his group of followers.

Stéphane, on the other hand, never questions his political visibility. In keeping with his status as a young, white, liberal Frenchman who wishes to aid the poorest and most marginalized of the world, he decides to go abroad to help those in underserved regions. Stéphane reproduces the paternalism of the idealized French Republic that wishes to maintain economically beneficial cooperation with its former colonies. Patrick Roger, in his article for *Le Monde*, elucidates this economically beneficial relationship: France controls the largest space of economic territory in size after the United States, and this vast economic zone is made up of France’s overseas departments, of which Mayotte has strategic and economic importance (42). France’s past as an imperial power and its role in the slave trade informs its present relations to its overseas departments (42). Stéphane unintentionally reproduces these unequal relations of power, as his ignorance and privilege drive his lack of grounding in the specific lived reality of Mayotte. Instead of helping, he causes irreparable damage. The reader meets Stéphane as he wanders through the youth center he helped to create, unwilling to return home, reflecting on his own powerlessness and knowing that he can no longer help Moïse. The text does not unfold chronologically, and at the moment Stéphane enters the narrative, Moïse has already killed Bruce. We learn about Stéphane’s experiences through flash backs and memories:

J’erre dans le local de l’association, je ne suis pas rentré chez moi, je cherche quelque chose, je ne sais pas quoi, je cherche à saisir une main solide, je cherche un reste de moi-même pour m’y accrocher, ne doit-il pas subsister quelque part un relent de

l'homme que j'étais, qui disait des grandes phrases telles qu'*Il n'y a pas de problèmes il n'y a que des solutions* ou *Quand on veut on peut* ou encore *Mens sana in corpore sano*? Je colle mon corps dans un angle, je cogne ma tête une fois deux fois, je pleure. Je pense à Moïse. Où est-il en ce moment? (109)

Stéphane recognizes his former naïveté even as he longs for the lost innocence—an innocence of platitudes and idealism—that he possessed before he arrived in Mayotte. The meaningless banalities that he cites are reminiscent of political slogans that promise reform, increased social welfare and aid for the poorest regions of France, but do little in practice to alleviate any of these problems. Although Stéphane does not personally inflict violence like the Vice-Consul, he likewise possesses a weapon that provokes unintended consequences even though his position as an aid-worker dictates that he be unarmed.

Stéphane describes the motivations that drive young volunteers, and once drove him, to travel to the underserved regions of the world: “Ils voulaient de la ‘vraie’ misère, de la misère centenaire ancrée comme une mauvaise racine, des pays ‘où c’est chaud,’ des endroits où les tempêtes succèdent aux guerres, où les tremblements de terre suivent les sécheresses” (112). Stéphane’s friends all choose to go to places that have “la vraie misère,” like “Bangladesh or Ethiopia.” The prose captures how the volunteers’ hunger for misery as if it were an exotic novelty and they compete with each other to find the most atrocious conditions. The specific countries matter little as long as the suffering is cinematically intense—the “misère centenaire” something that the volunteers have seen on news broadcasts of the latest earthquake, famine or civil war in the global South. Stéphane names only two countries, Bangladesh and Ethiopia, as if these two countries, with their fraught histories, can signify any region of the world with “real misery.” For the volunteers, the specificity of place, person or disaster matters little so long as the suffering of the “other” human beings is

sufficiently extreme. As Lucretius explains, to watch another's danger from a place of safety reinforces one's own good fortune.⁶¹

When he arrives in Mayotte, Stéphane is shocked, “Mais c’est un bidonville ici [...] Mais c’est la France quand même!” (112, 113). The region of Mayotte that the locals call Gaza has nothing in common with the utopian island, but more closely resembles its war-torn namesake in the Middle East. Stéphane is determined to escape the cynicism that he encounters: “Je voulais faire autrement, ne plus incarner le cliché de l’humanitaire baroudeur aigri” (114). At first, he seems to succeed in escaping the bitterness of the more seasoned humanitarian workers. He believes that the center he helped create is effective, making a difference to the youth of Gaza. If Bruce accuses Moïse of not understanding the complexities of Mayotte, Moïse repeats an echo of the same criticism, but aimed at Stéphane. When Stéphane takes Moïse to visit *Kani Keli*, a beach on the south side of the island, Moïse explains Stéphane’s lack of comprehension to the reader:

Stéphane ne comprendrait jamais ces choses-là. Je ne le juge pas, j’en ai vu des gars, comme lui, passer quelques mois à Gaza, je ne sais pas quel est leur but, je ne sais pas s’ils croient vraiment que quelques séances du cinéma, quelques matchs de foot ou pop américain suffiront à nous faire oublier la misère, la crasse et la violence. (125)

Moïse does not judge Stéphane’s ignorance or well-meaning naïveté, but resignedly highlights the absurdity of expecting games and pop music to eclipse the trauma of everyday lived misery, filth and violence. Stéphane’s failed good intentions represent another iteration of the trope a beneficent colonialism—in this case, the utopian construct of the white, European savior come to resolve the problems of a struggling native population.

⁶¹ “How sweet, to watch from the shore the wind-whipped ocean / Toss someone else’s ship in a mighty struggle; / Not that the man’s distress is cause for mirth— / Your freedom from those troubles is what’s sweet” (Lucretius 12). Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Trans. Anthony M. Esolen. Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

By the time that Stéphane learns of Bruce's murder, he too has become disillusioned by the French government's inaction in Mayotte. Despite Mayotte officially belonging to the European Union since 2014 as a "region ultrapériphérique," the French government spends less on the island than the national average (Roger 43).⁶² Eighty-four percent of the population lives below the poverty line and the unemployment rate is above thirty-four percent. Furthermore, the elections that made Mayotte a French overseas department were controversial, with the majority of votes for departmentalization coming from citizens living abroad (43). Stéphane spells out these ongoing geo-political uncertainties facing the inhabitants of Mayotte:

On te dit que si ça continue, si l'État français ne fait rien, ce sont les Mahorais eux-mêmes qui prendront leur destin en main et ficheron tous les clandestins et délinquants dehors. Tu as alors l'image de centaines de Noirs descendant dans la rue avec des machettes et tu ne sais plus si c'est une image du Rwanda ou du Zimbabwe ou du Congo et tu dis *Ça n'arrivera jamais dans un département français.*" (138–39)

Stéphane grows afraid as the tension mounts between the Mahorais legal population of the island and the incoming *clandestins*, and when a friend offers him a gun for protection, he accepts. Moïse takes Stéphane's gun, for retaliation against Bruce who earlier raped Moïse, during a car ride to the idyllic beach of *Kane Keli*. *Kani Keli* is both the perfect representation of the utopian island, with its "mer magnétique qui déployait son bleu, son émeraude, son vert, son opaline," and the traumatic site at which Moïse's birth mother abandoned him (128–29). Finding the gun imposes symbolic violence onto the idyllic scene, further reinforcing the disarticulation between Mayotte's reality and its postcard-perfect beaches.

⁶² Patrick Roger. "La France riche de ses confettis de l'empire." *Le Monde*, juillet–août 2019, pp. 42–46.

This contradiction between the utopian island space and its lived misery illuminates the heritage of colonial violence that continues to inform the postcolonial present. Contradictions seem to define Mayotte's relationship to France, for despite being the poorest region of the E.U., economic and geo-political interests make Mayotte a French overseas department of strategic importance. The island serves as the site for a satellite facility that enables France and thus the entire EU to have "ears" in the region and the recent hydrocarbon discoveries in the southern part of the Indian Ocean suggest economic motivations behind Mayotte's departmentalization (Roger 46). Mayotte's migrant crisis, however, remains largely absent from mainstream media coverage.

The mission to assist in this invisible migrant crisis is what drives Appanah's well-meaning volunteer, yet Stéphane's volunteerism implicitly perpetrates violence upon his presumed objects of aid as much as diplomatic service explicitly enacts it in Duras's novel. Although diplomacy and humanitarian aid organizations are by definition non-military and *unarmed*, in these texts, the diplomat and the volunteer paradoxically carry weapons, as if Appanah and Duras arm their characters to contradict the seeming nonviolence of the institutions that both men represent. The Vice-Consul's commits his violent crime with a firearm and "his act reveals the disguised violence implicit in the colonial project itself" (McNeece 55). In Appanah's text, the reluctantly armed Stéphane intervenes into Mayotte's community of *clandestins*, revealing the disguised violence implicit within humanitarian aid as Stéphane's gun enables Moïse's violent crime. Stéphane is perhaps the character who most explicitly critiques the paradoxical nature of humanitarian aid work that is, for Appanah, ultimately "une impossibilité de la rencontre entre le Nord et le Sud" (Baage 10).

In neither novel, do the authors critique the individual: Stéphane and the Vice-Consul are both merely symptoms of a larger global problem. Appanah and Duras point to the systemic failings of volunteerism and diplomacy as state institutions: they assume the Global

North's superiority to the Global South, and they do not allow for the agency of the people of the Global South whom they claim to help. Appanah and Duras restore this agency to their characters. If Appanah and Duras paint a pessimistic picture of colonial diplomacy and postcolonial volunteer work, they also grant power, autonomy and agency back into the hands of the subjects of the Global South. In Duras's India, the colonial system destroys, above all, its European characters (McNeece 49). Despite her trauma and madness, the beggar-woman lives on, continuing to haunt the European characters. At the novel's end, she remains, laughing and smiling:

Elle est là. C'est une femme. Elle est chauve, une bonzesse sale. Elle agite le bras.

Elle rit, elle continue à l'appeler arrêtée à quelques mètres de lui [Charles Rossett].

Elle est folle. Son sourire ne trompe pas. (Duras 198)

Likewise, in Appanah's Mayotte, it is Bruce who succeeds in providing food and shelter to his gang of *clandestins* where Stéphane fails. Appanah closes her novel in the voice of Moïse, who finally escapes into the "bleu magnifique" of the ocean he has barely seen. Moïse recounts his last act: "Je plonge dans la rade de Mamoudzou, je fends l'océan de mon corps souple, mon corps vivant, et je ne remonte pas" (Appanah 175). These final phrases, with their decisive verbs, "je plonge, je fends, je ne remonte pas," leave no doubt that Moïse *chooses* freedom as he disappears into the ocean.

"Ending Points as Starting Points" in Condé and Devi

Appanah's novel exposes the French government's complicity in the violence and death that plague present-day Mayotte, a region of France. Duras' depictions of colonial French society in Calcutta, India during the 1930s and Appanah's more contemporary

portrayal of “postcolonial⁶³” Mayotte both expose the fact that the familiar myths and tropes that once justified colonization, although widely repudiated, still function insidiously to further neoliberal systems of global exchange.⁶⁴ Furthermore, both texts give voice to the voiceless, making visible the most precarious subjects, both past and present-day. Ultimately, I argue that both texts mobilize and then dismantle the tropes of the idealized island space and of the paternalist west through the sensorial disjunction that occurs throughout their texts that juxtaposes the mundane with the shocking, the disgusting with the beautiful and the cruel with the so-called civilized.

Duras’s beggar-woman exemplifies the figure of the “transgressive woman,” who flouts the conventions of heteronormativity to re-orient the linear and patrilineal realist narrative. She is mad, marginalized and does not conform to the patrilineal society of the colonists or to the patrilineal norms of her own family’s cultural expectations. A generation later, in *Traversée de la Mangrove*, Condé writes against masculinist diasporic hegemony and challenges the categories of racial belonging and inheritance in Guadeloupian society. Similarly, Devi crafts characters who challenge the linearity of patrilineal descent, inheritance and power by questioning the masculinist norms of traditional Indo-Mauritian society. In Devi’s *Le Sari vert*, transgressive women, who refuse to follow, or follow divergently the paths of heterosexual marriage and childbearing, drive the narrative events of the novel, inverting their roles as the “end points” of normative genealogical trees and instead becoming the “starting points” of the new narratives that tell their stories.

⁶³ Mayotte is not independent and the term “postcolonial” becomes complicated in island spaces. In her book *Coloniality of Diasporas*, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel coins the term “extended colonialism” to discuss the regions of the Caribbean and the Philippines that did not follow the same “colonial-postcolonial” or “colonial-sovereign” path to independence as other parts of Latin America. This same concept can be applied to regions like Mayotte in the Indian Ocean (6).

⁶⁴ The myths like racial superiority and “civilization” that were once used to colonize continue to be deployed. Trade sanctions by the West against “dictatorships,” but only certain strategic ones, are one example.

In her article “Mixed Orientations,” Ahmed explains that it is her unmarried feminist aunt—a woman who defied the cultural and religious norms of her culture—who orients Ahmed toward her Pakistani inheritance (105). Because of Ahmed’s sexual orientation and her father’s subsequent refusal to acknowledge her, Ahmed’s only remaining contact with the Pakistani side of her family occurs via her aunts. Using her personal story as a case study and bringing together Black Feminism and phenomenology, Ahmed proposes that a queer genealogy would privilege women and rewrite the normative, masculinist family tree: “It is interesting to imagine how family stories could be told differently, through the very affective labour of women, who do not reproduce the family line; who in a straight family tree would just be an ‘end point.’ In a mixed and queer genealogy, an end point is a starting point” (106). Condé and Devi generate just such “mixed and queer genealogies” that privilege the “affective labour” of transgressive bodies and practices.

Condé, known for her resistance to labels, subverts and explodes rigid ideologies—be they feminist, creole, queer, postcolonial, or any other attempt to codify or dogmatize a theoretical perspective. *Traversée de la mangrove* is no exception, and within Condé’s narrative are critiques of *créolité*, gestures that Lionnet calls “humanist,” and a queering of patriarchal Caribbean culture (*P.R.* 69, Foster 115). The novel has been widely studied—just a few examples include Heather Smyth’s reading of *Traversée de la Mangrove* that focuses on narration and structure to propose that Condé puts forth a “feminist creolization”⁶⁵ and Christopher Ian Foster’s examination of the text through “queer diasporic theory.”⁶⁶ I focus my analysis of Condé’s text on the specific examples of Indo-Caribbean heritage that the text

⁶⁵ Heather Smyth. “‘Roots beyond Roots’: Heteroglossia and Feminist Creolization in *Myal* and *Crossing the Mangrove*.”

⁶⁶ Christopher Ian Foster. “The Queer Politics of Crossing in Maryse Condé’s *Crossing the Mangrove*.” *Small Axe*. Vol, 18.1 no. 43, 2014, pp. 114-124.

evokes, and how these representations of the Indian ethnic minority in the Caribbean dialogue with creolization and *créolité* to “reorient” tropes of diasporic origin and inheritance.

In *Traversée de la mangrove*, the small and deeply intertwined society of Rivière au Sel is made up of characters that come from diverse backgrounds. The Lameaulnes family is white creole (mostly), Désinor is an undocumented worker from Haiti, Moïse is half Chinese, Dodose Pélagie is a very light-skinned mulatto and Léocadie Timothée is Black and very dark-skinned. In these character’s stories, the color of their skin arises as a defining factor in their identity and relationship to the other characters, or more specifically as a physical manifestation of the “fragmentation of identity:”

Fragmentation serves as a basis for the construction of cultural models appropriate to the contexts of postcolonial creolization, where exchanges and interferences produce a dynamic subject participating fully in the global process of métissage or transculturation, at the heart of which the Caribbean has been since the colonial era. Hence to search for affiliation and origins [...] would clearly result in an impasse for the Antillean subject, since her *imaginaire* can be successfully articulated only through nonlinear, egalitarian, and nonhierarchical cultural relations. (Lionnet *PR*, 79)

Antillean identity then resists fixed diasporic origin that insists on one heritage or identity and is reflected by Condé’s portrayal of the Ramsaran family. Although Indian by heritage, the family settled on a part of Guadeloupe that Indians do not normally choose: “Ti-Tor Ramsaran...s’était installé dans cette région qui traditionnellement ne comptait pas d’Indiens” (Condé 20). The family thereby inserts itself into a region to which they do not completely belong, destabilizing notions of Indianness in the novel. Although the Ramsaran family has its roots in India, the family simultaneously belongs to the creole society of Rivière au Sel through ties of blood and through cultural practice. It is important to note that the term “creole” itself resists a fixed definition. Creole has meant, in different historical and

geographic contexts, the children of Europeans born in the colonies, whites, mulattoes, Blacks, or a combination of these groups. Creole is both a racial and linguistic category, referring to the different languages that are European based, but involve significant mixing and vary much from one region to another (Haitian Creole is a different language than Mauritian Creole for example). The term creole therefore must be used with certain caution (Lionnet and Shih 22). Additionally, Creoleness as it pertains to racial intermixing implies heteronormative, biological reproduction (and rape) that then produces the creole body.

The Indian/Creole Ramsaran family flouts multiple traditions. It has not conformed to the tradition of intermarrying only with other Indians, defying an Indo-Caribbean cultural expectation and the colorism/racism endemic to Indian social hierarchies:

Enfin, si certains d'entre eux avaient gardé leur sang pur et avaient été chercher leurs compagnes aux Grands Fonds dont ils étaient originaires, nombreux étaient ceux qui s'étaient mariés dans les familles nègres ou mulâtres de la région. Ainsi des liens de sang s'étaient tissés. (Condé 23)

In this passage the author signals both the image of “sang pur” and “liens de sangs qui s'étaient tissés” to indicate that the Ramsaran family is one of many threads that are woven together to comprise Rivière au Sel's inhabitants. Condé juxtaposes “pure blood” with blood that is “woven” together, thus evoking the cultural “braiding” of *créolité*: “Notre Histoire est une tresse d'histoires” (Bernabé et al. 26).

One critique of *L'Éloge de la Créolité* is that its authors romanticize and exoticize the métissage that constitutes creoleness—that they make the complexity of creoleness into a “hardened and reified state (Shih and Lionnet 24). Glissant further critiques *créolité* as exclusionary and as preventing a true conception of Antillanité:

[Créolité] Théorie selon laquelle il s'agit de réunir les peuples créolophones (y compris la Réunion) et de développer l'usage exclusif de la langue. La créolité

adopte ce dont notre langue a souffert (le monolinguisme discriminant) et ignore les histoires antillaises : ce qui nous unit aux Jamaïcains et aux Portoricains, par-delà les barrières des langues. (*Discours*, 825)

Condé, for her part, engages in the debate, calling Chamoiseau and Confiant's vision of *Créolité* a "mere aestheticization of Antillean reality." *Traversée* illuminates her critique by showing how the pain of losing one's cultural roots also makes up the reality of creoleness in the microcosm of Guadeloupian society (Nesbitt 129).

Although the Ramsaran family belongs to the creole society of Rivière au Sel, its members long for their forgotten roots in India, this longing orienting them toward an imagined past that remains forever out of reach. When the young Sylvestre Ramsaran learns that his father means to take him to a Hindu temple, he has little understanding of what this space means in a religious sense just as has no idea of the task that he will be asked to complete. For Sylvestre, the phrase "au temple" means nothing (Condé 132). Instead, his family's Indian ancestry manifests itself in the form of the strange and colorful objects that decorate his parents' bedroom:

Sylvestre avait bien aperçu dans la chambre de ses parents où il n'entrait jamais des images, entourées de guirlandes d'ampoules multicolores, violemment coloriées, représentant des femmes aux mille bras sinueux, d'autres tenant d'une main une sorte de guitare et de l'autre une fleur, des personnages à trompe d'éléphant enroulée au-dessus de leur estomac rebondi. (132)

Although Sylvestre does not intellectually comprehend his family's Hindu faith and Indian ancestry, he affectively understands them through the sensorial pull of these objects.

Sylvestre perceives these "violently multicolored" objects from *outside* his parents' bedroom and in being drawn toward these objects, Sylvestre redefines what these objects mean in the diasporic space of Guadeloupe. Ahmed tells us that "diasporic spaces are shaped by object

histories” and that it is important to remember that these objects do not merely pull us toward the past, but that these objects “make new impressions” in the hybrid home (149-50). The objects in Sylvestre’s home do not necessarily pull him toward an idealized Indian past but become interwoven with his hybrid Guadeloupian present.

As a boy of only ten years old, Sylvestre’s visit to the temple marked a tenuous connection to the seemingly far-off, physically and symbolically, culture of India. He is fascinated by the ritual and symbols of a culture to which he belongs by heritage, but not by practice. At the temple, Sylvestre breaths the unfamiliar odors of incense and the unfamiliar sounds of drums. His sensory experience of the temple paradoxically makes him aware of the incompleteness of his knowledge of his country of origin: “Lui qui ne connaissait rien du passé de son peuple et dont l’imagination de ce fait ne s’évadait jamais au-delà des limites étincelantes de l’île se sentit mystérieusement transporté en un pays lointain, murmurant, odorant comme la mer” (Condé 133). His senses are activated, his sense of smell and hearing triggering his imagination. Although Sylvestre knows that his people come from a distant country, his imagination has never allowed him to think past the “étincelantes” limits of the island of Guadeloupe. The smells and sounds of temple, however, give the young Sylvestre the illusion of a homegoing voyage. We clearly see how objects “make new impressions in the very weave or fabric of the present” when Sylvestre first enters the Hindu temple (Ahmed 150). He is struck by the unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells and feels as if he were dreaming: “Tout se passa comme dans un rêve et Sylvestre n’aurait su dire ce qui l’avait fait davantage du chant des officiants, de l’odeur des fleurs, des cierges et du camphre qui brûlait sur un plateau” (133). As he feels “mysteriously transported” what Sylvestre experiences are the *objects* that evoke the inheritances of his distant country of origin, again creating new impressions in his hybrid lived present. Sylvestre knows nothing of his past, but through the

pull of these objects, he apprehends his past through its present in the “contact zone”⁶⁷ of the temple. The pull of these objects is an affective rather than logical pull. The sensations of smell and sound evoke bodily memories of an India that is at once familiar and completely unknown. This far-off country, murmuring and odorous like the ocean, pulls Sylvestre toward his past even as it simultaneously anchors him in the present of Guadeloupe. However, Sylvestre’s awe is brutally replaced by fear when he witnesses the throats of baby goats cut in sacrifice. He wets his pants, and his father never ceases to remind Sylvestre of the shame he has brought upon the family by doing so:

C’est alors que des jeunes garçons, vêtus de blanc, avaient amené les cabris, rétifs et bêlants. On leur avait fait respirer de l’encens. Puis d’un seul coup, vlan, on les avait décapités. Leurs petites têtes aux yeux innocents avaient volé dans l’air cependant que leur sang coulant à gros bouillons avait inondé la terre. Alors un hurlement s’était élevé, mais Sylvestre ne savait pas qu’il sortait de sa bouche cependant que le flot brûlant de l’urine inondait, souillait son beau pantalon de drill blanc. (Condé 133)

Fear and shame replace the desire of longing, the “sang coulant” and “brûlant” urine, creating the juxtaposing sensations of terror and “honte.” Because of this early memory of shame, as an adult Sylvestre seeks to become as “Indian” as he possibly can be. He becomes “un hindouiste fervent” and he does not skip one Hindu holiday, “ni samblmani, ni divapali” (134). Yet this desire is perpetually out of reach. When he wishes to take his new bride to India for their honeymoon, she refuses, and they go instead to Paris. India remains unattainable for Sylvestre: “L’Inde s’était réfugiée dans ce coin des rêves qui ne prendront jamais vie” (134). Hindu-Hindi hegemony obfuscates the multiplicity of Indian heritage. In Guadeloupe racial mixing has “diluted” the pure Indian heritage of the Ramsaran family even as they seek to recuperate that heritage.

⁶⁷ Ahmed uses Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” to describe homes in which bodies and cultures collide (148).

Diasporic longing contradicts the sometimes-idealized vision of creoleness that the authors of *L'Éloge* put forth. Although these authors are cognizant of the violent ruptures that have led to different processes of creolization, they make a too rigid a distinction between cultures that have adapted to a new environment by becoming creolized and cultures that have not. They make this point with specific illustrations of how Hinduism adapts in different regions of the Caribbean. For example, the authors juxtapose the Hindus of Trinidad, in which the “Hindu culture adapted...without getting involved in the process of creolization” and the “*bondyékouli* of the small Caribbean islands which is a creole cult based in Hinduism” and thus an exemplar of *créolité* (94). Although there are differences in how Hinduism has adapted and changed based on regional specificity, as we see in *Traversée de la mangrove*, this distinction between creolized Hinduism and “Americanized” Hinduism⁶⁸ is too binary to accommodate the lived realities of Indians in the Caribbean.

Rosa, Sylvestre’s wife, even more emphatically signals the loss that she feels for her mysterious country of origin. Here, rather than tangible traces of culture that one could “braid” together in a celebration of creoleness, the strands of the braid are elusive and slip out of reach. She dreams of India, but remarks that “notre pays d’origine dont hélas, nous ne savons plus grand-chose” (164). For Vilma, Sylvestre and Rosa’s daughter, India remains only a trace in her memory. She equates her loss of Hinduism with the loss of her lover Francis Sanchez. She remarks that if she had been her Indian grandmother, she would have joined Sanchez on the funeral pyre. The concept of *suttee*, a widow choosing to die with her husband, was never widely practiced in India, but for Vilma, this ceremony comes to represent her lost Indian roots: “Je voudrais être mon aïeule indienne pour la suivre au bûcher funéraire. Je me jetterais dans les flammes qui l’auraient consumé et nos cendres seraient

⁶⁸ “Americanization and its corollary, the feeling of Americanness, describes the progressive adaptation of cultures, and with no real interaction with other cultures, of Western populations in a world they baptized as new” (Bernabé et. al 91). The authors signal that certain Hindus and Black people become “Americanized” in the same way.

mêlées” (185). She has never met this Indian ancestor but imagines that she would jump onto the funeral pyre so that her ashes mingle with her husband’s. Vilma’s Indian ashes might likewise mingle with the ashes of Francis Sanchez, a man of mixed and unknown heritage, and thus represent *créolité* in the same incendiary way as the “red glow of magma” that the authors of *L’Éloge* evoke to symbolize “living” the “question of creoleness” (89). However, the burning and the ashes of Vilma’s imagination represent a creoleness that comes together in the destructive force of death, rather than in the creative force of life. For the members of the Ramsaran family, their Indian heritage neither becomes fully incorporated into their daily life in the Antilles, nor do they adapt their Hinduism to weave into Antillean cultural practice. Instead, they lose and long for this past that they cannot quite manage to “braid” into their daily lives, the longing both orienting the characters toward an imagined place of origin and pushing the same origin further and further out of reach.

Condé objects to what she calls the “aestheticization” of *créolité* even as she puts forth the hope for a “new Antillean humanism” (Lionnet *P.R.* 71). Lionnet argues that with *Traversée de la mangrove*, Condé “denounces anti-Indian racism of Caribbean Creoles” and that she “represents...the traces of a unique cultural brew, the *créolité*, now being celebrated by many” (73). In Condé’s novel, Xantippe’s creole garden exemplifies both Condé’s vision for a hopefully creolized future and the contemporary violence that impedes such neat teleological progress. Xantippe is an outsider who inspires fear in the other inhabitants of Rivière au Sel. They avoid him, run from him, and consider him to be cursed. However, it is Xantippe, the outcast, who knows how to plant a creole garden in the same manner as his father and grandfather before him: “La journée, je plantais comme avant moi mon père et mon grand-père et la terre me donnait tous les trésors de son ventre” (242). This image signals the possibility for the productive coexistence of diversity within this creole garden

that exemplifies Guadeloupean society even as the next scene seems to foreclose it: “Ma case flambait et tout mon bel avoir était réduit en cendres” (243).

Condé’s text makes multiple implicit references to *créolité*, just as she is in direct dialogue with the authors of *L’Éloge*. She mentions Chamoiseau in her fictional text and despite some of her critiques of his work, she acknowledges the writer and scholar’s influence, especially linguistic, on Caribbean literature. In *Traversée*, in a discussion between Sanchez and Lucien Évariste (the local revolutionary who is fascinated that Sanchez might come from Cuba). Lucien asks Sanchez if he has, “le talentueux Martiniquais,” Patrick Chamoiseau’s talent for deconstructing “français-français” (228). Chamoiseau for his part writes an article about *Traversée de la mangrove* at the request of Condé. In the opening lines of the review, Chamoiseau explains that: “In her letter asking me to be her first reader, Condé wrote that ‘we must show that although we may have different conceptions of the novel, we can still engage in a dialogue. From the perspective of your theory of *créolité*, you can offer a critical reading of my book’” (389-90). In this article he explains that *créolité* is not a theory, but an aesthetics (390). He continues with a reading of Condé’s novel that touches on many different aspects of the text, both thematic and stylistic. He calls the scene of Francis Sanchez’s wake a “melting pot of Creole culture,” and it is in this phrase that I find the primary contradiction between Condé’s conception of *créolité* and Chamoiseau’s. Rather than a “melting pot,” Condé’s novel points to a culture that incorporates its various heritages but does not fuse them together into an essentialized *créolité*. Condé’s humanism is not an idealized, or exoticized essentialism, but more of a gesture toward the “diversality,” a universality that does not elide its diverse parts.

Another critique of *créolité* as defined by Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant is that it privileges male authors and is “sharply gendered” (Arnold 21). Condé engages with *créolité* and creolization to push back against this gendering. According to Foster, not only does

Condé resist gendered conception of créolité, but she creates a space of “queer praxis” in her text with the concept of “crossing” that open up spaces of “cross-national, cross-racial and cross-gender alliances” (115). Foster reads in *Traversée* an entire “politics of crossing” that he bases in queer diasporic theory with its questioning of biological inheritance and the stability of the nation (115). A “politics of crossing” becomes a useful way to read not just Condé, but the other three authors of this chapter.

Devi’s novel, *Le Sari vert* similarly challenges gendered conceptions of belonging and articulates a “politics of crossing” that mobilizes a male performance of narration that simultaneously undermines male authority in the text. The novel privileges the voices and experiences of the female characters even as it is the voice of its male narrator that the reader primarily hears. The novel is narrated by “Dokter-Dieu,” as he is called throughout the work, and the reader perceives the events of the story from the doctor’s perspective. He is a doctor of Hindu Indian heritage who marries a high-caste wife whom he torments and then kills. The novel’s plot takes place at the doctor’s sick bed where he is cared for by his daughter Kitty and his granddaughter Malika, and it goes back and forth between the present and the doctor’s hallucinatory memories. Despite the first-person narration, the novel is not the doctor’s story, but the story of three generations of women, Kitty, her mother and her daughter.

Le Sari vert takes place on another island in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius, that was colonized by the French (and British), but that unlike Mayotte, is now independent and has been since the 1960s. The main characters are Indo-Mauritian, and the caste distinctions of traditional Hinduism continue to influence the character’s lives. The protagonist and narrator, “Dokter-Dieu,” is obsessed with the idea of a pure Hindu-Hindi heritage that conflicts with the reality of his daughter and grand-daughter’s, Kitty and Malika, lived experiences as Indo-Mauritian women. A dying Dokter-Dieu torments his daughter and granddaughter who act as

his caretakers as the present-day scenes at the man's bedside give way to flashbacks that occur before his wife's death. In Devi's novel, India figures as the imaginary and unattainable "homeland" that the male protagonist both yearns for and feels oppressed by. His daughter and granddaughter both refuse, in their own ways, to conform to the restrictive and traditional roles of wife and mother. As the novel progresses, the narrative exposes the extreme abuse that characterizes the doctor's relationship with his wife and daughter and that contradicts the doctor's hallucinatory belief in his own righteousness.

Le Sari vert foregrounds the "alternative" life choices of her female protagonists—three women (two who *seem* to follow the conventional and expected choices of marriage and childbirth, and another who clearly does not) who defy the normative expectations of the family's patriarch *Doktor-Dieu*. Malika and her mother Kitty stand watch over their respective grandfather and father and their affective labor, the labor of caretaking, cooking and nursing, precipitates the events that lead to the doctor's death.

Devi's novel exposes the deep-seated racism within Hindu Mauritian society against those with dark skin. The doctor is obsessed by race and caste, ashamed of his own "low-born" background, yet he resents the high-caste of the wife he chooses. His own childhood was marked by "inconsolable pauvreté," although his wife comes from "haute société" (Devi 81, 23). This obsession with Hindu caste and skin color, higher castes being associated with lighter skin than lower castes, translates into the doctor's disdain for the darker-skinned Creoles who inhabit his "creole island," and his prejudice is exemplified in his perception of Malika. The doctor describes Malika's physical appearance with disdain, and he wonders from where she could have inherited her features: "Malika. Grande comme aucun de ses ancêtres, lourde, épaisse" (43). Malika is bigger, heavier and thicker than her purportedly fine-boned high-caste Indian ancestors. Her skin too, is darker and the doctor's words make explicit the erasure of the darker-skinned Dravidian peoples, the multiple indigenous groups,

and the Dalits (previously called Untouchables) who also make up the Indian diaspora's heritage.

The doctor's hatred for women is inextricable from his racism. He likens women to cows, repeats that they are only good for breeding and bemoans the loss of masculinity on the part of men. He describes the uselessness of Kitty and Malika in violently derogatory terms:

Oui, on me prend pour un misogyne, mais je ne fais que constater l'évidence. Je ne m'érige pas en juge. Il n'y a qu'à voir les deux exemples de féminité que j'ai auprès de moi en ce moment : quelle est leur raison d'être ? À quoi sert cet assemblage de cellules inutiles ? Ça marche, ça bouge, ça parle, ça vivote. (90)

For the doctor, women are nothing. They serve no purpose. They move and speak but are masses of useless cells. However, the same women, whom the doctor so despises as useless, perform the work of caretaking that the doctor needs but resents. His position of inferiority is reinforced by his physical incapacitation. Malika challenges the doctor's system of beliefs, his extreme chauvinism and heteronormative assertions, by relating through a verbal performance, the intimate details of explicit lesbian sexual scenes. While sitting by his bedside, Malika describes her lesbian relationship to the ailing, bed-ridden Doctor-Dieu. She imposes her physical self, her dark skin and her corporality, on the doctor. Malika's sexual "orient"-ation pushes the doctor away with repulsion just as it pulls him in with a kind of obscene fascination. He is fixed in space, unable to move, but his mind, his desires and his agency all betray him as he is increasingly subject to auditory and visual hallucinations that he cannot control.

Malika forces the doctor to listen to these stories of her sexual encounters with her lover Marie-Rose against his will. Despite the first-person narration of the doctor, because of his state as an invalid, he must listen to the voices of the women who care for him whether he wishes to or not. If the implicit heteronormativity and implied glorification of the rape that

produced racial mixing in the Caribbean is one of the critiques of *métissage* and creolization,⁶⁹ Devi's work offers a counter-discourse in which Malika's homosexual affair is forced upon the impotent doctor. Malika is not only larger and darker skinned than her family, but she is also more "masculine." The doctor describes her laugh as a "rire d'homme" and her voice as "trop grave" (43). The emphasis on Malika's corporality, gender nonconformity and her use of sensorial imagery to provoke the doctor is another example of a character who mobilizes the sensorial realm as a means of resistance to, or destabilization of, misogynist forms of authority. Nonconformity to female gender roles threatens the doctor, as does Malika's sexuality. Malika provokes the doctor with tales of her love affair, and she asks if she makes him afraid. He asks her to stop but she continues unflinchingly:

Pourquoi dois-je arrêter, grand-père ? Cela ne t'excite pas, d'imaginer deux femmes ensemble [...] Regarde ce doigt avec lequel je touche ta nourriture [...] tu vois, ce gros index de cochon qui touille ton porridge et ta crème dessert, imagine qu'il est entré, cet index, dans une autre femme, et pas n'importe quelle femme, tu vois, une bien noire, de ceux que tu méprises si fort, une magnifique noire. (47)

In this passage, Malika challenges the doctor's double prejudice against women and Black people. She not only visualizes feminine penetration, turning her finger into a phallic symbol, but also appropriates the language of chauvinism with "index de cochon." Furthermore, the passage explodes with images that evoke sensorial responses. The "crème dessert" clearly evokes sexual fluids, male or female, and the implied whiteness of the dessert contrasts with the "magnifique noire" who is Marie Rose. The porridge, dessert and "nourriture" are all images that evoke the sensation of taste, and the passage deploys this sensorial experience as both an explicit sexual reference and as an implied challenge to heterosexual sex. Malika

⁶⁹ "The 'racial' mixing that illustrates the process of creolization has historically been a scene of sexual violence against women" (Smyth 2)

makes clear that she and her lover wear their identities with pride—Malika’s mixed-race body, Marie-Rose’s Black body—and their homosexual mixed-race relationship.

Just as bodies take on outsized importance in the text, certain objects and symbols recur throughout *Le Sari vert*. Objects may take on different meanings in different contexts. Lionnet explains that in Hindu literature, the sari evokes the epic poem the *Mahabarta*, in which it functions as a magical garment that protects the epic’s heroine (*Écritures* 259). She further argues that in Devi’s work, the sari has multiple meanings: “As page of text, as corpus, body and book” (268). The sari as symbolic repeats throughout Devi’s oeuvre, and the garment takes on different significance in the different works. In *Le Sari vert*, the sari represents female power and agency that evokes the destroyer goddess Kali:

Je me réveille et je me souviens que le sari vert a brûlé. Le corps qui n’existait pas s’est consumé avec une facilité malveillante : il avait envie de disparaître. Il est resté immobile tandis que mille étincelles s’échappaient du vêtement telle une pluie d’or. La chaleur est devenue suffocante. Le tissu fin comme une aile de mouche était parfait pour se transformer en brasier. Elle n’a pas bougé, n’a pas crié. Elle s’est laissée brûler et je crois qu’à la fin elle a eu un sourire en me regardant, avant d’ouvrir la bouche et grand pour laisser sortir une fumée gluante. Elle était consumée vive, de l’intérieure. (Devi 100)

The doctor wakes from sleep only to encounter the same nightmare manifested as a hallucination before him. The green sari burns, but in an inversion of power that upends the tradition of suttee, or bride burning. Instead of being forced to join her husband on the funeral pyre in the ultimate act of female subservience, the doctor’s wife burns by choice in his

hallucination. When she opens her mouth, exhaling choking smoke, she evokes the sensuality and terror of the devouring mouth of Kali.⁷⁰

The sari functions as an object toward which the characters are “oriented,” one that pulls the characters toward the past, and one that carries a wealth of affective significance. The green sari appears to haunt the doctor—to bring forth visions of his dead wife and the child that they lost. The sari thus “orients” the doctor toward the male offspring that would have carried on the family line, but who died, leaving his female heirs as “end points” (Ahmed 106). In the same hallucination, the sari becomes a disembodied specter that mimics a living breathing woman who grows with pregnancy, whose water breaks and then who bleeds with childbirth:

Le ventre grossit. La démarche est un peu plus lourde. Les traces d’enfant se creusent.

Le sari verdit, s’enfle, s’épanche. Eaux perdues. Gouttes de sang. (99)

The spectral sari at once evokes his high-born wife and his lost male heir and conjures the physicality of pregnancy and the bodily fluids of miscarriage. The body is foregrounded in this passage. The stomach, the heaviness, the swelling and the pouring forth of fluids conjure death, childbirth and the intimate connection between the two bodily processes. Female power is privileged in death and in life.

When the vision ends, in his disorientation, the doctor imagines women speaking. He thinks it might be Malika speaking to his dead wife and he attempts to disempower her as he derides the idea that she might tell her mother of her lesbian lover: “Oui, tu vois, Maman, elle et moi, le matin, on aime bien se réveiller ensemble, collées par notre sueur...” (100). The doctor is haunted by Malika’s sexuality and her divergence from the heteronormative

⁷⁰ “Embodied in the horrific image of the violently sexual goddess Kālī, India was at once seductively mysterious and bound up with “debauchery, violence and death” (Urban 50). Hugh B. Urban. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*. University of California Press, 2003.

narrative of Hindu-Hindi heritage just as he is haunted by the ghost of his wife: both women who refuse to obey him and whom he fails to dominate.

Ultimately Malika, her mother and dead grandmother stand together beside the dead doctor's bedside and represent three generations of women who exist together in a dream-like liminal space, without men and the biological relationships that constitute a normative family tree. Malika, who chooses a lesbian relationship and therefore represents the end of a traditional bloodline, represents the generative starting point of the three women's journey toward freedom. Devi ends her novel with the women's voices triumphing over the doctor's, vanquishing his misogyny and reversing the power roles. Whereas it is the doctor's voice that we hear throughout the novel, his death allows the reader to hear the voices of the women unfiltered through the doctor's perspective, concluding the narrative with the primacy of their stories over his. At the novel's close, three women—the reader assumes that these women are Malika, her mother Kitty and dead grandmother although the text does not explicitly state it at first—lean over the corpse of the doctor and two of the three, again unspecified, pose questions, one after the other:

Où se situe le centre de son humanité? Où se trouve de sa méchanceté? Où commence le début du pardon ? Où finit l'individu? Est-ce bien lui, là, ou est-ce autre chose? À quoi a-t-il servi ? (213)

Not only do we finally hear these women's voices, but their final question echoes the same question that the doctor had posed about the "purpose" of women. By restating the doctor's question, these women have come full circle in the narrative. It is the doctor whose existence was pointless, not their own. The doctor's death, as the last male member of his family, represents the end of patrilineal bloodline, but with his death the women commence an alternative genealogical family tree. In the following passage, the third woman's identity is revealed to be Kitty's murdered mother. She is both the youngest and the oldest. The text

explains the relationship between these women as it questions the linearity of inheritance and thus orientations toward the past and future: “Elles se ressemblent, mère, fille et petite-fille, ou autre chose, sœurs peut-être, aïeules ou progéniture, aucune importance dans l’ordre de choses (214). Here the author explicitly undermines the notion of a teleological pattern of inheritance by insisting that the “order of things,” that is to say the chronologically dictated pattern of biological inheritance, matters not at all. Rather, these women reimagine the histories of their own lives and with the doctor’s death, they rewrite the “endings” that he had tried to impose on all three of them.

Rewriting Inheritance:

In their novels, both Devi and Condé populate their texts with objects and images that are emblematic of the complex inheritances—inheritations that refuse to follow the genetically straightforward lines of origin/offspring—of diasporic populations. The authors describe characters that inhabit mixed-race (or racially ambiguous) bodies within diasporic communities, and they disturb the reified notion of one, pure diasporic origin. Appanah juxtaposes dystopian violence with utopian island imagery, exposing the legacies of colonial injustice that continue to function through systems of neocolonialism and neoliberalism in present-day D.O.M.s, and thereby reorients the notions that often define progress. Duras privileges the stories of transgressive women as she questions the inheritance and transmission of French diplomacy and paternalist notions of empire. All four authors challenge teleological inheritance and instead, weave together a non-linear genealogy of sensorial experience as they deploy the sensorial realm to destabilize the utopian island, patrilineal genealogies and the French “mission civilisatrice.” Inheritance directly relates to all three concepts: the utopian island is a trope that is inherited through literary representations, patrilineal genealogy implies teleological and biological inheritance and

French paternalism is disseminated throughout the formerly colonized world as the rational and humanist inheritance of Enlightenment ideals.

The diasporic experience is sometimes referred to as a type of “failed” inheritance. In *Impossible Desires*, Gopinath takes up Fanon’s characterization of the failure of the oedipal complex in the Black colonized male (5). Following Fanon, Gopinath agrees that the oedipal narrative cannot fully account for “racial and sexual subjectification” in colonial and postcolonial contexts. However, Fanon’s explanation, in which the Black son is unable to identify with the Black father because of the Black father’s loss of “phallic power,” excludes female subjectivity—particularly that of queer women of color (66).⁷¹ Gopinath instead exposes the female queer experience hidden within the novels, films, music and dance of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. In so doing, she rewrites and discovers new inheritances for these communities that challenge the male-dominant narratives that monopolize stories of diasporic origin.

Ahmed also evokes Fanon when she cites his description of the man of color’s “bodily schema” in a “white world” (*Q.P.* 110). Fanon asserts that a Black man cannot feel bodily at home in a “‘corporeal schema’ that is already racialized,” or in other words, that whiteness, or a white body is a condition of belonging in a white world that “disorients” the Black body, making it impossible for the Black body to inhabit certain spaces (111). Ahmed further analyses how race orients bodies in specific directions and thus toward specific inheritances and how racism acts affectively on bodies with “mixed orientations” (111). Specifically, she proposes that mixed-race bodies have inheritances that *cross* genealogical lines, and that objects orient us toward and away from these inheritances:

For diasporic communities, objects gather as lines of connection to spaces that are lived as homes but are no longer inhabited. Objects come to embody such lost

⁷¹ Gopinath cites *Black Skin/White Masks* (151-52)

homes...Mixed-race homes also gather objects around, as objects that emerge from different worlds and seem to face different directions. (149-150)

Both Ahmed and Gopinath offer alternative lenses through which to theorize inheritance that privilege non-normative and queer orientations instead of the patrilineal genealogical model. Within these multiplying lines and queer orientations are a plethora of objects. As Ahmed states, these objects fill the homes of diasporic peoples and they provide a complex web of interlinking and multidirectional connection between the past and present, homeland and diasporic community.

Appanah, Condé, Devi, and Duras thus create an alternative, cross-teleological and cross-hierarchical genealogy of women writers that orients the reader toward both past and present. Although they also belong to a chronological genealogy—one that articulates the successive generations of “Francophone” women writers, their texts speak to one another not simply as steps along a generational line, but as interlinking works that relate to each other multi-directionally, that *cross* the chronological genealogy. By challenging essentialist myths of inheritance and origin, these writers destabilize the utopic archipelagic space. The archipelago, a grouping together of island spaces—not necessarily of nations—creates a visual representation of the genealogy that these women create. The land masses of an archipelago, like the writers and their characters, are connected yet separate, and they form a loosely articulated whole comprised of multiple, separate pieces. In the next chapter, I examine how naming, in the colonial and postcolonial archipelago, plays with similar themes of origin and diaspora, but with a focus on spatial more than temporal relationships.

III. NAMING THE DIASPORIC SPACE: REPETITIONS AND REPRODUCTIONS

In 2008, for Sydney's Biennale, Nalini Malani staged the installation, *The Tables Have Turned: A Shadow Play*, inside a former air raid shelter on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbor, Australia. The biennale's theme was "Revolutions - Forms That Turn," and Malani's shadow play deployed rotating cylinders with illustrations from Hindu, Buddhist and Old Testament myths. Malani's choice for the installation's housing was as significant as the installation's content. The air raid shelter evokes World War II, the role that colonized spaces played in this war, and industrialization. War, with its accelerated production and industrialization, and colonization were and are essential to capitalist production, exchange and accumulation.⁷² The shadow play, as its name suggests, "turns the tables" on the relationships of power between the Hindu and Christian myths, and the entire installation could be read as a retelling, a renaming, and a *displacement* of the story of the colonization, independence and postcolonial period of India.

Malani decenters the postcolonial narrative by physically displacing and restaging it. This chapter focuses on diasporic spaces—their myths of "origin" and their restagings throughout the Francophone world. My analysis begins with a brief exploration of early modern practices that christened places in keeping with colonialist and religious practices. I then move on to Duras's *Cycle indien* to suggest both a continuity and a subversion of said practices. The subsequent sections of the chapter explore contemporary Mauritian fiction that plays with the concepts of space—their antecedents and duplications—to establish a genealogy of colonial and postcolonial toponyms.

⁷² "War develops [certain features] earlier than peace; the way in which as a result of war, and in the armies, etc., certain economic conditions, e.g., wage-labour, machinery, etc., were evolved earlier than within civil society. The relations between productive power and conditions of communication are likewise particularly obvious in the army." Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Economic Manuscripts: Capital: Volume One*, Marx & Engels Internet Archive. 1995. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm.

Naming, the system of classification and the power that comes from defining this knowledge might be best exemplified by the encyclopedia. In Diderot's eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire des Arts, des Sciences et des Métiers*, (1751-1772), two entries appear for the city of "Benares: "BENARES * BENARES, (Géog.) ville de l'Indostan, sur le Gange; c'est où les bramines tiennent leurs écoles. BANARA ou BENARES * BANARA ou BENARES, (Géog.) ville d'Asie, au Mogol, dans le royaume de Bengale. Long. 101. 30. lat. 26. 20." ⁷³ One entry specifies that Benares is a geographical location in "Hindustan" on the Ganges River where Brahmins (the "priestly" or highest-caste Hindus) have their schools. The other entry indicates that Benares is a city in Asia, in the kingdom of Bengal, and gives the precise longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates of the city. As a reference tool that deals in numerous subjects, an encyclopedia entry must limit the amount of information it can provide in each entry, and in this case, neither captures the religious significance of the city of Benares for Hindus, nor does the author give historical or cultural information about the city. If the reader were familiar with the Hindu caste system, they might be able to intuit that the city had a certain holy significance since the priestly caste of Brahmins established schools there, but broadly speaking, the encyclopedia entries vastly oversimplify the city's history and significance. The entries collapse a wealth of culturally and religiously significant information about the city into two lines of information that a French-speaking and literate public could apprehend from afar.

The observational and classificatory systems employed during the eighteenth century (travelogues, encyclopedias, scientific observations/experiments) to document and analyze the regions of overseas colonies attempted to categorize and define these unknown regions so that they could be understood, through the reading of the above-mentioned types of texts, and

⁷³ Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2016 Edition), Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (eds), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>

consumed, through the commerce comestible goods. As Said famously explains the “Orient,” from a Western perspective, is a projection of occidental desires and imaginations: “The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part” (7). Diderot could write his encyclopedia entry with little worry that his version of India would be contradicted by an Indian subject because of the colonial power relations of the time. Although Said’s concept of orientalism spans centuries, his book primarily investigates the nineteenth century. In a work that specifically addresses the eighteenth-century, *Tropicopolitans*, Aravamudan explores colonial representations of non-European peoples, whom he describes as follows:

Non-Europeans in eighteenth-century literary representations are often, although by no means always, inhabitants of the torrid zone, tropicopolitans, like the male slave whose gaze challenges the imperial presumptions of cosmopolitans. However, representations here should not be read as politics *tout court*, but as vicariously so. As colonialist representation features an unstable rhetorical mixture of geographical, historical, and literary apprehensions of the colonized, such a politics manqué works in in the manner of the fantastic and the grotesque, the romantic and the gothic. Reading for tropicalization tactically allows the discussions of a wide range of representational and rhetorical techniques used by metropolitan cultures (sometimes erratically, at other moments systematically) to comprehend the colonized. (9)

If we read Diderot for “tropicalization” we find that his encyclopedia entry attempts to “comprehend the colonized” in just such a manner. The romanticized definition of Benares as a site of Brahmin learning and as geographically defined by the Western system of coordinates projects a colonial definition of space—one that relies on absolute location

(longitude and latitude) rather than on relative location as determined by proximity to another place or to natural features like rivers and mountains—onto the sacred Hindu site.

If representation and categorization necessitated a certain oversimplification in eighteenth-century literary representations, we can read for other types of “tropicalizations” centuries later in Duras’ twentieth-century novels, plays and screenplays. In her *Cycle Indien*, Duras self-consciously deploys fictional representations of India to critique the mechanisms of colonialism that homogenize, flatten out and attempt to apprehend the space of the colony.⁷⁴ She intentionally oversimplifies colonial space as a literary device to point out colonial injustice. Throughout Duras’s *Cycle Indien*, she writes of places with vague names like “S. Tahla” and “T. Beach” (*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*). Duras utilizes these “false geographies,” these amorphous, unspecified and fictionalized toponyms, to suggest that, under a colonial power structure, colonial towns are interchangeable, lack individuality and function primarily to conjure certain abstract significations rather than as concrete physical locations. Her works textually enact the Orientalism that Said will later deconstruct and theorize, building up and then destroying spatial projections of occidental fantasy. Duras employs a literary strategy that makes visible and amplifies the way in which the colonial power structure ignores the difference and specificity found in the spaces of the colonies, and thus critiques colonialism. Yet, Duras, a white, French woman who grew up on a plantation in what was then Indochine, risks reproducing the same colonial logic, iterating the same “tropicalizations,” against which she is writing.

The attempt to articulate certain colonial spaces with no first-hand knowledge (seen in Diderot’s *L’Encyclopédie*, Guillaume de Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*⁷⁵ and common

⁷⁴ See David Harvey’s discussion of how imperial expansion created a kind of knowable geography that altered the conceptions of space and time (244). David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell, 1990.

⁷⁵ Guillaume Raynal. *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (XVIIIe)*. Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d’Étude du XVIIIe Siècle, 2010. Print.

practice during the early modern period) and Duras's use of a geographic region, or toponym to evoke certain tropes and associations without attending to the region's specificity, undoubtedly perform Orientalist projections of Western imagination onto the reality of the so-called East. Yet Duras's freely imagined colonial geography and misuse of names does more than simply project a Western reality onto colonial subjects and colonized space. Her work critiques the project of Western hegemony even as it participates and emanates from within it. Duras fictionalizes these colonial spaces to create a textual performance of the colonizer's gaze. The colonizer's gaze sees all "natives" as interchangeable and lacking individuality, and Duras's text intentionally reproduces this reductive gaze to counterintuitively make the system hyper-visible to the reader.

Duras sets her *Cycle Indien* before the widespread decolonization of the 1960s (*Le Vice-consul* and *India Song* take place during the 1930s) and her use of toponyms reflects the policies and geopolitical realities of a colonized world. Conversely, around the turn of the last century, many formerly colonized countries began changing some of the official names of their cities. The *postcolonial* practice of renaming cities, whose names are legacies of colonialism, attempts to reappropriate these cities by returning agency to the formerly colonized peoples living in them. For example, in India: Bombay became Mumbai (1995), Madras became Chennai (1996), Calcutta became Kolkata (2001), and Pondicherry became Puducherry (2006). These toponymical changes reflect both the changing discourse in India about autonomy and authenticity and the country's shifting attitudes toward the legacy of colonial and neocolonial practices. Mumbai is the Marathi/Gujarati name for Bombay, Chennai the Tamil name of Madras, Kolkata is the Bengali pronunciation of the anglicized Calcutta, and Puducherry more closely aligns with Tamil pronunciation than the former French pronunciation of Pondichéri (Pondicherry). Thus these "new" names are not new at all, but just an official return to the "old" names that (some) inhabitants of these cities have

always used. These toponyms and their new official forms highlight the legacy of colonialism that tied India to Britain (and France but to a much smaller degree) and resulted in the anglicized names of Indian cities. Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were all important port cities during the British Raj and were vital to the economic functioning of the British Empire. Some of the twentieth and twenty-first century name changes remain controversial as they have tended, especially in the last few decades, to privilege Hindi/Hindu heritage as opposed to Muslim heritage.⁷⁶

In addition to economic significance, there are spaces whose names and renaming evoke special religious and cultural meaning. The “Benares” found in *L’Encyclopédie*, is also known as Banaras, Kashi and Varanasi—all variations on the name of the Hindu holy city on the Ganges (Ganga in Hindi) River. Hindus make pilgrimages to this city, and if they die there, their souls are released from the cycle of reincarnation and instead become one with the universe to find ultimate peace and knowledge. In Mauritius, there is yet another town called Bénarès; however, rather than being named for the holy city in India by the Indian immigrants who came to the island to work the sugar plantations, Bénarès was named by French colonists before the arrival of the first indentured servants from India (Mehta 42).⁷⁷ Although the town was named before the arrival of indentured servants to Mauritius, the name holds significance for Indo-Mauritians, many of whom originally came from eastern Uttar Pradesh where Varanasi (Benares) India is located (4). Indo-Mauritians are primarily the descendants of the indentured servants brought to Mauritius to work the sugar plantations, and the Mauritian Bénarès identifies the cultural link between Indo-Mauritians and India at the same time that it occludes the earlier Indian migration that came from Pondicherry and

⁷⁶ A more detailed analysis of the Hindu nationalist aspect of these name changes necessitates further research.

⁷⁷ Binita Mehta. “Memories in/of Diaspora: Barlen Pyamootoo's Bénarès (1999).” *Esprit Createur*. Vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 46-62.

was primarily Tamil.⁷⁸ The eponymous town is also a product of the earlier French, rather than the later British colonization of the island.

The study of how toponyms are *replicated*, deployed and imagined sheds light on the historical processes of colonialization, migration and diaspora—thus toponymy, the study of place names, functions as an analytical category through which to examine how the texts of Appanah, Devi, Duras and Pyamootoo write these processes into their narratives to expose colonial, neocolonial and neoliberal practices. Naming—of a child to indicate familial belonging and individuality; of a geographic space to demonstrate ownership and discovery; of a work of art or fiction to indicate authorship and creation—is a highly personal and human act of claiming something to be one’s own. To confuse, conflate, and replicate names, collapsing one geography onto another, plays with the reader’s sense of belonging and their knowledge of the spatial construction of the time and space of the novels. Textual toponyms thus illuminate a trajectory of exploitation and domination that spans the colonial era of the 1930s to the present-day by conjuring sensorial responses throughout the texts—certain names evoking sights, sounds and smells that in turn elicit and produce sensations for both the reader and the characters of the novels.

Imagined Itineraries and Cities as Signifiers in *Le Vice-consul*

In chapter II, I focused on the time of Duras’ narrative and her achronological belonging to a genealogy of contemporary Francophone writers, anti-colonial to postcolonial. I further explored her articulation of colonial diplomacy in conjunction with Appanah’s iteration of the modern-day NGO. In this chapter, I focus on the *space* of Duras’s oeuvre. In her *Cycle Indien*, Duras employs specific, real names of colonial cities and regions in

⁷⁸ “The first Indian migrants (slaves and free artisans) were, in fact, brought to the island by La Bourdonnais when he became Governor in 1738. These Indians came from the region of Pondicherry in South India... The official Hindi-Hindu narrative is elitist and excludes descendants of Tamil settlers, many of whom intermarried with African Creoles and converted to Christianity while still retaining Hindu practices” (Ravi 5-6).

conjunction with symbolic, invented, shortened, and false toponyms to undermine the notion of spatial and temporal reality. This sensorial disorientation is a hallmark of Durasian oeuvre, defines the *nouveau roman* and makes her writing notoriously difficult to pin down.⁷⁹ This disorientation simultaneously performs the experience of colonial oppression in which the colonizer imposes a different time and space onto the colonized subject and space of the colony. Duras unmasks the oppression of colonial systems with textual performance as much as her style exposes the fractured storytelling of the postmodern novel.⁸⁰ Mapping serves as a powerful visual representation of colonial, spatial subjugation: “La cartographie des territoires colonisés a été l’une des premières œuvres des puissances européennes désireuses de marquer leur mainmise sur les terres nouvellement acquises” (Clavaron 413).⁸¹ Duras reinscribes colonial maps onto her stories, delineating an alternative mapping of the colonial space of India throughout *Le Vice-consul*.

Duras describes her use of names when she opens her screenplay, *India Song* (1972)—loosely based on her novel *Le Vice-consul*, but a separate and different adaptation that follows the same characters—with the following lines:

Les noms des villes, des fleuves, des États, des mers de l’Inde ont, avant tout, ici, un sens musical. Toutes les références à la géographie physique, humaine, politique, d’*India Song*, sont fausses : Ainsi on ne peut pas, par exemple, aller en automobile de Calcutta à l’embouchure du Gange en un après-midi, ni au Népal. De même, l’hôtel

⁷⁹ For example, Béatrice Didier explores Duras’s use of the names S. Thala, T. Beach and U. Bridge from *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* as mysterious first names that evoke ambiguous spaces or as anagrams of Lol’s initials. Duras undoubtedly employs multiple lexical games that make a multiplicity of meaning possible throughout her texts. Béatrice Didier. *L’écriture-femme*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1991.

⁸⁰ See Homi Bhabha’s discussion of postmodern space and time in *The Location of Culture*. “My rendition of Jameson...reveals the anxiety of enjoining the global and the local; the dilemma of projecting international space on the trace of the decentred, fragmented subject” (216).

⁸¹ Yves Clavaron. “Capitalisme et colonialisme français dans quelques romans indo-chinois de Marguerite Duras.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2015, pp. 410-414. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2015.1066187>

de *Prince of Wales* ne se trouve pas dans une île du Delta, mais à Colombo. De même encore, c'est New Delhi qui est la capitale administrative de l'Inde et non pas Calcutta. Etc. (9)

Duras insists on the musicality of the names of the Indian towns that she invokes, and it is this sensorial aspect of the names that matters, “before all else.” She emphasizes the inaccuracy of her geography, but for what purpose? Does she simply wish to signal that her inaccurate geography is inconsequential to the story or is she self-consciously indicating to the reader an intentional literary/theatric/cinematic device that she will use repeatedly throughout her plays and novels? By drawing the reader’s explicit attention to her misrepresentations of Indian political and geographic space, and then finishing her sentence with “etc.,” Duras implies that she will utilize an endless series of similarly false repetitions. As celebrated author of the *nouveau roman*, Duras uses her false geographies to point out the fictive and representational nature of literature, where perspectives and voices seamlessly blur into each other and where the author intentionally violates the authorial pact, the divisions that separate the author from reader and character from narrator. Her *nouveau roman* style is as much a critique of the rise of imperialism as it is a critique of the contemporaneous realist novel, suggesting a connection between the dominance of the realist novel as a genre and the domination of territories.⁸² She signposts the falsity of her geography as a specific critique of colonialism, her characters engaging in an exaggerated performance of settler colonialism that amplifies an attitude of colonial indifference, whose inhumanity at times veers into the absurd,⁸³ yet reflects the all-to-real violence of the project of imperialism. It is the façade of colonialism as a civilizing mission that crumbles into absurdity via Duras’s

⁸² “Marguerite Duras’s *nouveau roman* is well-known to have challenged the conventions of the traditional, realist novel. See Waters and Willis.

⁸³ See chapter II discussion of colonial diplomacy in Duras.

narratives. The author instead exposes the profit and resource exploitation that drove France's (and every other colonizing country's) colonialist project (Clavaron 410).

The *Vice-consul* begins with the story of *la mendiante*, a woman who walks from Battambang (her native village in what was then Indochine) to Calcutta (Kolkata). Like the geographic impossibilities that Duras signals in her introduction to *India Song*, the beggar-woman's journey represents what I will refer to as a Durasian "imagined itinerary," her unlikely geographies, imprecise locations and imagined spaces. While not impossible, *la mendiante*'s journey of almost two thousand miles on foot while heavily pregnant defies belief, and Duras intentionally deploys such unlikely voyages as a literary strategy that collapses one colonial space onto another. In her novel, both the beggar-woman's village of origin and the spaces in India that she comes to inhabit (Calcutta and the island in the delta of Ganges) become interchangeable in that their precise geographical locations do not matter as much as what their names evoke: the trauma, disorientation and dislocation inflicted by the colonial system of governance. Duras grew up in Indochina not India, but she calls on her colonial knowledge of what is now Vietnam to imagine the space of India in her novels, plays and screenplays (Knapp 9). In the novel (as in the play), the beggar-woman's story is closely intertwined with the European characters' story, although, as we saw in chapter II, she begins as a character in Peter Morgan's novel, she "escapes" her narrative and enters the other. The chapters alternate between Peter Morgan's narrative and the beggar-woman's, as the line between the two (discourse time and story time) increasingly blurs.⁸⁴

Duras intentionally disorients her reader such that the subject of the narrative voice is confused throughout the text leaving one to wonder who is speaking:

⁸⁴ See Genette for a detailed explanation of discourse time and story time. Gérard Genette. *Nouveau discours du récit*. Editions du Seuil, 1983.

Elle marche, écrit Peter Morgan. Comment ne pas revenir ? Il faut se perdre. Je ne sais pas. Tu apprendras. Je voudrais une indication pour me perdre. Il faut être sans arrière-pensée, se disposer à ne plus reconnaître rien de ce qu'on connaît, diriger ses pas vers le point de l'horizon le plus hostile, sorte de vaste étendue de marécages que mille talus traversent en tous sens on ne voit pas pourquoi. (9)

The phrase begins in the third person with “elle” and then seamlessly slides into the first and then second person. Peter Morgan writes that she walks, and then with no quotation marks or textual indication, the reader is immediately drawn into this text that he is in the act of writing, and into the mind of the beggar-woman. Perhaps. It could equally be a kind of internal musing on the part of the author, Peter Morgan, or Duras, about the process and experience of being and getting lost, a kind of meta-reflection of the author about his/her writing. Duras textually performs the confusion that she indicates in the narrative through her lack of punctuation and lexical norms. The subject matter confuses, just as the language and style confuses. In the narrative within the narrative (the beggar-woman’s story that belongs to Peter Morgan’s novel) the beggar-woman similarly *intentionally* disorients herself, she disrupts the space of the narrative, as she must flee home, exiled for an illegitimate pregnancy, in terrain so familiar to her that she struggles to lose herself in it. She disorients herself to lose herself, signaling a kind of spatial impossibility that mirrors the impossibility of the beggar-woman’s journey as a whole and recalls Ahmed’s words: “Migration could be described as a process of disorientation and reorientation: As bodies ‘move away’ as well as ‘arrive,’ as they reinhabit spaces” (9). The beggar-woman must disorient and reorient herself, physically and symbolically, so that she may achieve her unlikely migration. Just as in Ahmed’s text, I use the “orient” of these terms with intention. The beggar-woman comes to embody all that is “other” in Duras’s text, she incarnates the “Orient” that plays counterpoint to the “Occident” that is the European’s world of Calcutta.

She follows the water, first the lake Tonlé-Sap and then the Stung-Pursat river, both real geographic locations, described accurately in the text as being in what is present-day Cambodia. The Tonlé-Sap represents home, où “on ne se perdait jamais” so she attempts to lose herself by going north toward Siam (Thailand) (13). She walks for days, trying to go north away from her village: “Elle voit le Sud se diluer dans la mer, elle voit le Nord fixe” (12). Yet the geography of the rivers is complex, and she is deceived multiple times as she circles the lake and continues to return home:

On voit ces fleuves, tous groupés en une chevelure, et la tête qui lui les porte est tournée vers le sud. Il faut remonter à la pointe de la chevelure, à sa fin, et, de là, on aura son étalement devant soi, vers le sud, le village natal compris dans le tout. Les buffles trapus, les pierres qui rosissent, parfois il y en a des blocs dans les rizières, ce sont des différences qui ne signifient pas que la direction est mauvaise. Elle croit terminée sa danse autour de son village, son départ était faux, sa première marche était hypocrite, elle se dit : Maintenant, je suis partie pour de bon, j’ai choisi le nord. (13)

The river system flowing into the Tonlé-Sap resembles the multiple strands of a mane of hair, difficult to disentangle, but all flowing from the north. She is once again mistaken, “elle a remonté le Stung Pursat qui prend sa source dans les Cardamones, au sud” (13). She is again disoriented, still in Cambodia, having mistaken north for south. Does she simply mistake her bearings? Or do the author’s words, that the beggar-woman’s departure is “faux” and her first walk “hypocrite,” personify this act of forced fleeing and imbue it with will and agency that belie her status as a victim? The beggar-woman failed because she could not or chose not to become purposefully lost, because home, the waters of the Tonlé Sap, refused her attempt at disorientation, representing a kind of magnetic north from which she could not disengage.

When the beggar-woman appears in Calcutta, it is the reader whom she disorients, as she slides from Peter Morgan’s narrative into the physical space of his city. The chapter

before leaves us with an image of the beggar-woman, heavily pregnant, but fearless and determined: “Ses yeux pleurent mais elle [la mendicante], elle chante à tue-tête un chant enfantin de Battambang” (27). The next chapter begins: “Peter Morgan. Il s’arrête d’écrire” (28). Duras takes the reader directly from the beggar-woman’s story into the “present” of the European’s world in Calcutta. Immediately however, the division between the narratives (the beggar-woman’s narrative in Peter Morgan’s book and Peter Morgan’s “present”) is shattered: “Elle est là, devant la residence de l’ex-vice-consul de France à Lahore. A l’ombre d’un buisson creux, sur le sable, dans son sac encore trempé, sa tête chauve à l’ombre du buisson, elle dort” (28). Perhaps Peter Morgan has simply invented a past for this beggar-woman who he sees in Calcutta, yet the lack of transition that Duras employs between her speakers and the authorial voice could equally suggest that she and her characters inhabit multiple narrative spaces at once, performing the artificiality of reality and realism in her narrative.

Calcutta, a name that no longer exists, is a port city in the Indian State of West Bengal and once served as the capital of India under the British Raj. The name conjures a wealth of meaning as it was both the symbol of colonial oppression and the center of nationalist movements in the 19th century. The port of Bengal, given to the British East India Company by the weakening Mughal ruler Aurangzeb in the late 17th century served as the entry point to power for the British East India company and the establishment of British rule throughout the subcontinent, yet the city simultaneously represents a locus of resistance to these same colonial invaders. The British imposed partition in Bengal and divided the people into two regions, East for Muslims and West for Hindus, in an attempt to suppress dissent in 1905, precipitating the Swadeshi movement in response (*Choices* 19).⁸⁵ Calcutta thus is a name that

⁸⁵ The *Swadeshi* movement was a boycott of British goods called for by the Indian National Congress in response to the partition of Bengal.

evokes aspects of Indian history as disparate as the populations of the subcontinent itself. In Duras's text, the beggar-woman comes to represent colonial resistance in this capital of British hegemony, even if in the story, Duras's characters are French rather than British, the colonial systems being interchangeable in the text despite the vast differences in the British and French approaches to colonization.

When the beggar-woman arrives in Calcutta, the author displaces her from the rural space of her homeland to the urban space of one of India's largest port cities. The beggar-woman, like the hyperbolically violent Vice-Consul that I examined in chapter II, is a caricature of the stereotypes that surround the feminized body of color: she is hyper-fertile: "L'enfant naît vers Oudang... Elle ne jette pas la sœur siamoise dans le Mékong, elle ne la laisse pas sur un chemin de la plaine des Joncs... Les autres enfants qui viendront après cette petite fille, elle [la mendiante] les laissera toujours..." (50). In her article about Duras's *Lover*, Karen Ruddy characterizes the "tropical woman of colour" as being portrayed with "excessive fertility, sexual appetite and poor hygiene," all characteristics embodied by Duras's beggar-woman (86). Yet, when she enters Calcutta, the beggar-woman's story, that of Anne Marie-Stretter and Peter Morgan collide in space and time. Although Peter Morgan's narrative, cited above, has just explained how *la mendiante* has given birth to the child that has caused her exile, when Duras's narrative shifts back to the "present," (in the sense that we are out of the beggar-woman's narrative and back to Calcutta), Morgan explains that the episode of childbirth and the beggar-woman's subsequent selling of the child was told to him by Anne-Marie Stretter:

La vente d'une enfant a été racontée à Peter Morgan par Anne-Marie Stretter. Anne Marie Stretter a assisté cette vente il y a dix-sept ans, vers Savannakhet, Laos. La mendiante, toujours d'après Anne-Marie Stretter, doit parler la langue de Savannakhet. Les dates ne coïncident pas. (70)

Duras adds another layer of doubt to the story. Not only is the reader lost among the multiple layers of the narrative voice (Peter Morgan's, the beggar-woman's and Duras's), but now must evaluate the veracity of Anne-Marie Stretter's account of the story from which Morgan's derived. The reader understands that the beggar-woman's journey is told not second but third hand, mediated by at least three subjects. That "the dates do not coincide" leads us to another assumption of inaccuracy in the work against realist expectations of reliability.

Added to this narrative confusion is the significance of the "vente" itself. In one reading of the story, the beggar-woman gives up her baby to give it a better chance of survival, an understandable if tragic outcome. As the beggar-woman wanders desperately a Cambodian woman advises her that, "on dit que des enfants ont été acceptés par des Blancs" and this "enfant va mourir" (51, 52). The white woman whom the beggar-woman follows, looks out from beneath her "casque colonial" and eventually accepts the beggar-woman's child. The excessive fertility of the beggar-woman becomes exploited as just another colonial resource, at the disposal of the colonial population to take at will. Despite the alleged "voluntary" means by which the beggar-woman gives her child to the white woman, her desperate circumstances (her child might die) make the action less of a choice than a necessity.

The beggar-woman also embodies an unthinkable taboo: a mother who does not want her children. In the earlier passage, when the reader first learns of the beggar-woman's baby's birth, the text implies that she simply abandons her children: "elle les laissera toujours" and Duras plays with this "unnatural" tendency, the rejection of motherhood, to critique colonialism and its imposition of traditional western gender roles onto other cultures. As Mimi Sheller states in her conception of citizenship that resists state power from the bottom up, to become a citizen, following Foucault, "is to become a racialized, gendered and sexed

subject” (26). On the other hand, Sheller considers “counter-performances” of citizenship in which subjects dismantle the power structures by way of “erotic agency” (27). The beggar-woman inhabits a kind of taboo and disturbing sexual space: she is at times portrayed as a victim and helpless, but at other times she incarnates a monstrous and devouring sexual voracity, as evident at the end of the novel, where she is left laughing like a crazy person with a mouth full of raw fish.⁸⁶ Her name, or lack thereof, further relegates the beggar-woman to the status of trope, a “trope-ical” incarnation of colonial trauma and madness.

Duras never names the beggar-woman. She is *la mendiante* from beginning to end, her identity obscured. Duras’s European characters do possess names, immediately asking us to evaluate the relative belonging that her characters experience. Does Duras silence the beggar-woman, stripping her of identity by refusing to give her a first and last name? If we look at Duras’s larger system of naming, one that employs ambiguous names, anagrams and abbreviations, then the choice of the beggar-woman’s name or lack thereof becomes key to understanding the text. According to Madeleine Borgomano (cited in Sharon Willis), the figure of the mendiante is the “generative cell” that anchors the *Cycle Indien* (25). In Willis’s analysis, the beggar-woman exemplifies the “mother-daughter dyad” as well as Duras’s literary strategy of endless repetition and replication (25). In a decolonial reading of Duras, the beggar-woman, nameless except for her name that defines her activity, comes to represent the colonial subconscious that haunts the European colonizers.

Fanon wrote contemporaneously with Duras⁸⁷ (at least until his death in 1961), and she echoes, perhaps unintentionally, his anticolonial writing and condemnation of the Algerian War in her own condemnation of the French atrocities during the war in Indochina. Fanon’s writing on the subconscious of the colonized and colonizer in *Les Damnés de la*

⁸⁶ See chapter II

⁸⁷ Given Duras’s anticolonial beliefs with respect to Indochina, it would be possible and even likely that she had read or was at least familiar with Fanon’s work. A rapprochement Fanon/Duras is thought provoking and deserves further research to examine the two contemporaries’ intellectual connections.

terre helps us to understand the power of the *mendiant*e figure and her madness in Duras's text: "L'impérialisme, qui aujourd'hui se bat contre une authentique libération des hommes, abandonne çà et là des germes de pourriture qu'il nous faut implacablement détecter et extirper de nos terres et de nos cerveaux" (240). Fanon goes on to explain that he will examine the psychiatric disorders resulting from the Algerian War of Independence but also states that it is not just war, but colonization itself that destroys the psyche: "La vérité est que la colonisation, dans son essence, se présentait déjà comme une grande pourvoyeuse des hôpitaux psychiatriques" (240). If colonization leads to the psychiatric hospital, then Duras articulates colonial madness, incarnated by the beggar-woman but also evident in her effect on the European characters, as an indictment against the system of colonization. The beggar-woman cannot be named individually because her identity and her madness are functions of the entirety of the colonial system, in Indochina, in Algeria, in India and elsewhere. She may be the "generative cell" of the *Cycle Indien* narrative cycle, but she is also recurring symbol of resistance. The mental illness that colonization wreaks on its subjects, settlers and the colonized, throughout the cycle makes her unproductive in the capitalist system of labor exploitation.

Duplication and Dichotomy in *Tropique de la violence*

In Appanah's novel, the first name that I explore is not a toponym in the traditional sense but the title of the novel, *Tropique de la violence*. Although the title does not name a geographical location, it functions as a toponym because it names an imagined place—much like the "non-place" of the term utopia. The novel's title invokes the word "tropic" as a global line of latitude, like the Tropic of Cancer, that divides the globe horizontally. The Equator divides the world into hemispheres, like the metaphoric Global North and South, and like the artificial borders of colonization and then arbitrary partitions of decolonization. Like

the volunteers who wish to go to regions where “c’est chaud” but also where “les tempêtes succèdent aux guerres,” the title also evokes more obliquely the “tropics” as a region, conjuring both the utopian island whose inhabitants luxuriate in the tropical sunshine and the violence of underdevelopment, poverty and war (Appanah *Tropique*, 112). As Jean Anderson argues, the postcard beaches of the tropics are often represented as places of unreality, or as an “*ailleurs* that is a-geographical in its sameness” (5). She further claims that Appanah upends this claim by representing the beach as a “contested space” (5).¹⁰ This condition of being “a-geographical” or a place of unreality is exactly the fantasy of postcolonial utopia, or non-place. In this multicultural utopia, métissage is implicit because the multicultural space, by definition, involves the mixing of races. Métissage recalls, following Agnani, Diderot’s “consensual colonialism” that relied on interbreeding between the races as a more humane colonization. Thus the “tropic” of *Tropique de la violence* is an in-between space of contention—geographically, politically and racially.

Appanah’s novel, as the title suggests, is filled with images that conjure the utopian “tropic,” such as Olivier’s garden discussed in my introduction and the beach at Kani Keli examined in chapter II. But the alleged utopian paradises are conversely informed by violence. By this I mean that the “tropic” and “violence” are not opposing terms but contingent, in that violence is already implied in the word “tropic” due to the history of the violent colonization of the regions that we now refer to as the tropics, including in the form of rape. This dichotomy and duality are perhaps best exemplified within works like *L’Eloge de la créolité*. Although I argue that *L’Eloge* reiterates the trope of the creole utopian island, it nonetheless explicitly acknowledges the violence that the colonial encounter produced and that resulted in créolité—thus the aestheticized créolité exists in tandem with the violence of encounter.

Within the term *créolité* already exists the duality between the productive power of racial and cultural intermixing and the implied rape that originally produced this *métissage*. The authors define *créolité* to include both the regional connections of the people of the Caribbean, and the linguistic, racial and ethnic connections which unite the islands of the Indian Ocean with the Caribbean. Thus for Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, *créolité* is two-fold:

Nous, Antillais créoles, sommes donc porteurs d'une double solidarité : -d'une solidarité antillaise (géopolitique) avec tous les peuples de notre Archipel, quelles que soient nos différences culturelles : notre Antillanité ; -d'une solidarité créole avec tous les peuples africains, mascarins, asiatiques qui relèvent des mêmes affinités anthropologiques que nous : notre *créolité*. (33)

The texts that I examine come from geographically diverse regions that are united by a geopolitical “solidarité créole.” *L'Éloge* proposes further definitions of *créolité* that emphasize it as a “braid of histories”—braiding and weaving being two manners of expressing cultural mixing that we might oppose to the more violent process of colonization that entailed rape and genocide (88). *Créolité* proclaims the peoples of the Caribbean to be “at once Europe, Africa... enriched by Asian contributions...Levantine, Indians, as well as pre-Columbian Americans (88). These individual elements of heritage do not fuse into a homogenous whole, but remain “diffracted, but recomposed” (88). *Créolité* is a “kaleidoscopic totality,” as illustrated in the Creole garden “that does not resist the different forms of yams which inhabit it” (89). Rather than coming together to produce an idealized, new species of yam, the different types coexist within a sustainable ecosystem that thrives from its diversity. The diversity of the Creole garden exemplifies the tension of the duality between the particular and the universal within *créolité*. However, this garden cannot exist without the violence that brought these multiple species of yams into contact with each other.

As Glissant reminds us in *Le Discours antillais*, the history of the Antilles cannot be constructed in a linear, continuous form like the history of the West because of the ruptures and discontinuities caused by slavery: “Notre conscience historique ne pouvait pas ‘sédimenter’, si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue, comme chez les peuples qui ont engendré une philosophie souvent totalitaire de l’histoire, les peuples européens, mais s’agrégeait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l’explosion” (223). He continues to say that this lack of universal history has created a “non-histoire” for the peoples of the French Caribbean and this “nonhistory” has prevented the creation of a collective, Caribbean history (224). Like the peoples of the Caribbean, those of the Indian Ocean experienced similar “shock and negation” and “contraction and explosion” due to the processes of slavery and indentured labor, and in these tropical regions, the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, violence is inextricable from the more idealized “kaleidoscopic totality” of the creole garden. Thus the phrase “tropicque de la violence” is not at all contradictory or paradoxical, but an illustration of the inherent duality of these regions’ histories and present-day experiences.⁸⁸

The title gestures toward “tropicque” as a region, and more concretely at the region found between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn—between 23.5 degrees north and 23.5 degrees south. The tropics tend to be conceptualized as falling within the global South, even if they are not physically found in the southern hemisphere. The global North and South do not fall neatly on either side of precise latitudinal lines, nor are these regions easily identifiable in concrete, physical and geographic terms any more than one could *see* or *touch*

⁸⁸ Although the Indian Ocean experienced and dealt with slavery in a much different fashion than the Caribbean experience of the transatlantic slave trade, Glissant’s explanation of non-histoire still helps to make sense of the present-day inequities in Appanah’s representation of Mayotte. See Lionnet’s explanation of Mauritius’s creole society and the differences between creole societies in the Indian Ocean versus the Caribbean (*Known and Uncertain* 222).

the Tropic of Cancer or equator. Rather, the tropic as a metaphor evokes the division between the spaces that are continually exploited and extracted from (the global South) and those that perform this exploitation and extraction (the global North). These latitudinal lines are both geographic points of reference, how we define absolute location, and imaginary divisions—they are both real and completely artificial.

The title of Appanah's work establishes the novel in space. The reader understands where the story takes place, the precise geographical terms of absolute location and relative location, as defined by the power dynamics and redrawn borders of postcolonial independence. The fracturing of ancestral lands and the redrawing of maps defined the decades following the end of formal colonialism and the author uses names to conjure present-day geopolitical situations to inform a reader who may not be familiar with the Indian Ocean, but who understands the contemporary crises that get media attention in the West and as such she uses "Gaza"⁸⁹ to describe an extremely violent ghetto on the island of Mayotte. The name evokes the creation of Israel and the displacement of the Palestinian people and thus draws a parallel between migrants and refugees from around the world who are the product of the unjust and often arbitrary borders created by colonization and the partitions that accompanied decolonization. The name also alludes to the history of Jewish settlement and displacement and makes implicit reference to the deportation and resettlement of Jews in camps on the island of Mauritius during WWII (Lionnet 114).⁹⁰ In Appanah's novel, Gaza functions as a signifier for both *one* specific violent neighborhood in Mayotte populated by

⁸⁹In addition to the Gaza of the Middle East, Appanah's Gaza could also refer the African Empire of Gaza. See Malyn Newitt *A Short History of Mozambique*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁹⁰ Françoise Lionnet. "'Dire Exactement': Remembering the Interwoven Lives of Jewish Deportees and Coolie Descendants in 1940s Mauritius." *Yale French Studies*, vol. 118-119, no. 118/119, 2010, pp. 111–35.

sans papiers and for *any* violent region in the global South that is characterized by extreme poverty and precarity.

In addition to its title that is both a toponym and a trope, Appanah's text exploits the significance of the toponym "Gaza" to comment on the social, humanitarian and international crises that Mayotte faces (Roget 42). Gaza is the nickname for the neighborhood in which the *clandestins*, mostly illegal immigrants from the Grand Comoros and Anjouan, live. The policeman Olivier describes Gaza in detail to the reader:

Gaza c'est un bidonville, c'est un ghetto, un dépôt, un gouffre, une favela, c'est un immense camp de clandestins à ciel ouvert, c'est une énorme poubelle fumante que l'on voit de loin. Gaza c'est un no man's land violent où les bandes de gamins shootés au chimique font la loi. Gaza c'est Cape Town, c'est Calcutta, c'est Rio. Gaza c'est Mayotte, Gaza c'est la France. (51)

This portrait of Mayotte evokes certain aspects of the idealized vision of creole solidarity put forth in *L'Éloge* in that the juxtaposition of the Gaza of Mayotte with other formerly colonized cities in India, Brazil, South Africa, France and Palestine suggests the same creole solidarity that *L'Éloge* proposes among Caribbean, African, Mascarin, Levantine and Asian peoples (88, 94). The solidarity in Appanah's novel is a solidarity born of misery and violence as well as the solidarity of creative allegiance and aesthetic production. This portrait of Gaza, an enormous trash heap inhabited by drug users suggests the antithesis of the creole garden. In her book *Sewing Empire* (2005),⁹¹ Jill Casid complicates Homi Bhabha's conception of hybridity, a conception that presumes that hybridization (or creolization or tropicalization) subverts the colonial power structure, by suggesting that hybridization cannot

⁹¹ Jill H. Casid. *Sewing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*. UP of Minnesota, 2005.

be considered as separate from its roots in colonial discourses about botany and race (1). She writes:

If one looks at the British and French colonial plantation systems of the Caribbean in the eighteenth century and the relandscapings of the British West Indies and the French Antilles effected through material transplantation of plants, enslaved African people, and machines, the production of hybridization stands out, rather, as a technique for symbolic, material and geopolitical colonization (1).

In Casid's work, the hybridization of peoples and plants comes to signify empire creation rather than a subversive strategy that resists colonization. Colonial powers appropriated indigenous farming methods, replaced existing crops, and adapted and hybridized to facilitate resource extraction and maximum yield. Similarly, in the Gaza of Appanah's novel, the "creole solidarity" of the creole garden gives way to conditions of economic exploitation that make multicultural coexistence a fantasy of utopia. Not only is this camp, named for one of the most war-torn regions in the world, a ghetto and a no man's land, but its solidarity with the other cities named in Olivier's description, is a solidarity that is based on exploitation and economic dependence.

However, Gaza was not always as it is in the present of the novel. In Bruce's voice, we learn that Gaza was once a "forêt verte" with which the Mahorais people lived in harmony (80). When Bruce was young, he would go to the once verdant forest, now the rotting, decaying, overpopulated and overflowing neighborhood of Gaza, with his family, and his father would lecture him about how nature in the forest was self-sustaining. There was no need to cut down dead trees because the tree would die in place and its ashes would sustain the forest (82). However, when the *clandestins* began arriving, they began building houses "n'importe où" and they disregarded the Mahorais laws that governed where to settle and where to gather water (83). Bruce portrays the *clandestins* as outsiders that defile what was

once pristine forest and as newcomers not welcomed by an earlier generation of migrants who now consider themselves the rightful inhabitants.

Bruce's description of Gaza's destruction alludes to the economic and political forces that drive migrants to French Mayotte to attain a French passport which would grant them legitimacy—would make them “real” citizens— and an arguably better life. But what they find is disdain and rejection and they settle in open-air camps as their only recourse. Instead of the creole garden of *L'Éloge* that celebrates the garden's multiplicity and fecundity, Gaza seems to illustrate the process in reverse—nature that cannot accommodate its newest arrivals. Gaza (in Mayotte) is the result of the violent coming together of cultures—the same “*point d'intrication*” that Glissant signals as the moment that creolization begins.⁹²

Creolization is then intimately linked to the question of diaspora and the competition between different diasporic waves, earlier waves often claiming a right of precedence and right to ownership that they then deny to later migrant waves, a symptom of the legacy of colonization that stripped these formerly colonized regions of their wealth and used divide and conquer strategies to cement colonial authority.

In their book, *The Creolization of Theory*, Lionnet and Shih put forth a conception of creolization that is not aestheticized or idealized, but rather a theoretical framework that is open and in constant flux. Creolization does not seek to reify the utopian island, but to acknowledge the multiple threads that weave together, often violently and in unequal terms, today's multiculturalism. Lionnet and Shih posit that we need to creolize theory because theory has “the transformative potential...to change the form of our entanglement with the world” (26). Similarly, the Gaza that appears in Appanah's novel, as a toponym and a trope,⁹³

⁹² Glissant specifies that the Palestinian compulsion to return is an immediate conflict and therefore different than the “retour” sought by the African diaspora displaced by the Transatlantic slave trade. The Gaza of the Middle East then, represents a different type of diasporic identity and conception of “le retour” than the Gaza in Mayotte. See *Le Discours antillais* 44.

⁹³ See Aravamudan

has the potential to change the reader's "entanglement" with the continuing global mechanisms that displace peoples across the regions of the global South.

The police officer Olivier makes these mechanisms of displacement explicit to the reader. He tells us that this violence in Mayotte has occurred "depuis le temps," and that despite the missions, the political speeches, the campaigns, the laws and the promises, the violence continues (51). He discusses the same *clandestins* that Bruce describes, and in Olivier's words, these migrants are the legacy of humanity's history of forced migration: "C'est l'histoire de ces êtres humains qui se retrouvent sur ces bateaux et on leur a donné de ces noms à ces gens-là, depuis la nuit des temps : esclaves, engagés, pestiférés, bagnards, rapatriés, Juifs, boat people, réfugiés, sans-papiers, clandestins" (53). Olivier insists on the *names* that these migrants are given (or they/we have given), "slaves, indentured servants, plague-ridden, convicts, repatriates, Jews, boat people, refugees, without papers and clandestine," all of which contain varying degrees of indictment. The naming of these migrants indicates the historical moment in which the migration occurred, from enslaved peoples to a time when the infectious ill were sent away to colonies, to the transportation of convicts to the modern migration crisis. The world, the privileged and the housed, create *names* for these migrants as a way to project a certain identity onto them. The *clandestins* of Mayotte are just another group in a long line of persecuted peoples that have fled or been forced to flee since "la nuit des temps."

The toponym Gaza contains within it the dichotomy and duality that juxtaposes the Jews with the Palestinians yet articulates both as persecuted peoples. Moïse, the main character of Appanah's novel shares a name with the famous prophet (sacred to all Abrahamic religions, but especially significant for Jews), and Moïse falls victim to the violence of Gaza. The Jews in Olivier's example are emblematic of a people who have been forced to flee since the beginning of time, victims of oppression and perhaps the most

quintessentially migratory of peoples. Gaza has a certain mythic appeal as a geopolitical conflict. As David Harvey explains in his exploration of the importance of space in the postmodern world, “Geopolitical conflicts invariable imply a certain aestheticization of politics in which appeal to the mythology of place and person has a strong role to play” (209). Gaza, home to both Jewish and Palestinian people, an aestheticized representation and *re-*placement in Appanah’s work of fiction, raises a kind of mythic contradiction: a proposed utopia—the establishment of a Jewish homeland after the Holocaust—and the resulting reality of violence and displacement between Jews and Palestinians that defines the lived conditions of Gaza today. Appanah’s Gaza deploys an echo of the same mythology to iterate the violent Mayotte ghetto.

Sex-work in the Space of the Scared: Bénarès dédoublé

In *Bénarès* by Pyamootoo, the eponymous city comes up in a conversation between three young men from the economically depressed Indo-Mauritian community of Bénarès, Mauritius and the two female sex-workers whom they “purchase” for an evening. One of the women, Mina, is unaware that another Bénarès exists outside of Mauritius, and the narrator invents a fantastic and fictional journey in which he visits the Indian Benares. During the car ride to the concrete Bénarès, the fictive trip to Benares creates a space of fantasy that provides a respite from the daily precarious economic realities that the women and men face in the capital city of Port-Louis and depressed country town of Bénarès. The Mauritian town of Bénarès suffered economic disaster when the town’s sugar mill closed thirty years ago. Mauritian dependence on the sugar industry and the sugar industry’s later failure were both results of first colonialist and then neocolonialist exploitative economic practices.

In Pyamootoo’s novel, the toponym Bénarès evokes duality and dichotomy as sex-work exists side by side with the sacred space of Benares. In the novel *Bénarès*, three young

Indo-Mauritian men from the same-named town use unexpected gambling winnings to purchase sex-workers in the capital city of Port Louis—a city seven hours away from Bénarès by car (10). Unlike the city of pilgrimage in India, the Bénarès of Mauritius is a small village that was devastated by the closure of the sugar mill thirty years earlier—a closure which put the entire village out of work and which I will explore further in chapter IV. Mayi, Jimi and the narrator continue to live in this village where there were once many inhabitants, but where now only approximately two hundred remain (42). Sugarcane, its cultivation, its processing and its decline create the economic setting of this novel about sex-work, poverty and unemployment. During the seven-hour car ride from Port-Louis to Bénarès, two female sex-workers and three young men create a space that is “unhomely,” and in which the imagined space of the Indian Bénarès comes to represent an escape, a kind of in-between space, from the precarity of the characters’ daily lived experience in the Mauritian Bénarès. According to Bhabha, “unhomeliness...is a condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (9). It is not the “fetishizing” and “celebratory romance of the past” but a place in which “the borders of home and world become confused” (9).⁹⁴ The Bénarès of India is not simply a romanticized location of idealism, but a displacement of space and time, that realigns the space of one transhistoric site onto another.

In the Mauritian Bénarès, the modern-day economic situation that these characters face is the legacy of the colonial histories that brought this island into being. The tiny island of Mauritius, situated in the Indian Ocean five hundred miles off the coast of Madagascar, first appeared on Arab charts in the 8th century and from 1500-1710, it was used subsequently by Portuguese and Dutch traders as a staging area (Simmons 2).⁹⁵ The French arrived on the island in 1710 and named the island *Ile de France*. The British then arrived in

⁹⁴ Homi K Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

⁹⁵ Adele Smith Simmons. *Modern Mauritius: The Politics of Decolonization*. Indiana UP, 1982.

1810 and proclaimed the island Mauritius (202). First the French, and then the British, enslaved people from the eastern coast of Africa to work the sugar plantations, and in the early nineteenth century, the first Indian immigrants began arriving as indentured servants (202). After struggling for its autonomy since the beginning of the twentieth century, Mauritius declared its independence in 1968 (202).

The island was uninhabited before its European settlement, and thus became a nation of immigrants with no indigenous population. The island owes part of its existence to the sugar industry that required first enslaved peoples and then indentured servants to work the plantations run by European colonists. Because of its ethnic diversity, Mauritius is often idealistically called the “Creole Island”—another iteration of the utopian island—but this name can obfuscate the social and economic disparities that exist between different ethnic groups. In her history of Mauritius, Megan Vaughn discusses the term “Creole” and its multiplicity of meaning in the Mauritian context. She defines “Creole” primarily as a label of exclusion: “The Creoles in contemporary Mauritian terms are those who are *not*: they are neither Hindus nor Muslims nor Tamils nor Chinese nor “whites” of either the Franco or Anglo variety” (3). She argues that rather than constituting a Mauritian identity that acknowledges the island’s diverse genealogy of national identity, “Creole” in the Mauritian context defines “those that look most African in their features” (2).

Lionnet complicates the narrative of Mauritius as the “Creole Island” by positing that although Mauritius exhibits a highly successful form of “multiculturalism” brought about by the welfare policies of the 1970s and 1980s that aided the poorest and most marginalized groups, because of the turn toward neoliberalism and decline of the welfare state since the 1990s, one should be cautious of putting forth an overly romanticized view of “exotic and harmonious coexistence” on the island (*The Known and Uncertain* 96-7). She also points to

the “new generation” of Mauritian writers, one of whom is Pyamootoo, who use literature to highlight the increasing inequality of Mauritian society. She writes:

These writers focus on the instances of economic, social and gendered violence that are part of the quotidian experiences of the poorest citizens, those who are the first victims of government-promoted economic restructuring and globalization policies that do not result in the same persistent defense of equality as did measures from the first postcolonial regime. (98)

Lionnet further highlights the fact that Mauritius, like India, abandoned many of its post-independence, socialist policies. Its more recent moves toward neoliberal economic policy have resulted in a resurgence of inequality. Pyamootoo’s text describes these stark economic disparities and social inequalities in his novel *Bénarès*.

The three main characters in Pyamootoo’s novel are the descendants of indentured servants, or “coolies,” once prosperous but now facing unemployment and poverty. The characters, the narrator Nad, Mayi and Jimi, are Indo-Mauritian, but they do not conform to the narrative of Indo-Mauritian success, or to the fiction of romanticized and successful multiculturalism. For example, Mehta draws our attention to the scene in which Jimi explains how his previous work at the sugar mill and the behavior of its white owners caused him to think negatively about all whites: “...et pourtant les propriétaires n’étaient pas gentils avec nous...avant que je ne rencontre des touristes, je croyais que les blancs tous sont méchants” (Mehta 51, Pyamootoo 48). Rather than experiencing the miracles of post-independence economic success, these “coolie” descendants find unemployment and bitterness.

As in Appanah’s text, the utopian island recurs throughout Pyamootoo’s text only to be immediately modified by an inverted mirror of poverty, unemployment or misery. Perhaps the most striking opposition occurs between the Benares of India and the Bénarès of Mauritius. The toponym, “Benares,” not only serves as the title of the novel and as the

concrete geographical town of Bénarès, Mauritius, but also creates a space of fantasy in which the iconic and holy city of India becomes briefly attainable for the characters in the car through Nad's storytelling. This physical space of the car's interior opens an imagined geography of the Indian Bénarès, yet this fantasy paradoxically destroys the other, guiding fantasy that drove these young men to seek out sex-workers. In the space of the car, the women become real, one with a child of her own and the other a child herself, immediately negating the unreality and impersonality of the sex-work transaction.

The language of the conversations between the characters is matter of fact, simple and without flourish but the author's descriptions of the character's movements, affect and the space in which they exist is elaborate and meandering. The recurring image of smoking, the sensuality of the oral action and the lazy, movement of smoke curling upward, are aesthetic, narrative motifs that bring the reader into the space of the novel. We smell the smoke, see the haze forming in the car and imagine the taste of the cigarettes that are smoked as the character's conversations progress. The narrator focuses on the faces, lips, eyes and cheeks, of the characters as they speak, the sensuality in the story comes through the physical descriptions and interpersonal dialogue rather than through any sexual act. Nad recounts how he was on the verge of suggesting that Jimi take a break from driving, heavy fatigue being one of many sensorial evocations in the novel:

Sur le point de lui [Jimi] dire qu'il pouvait s'arrêter, se reposer, parce qu'il ne cessait de bâiller et de soupirer, j'ai fermé la bouche et je me suis retourné. Mayi regardait à travers la vitre dans l'obscurité. Des gouttes de sueur perlaient sur ses joues creuses et dans ses yeux brillait quelque chose comme du contentement, de l'amusement. Zelda penchait la tête de côté, souriait et écoutait Mina qui lui parlait à mi-voix. Je ne savais pas de quoi elle parlait, sa voix n'était que bourdonnement délicat, dénué de sens. Puis

elle s'est tue, et quand s'est blottie contre Mayi, Zelda a allumé une cigarette et a regardé le champ où broutait un troupeau indistinct. (63)

Jimi's fatigue is evident in his yawns and sighs, actions that highlight the movement of the mouth, and Nad stifles his suggestion by closing his own mouth. For Mayi, the sweat that beads on his skin emphasizes his sensorial experience of warmth while his eyes reflect a feeling of something between amusement and contentment. After searching and searching, the characters have discovered a space of equilibrium in the car, a place in which they can relax to a certain extent. Even Mina and Zelda, who are working and nervous about the long drive to Bénarès, seem to let their guards down, smiling, smoking and moving closer to the others.

For Nad, the individual words spoken are lost in the quiet, rhythmic humming of sound, comforting but without differentiation. Darkness surrounds the car, framing the illuminated space inside, with only the vague shape of a herd of animals vaguely discernable outside. The narrative voice is elaborate, articulate and poetic, the descriptions evoking the senses, while the dialogue resists stylistic flourishes, remaining simple and declarative, sometimes terse: "Ça te ferait quoi d'habiter un endroit et de savoir qu'un autre pays porte le même nom, qui se trouve dans un autre pays ?" Nad asks Zelda and she responds, removing a cigarette from her mouth, "Peut-être que ça me ferait voyager" (63).

From here Nad begins his tale of a fantasy voyage to the Indian Bénarès, a city of which Mina and Zelda had never heard. According to the Indian Ocean scholar, Srilata Ravi, "Banaras can be read as a symbolic locus of transoceanic circulations and connections at the core of the thousands of stories that make up the Indian Ocean" (2). Ravi positions the use of Banaras as a symbol of "geographic dislocations" in Pyamootoo's work. The author's use of the holy site evokes the movement of diaspora, the call to an elusive and imaginary home, and Nad's story becomes just one of countless Bénarès stories to circulate in this

“transoceanic” space. The imaginary Bénarès of India fills the space of the car, and Mina and Zelda are incredulous that such a city could exist as a double for the economically depressed town to which they are bound.

Nad explains that no matter what crime someone may have committed in life, if this person dies in Benares, they will reach paradise:

Et ça fait des siècles que c'est comme ça, qu'ils sont nombreux à s'y rendre, dès qu'ils éprouvent les prémices de la mort. Ils abandonnent leurs maisons et leurs familles et ils font parfois un voyage long et pénible, rien que pour mourir à Bénarès, pour être sûrs d'aller au paradis. (65)

This passage establishes a double diaspora. One diaspora, happening in India as pilgrims flock to Bénarès, mirrors the previous diaspora that brought Indo-Mauritians to the island in the hopes of finding a different kind of utopia. The indentured laborers that crossed the Kala Pani, losing caste, home and family, were lured into the journey under the pretense of escaping the hardships they had faced in India and with the hope of finding economic success. This promise of future paradise, or utopia, sets up another duality between the promise of an idealized future and the lived realities of characters' present. Zelda, one of the sex-workers remarks on the cruelty and injustice of this promised future paradise that is available for all who can get to Benares, yet who may do nothing in this life to deserve reward, and she continues to ask questions about Nad's fictitious voyage to India (65).

Despite having made up his travels, Zelda and Nad bond through this imaginary description of Bénarès' twin city in India, and at the end of the conversation, they are like old friends: “Nous étions comme deux amis qui s'étaient retrouvés après une longue séparation, deux voyageurs qui venaient d'échanger quelques-unes de leurs errances, quelques souvenirs sur leur route nocturne” (70). In the last scene of the novel, the characters arrive at their destination with Jimi exclaiming, “Bénarès!” (90). The characters finally arrive at their

intended destination, but it is the journey matters, in which the sex-worker Zelda and the unemployed Nad, transform briefly from client and customer into two travelers who seek redemption and fantasy. The imagined Indian holy city will wash away both life's sins and the economic precarity of modern-day Mauritius. In the holy city's namesake, the Mauritian Bénarès, the fantasy of the female sex-worker, a body that can be accessed with a financial transaction, promises temporary escape from the same dire economic circumstances. At Bénarès, the divergent, and perhaps inextricably linked, worlds of the sacred and sex-work converge, destabilizing both and ultimately upending the male-gaze that seemed to center the novel.

Profaning the Places of Pilgrimage in *Indian Tango*

In *Indian Tango*, Devi desacralizes the holy site of Bénarès via female sexuality and the consummation of a queer relationship. In Devi's novel Kashi signifies Bénarès (another name for Varanasi/Benaras), yet at the beginning of the novel, the site symbolizes the *foreclosure* of the protagonist Subhadra's female sexuality. For Subhadra, Kashi represents the patriarchal domination of the Hindu nationalist politics supported by her husband and his family. In 1991, India opened its mixed, "quasi-socialist" economy, first implemented by Nehru after independence, and the country began privatizing much of its industry, allowing foreign investment, and relaxing trade restrictions (Jaffrelot 124).⁹⁶ This move toward neoliberalism resulted in the economic boom that produced Indian millionaires, but it left half of the country in abject poverty, which Lionnet echoes in her indictment of modern Mauritian political economy. Furthermore, the turn in mainstream Indian politics toward right-wing Hindu nationalism occurred contemporaneously with the rise of these neoliberal policies.

⁹⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot. "India." *Pathways to Power: The Domestic Politics of South Asia*. Eds. Arjun Guneratne and Anita M. Weiss. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 105-168.

Devi's novel critiques both the traditional patriarchy of Hinduism and the neoliberal economic policies that India has increasingly adopted since it opened its markets.⁹⁷ Thus in Devi's text, two narratives, one political and one personal, converge at Kashi.

Indian Tango plays with the religious and cultural significance of the toponym of Benares/Varanasi in the novel. Devi's novel recounts both the life of Subhadra, a traditional Indian wife and mother, and an anonymous, ungendered and unnamed suitor who follows her throughout Delhi. However, *Indian Tango* is also the quasi-autobiographical story of the writer/author (the suitor) writing the story of her "subject" (Subhadra). The protagonist Subhadra, both meets her lesbian and white lover for an affair and realizes her own potential as a woman/writer under the shadow of the metaphoric temple at Kashi (another name for the sacred site)—thus subverting both the patriarchy of Hinduism that would seek to foreclose Subhadra's sexuality after menopause, and more implicitly, the economic and social policies, supported by her husband, that were tied to the B.J.P, right-wing Hindu nationalist party that campaigned against the "foreigner," Sonia Gandhi in the 2004 elections.⁹⁸ Subhadra, as a high-caste Hindu, feels bound by certain rules and regulations that dictate her manner of devotion and comportment, and throughout the course of the novel, the reader observes how she increasingly defies these strictures.

The Hindu caste system, although technically illegal, still functions to keep low or no-caste groups in positions of economic dependence. The caste system dictates occupation as well as status within Hinduism, and certain castes traditionally perform certain professions. For example, the Brahmans were historically priests, the Kshatriyas princes and warriors, the

⁹⁷ For a current critique Prime Minister Narehdra Modi, his BJP party and Hindu nationalism see Arundhati Roy's article, "Modi's Star is Falling." <https://thewire.in/politics/full-text-narendra-modis-star-is-falling-arundhati-roy>

⁹⁸ The B.J.P. party is currently in power in India, with its leader Narehdra Modi easily winning reelection in 2019.

Vaishyas merchants and the Shudras laborers (Tejani 42-3).⁹⁹ These divisions were not always clear cut, and there was always crossover between castes and professions. Beneath the Shudras were the untouchables (now called Dalits), who were considered to have no caste and were consigned to the “lowest” forms of labor. As bearers of no caste, the untouchables were considered to be less than human and were pariahs—literally not to be touched.

Although the Hindu caste system predates the British colonization of India, under the British Raj, the caste system was codified and made explicit in ways it previously had not been.

Through systemized census taking that classified Hindu and Muslim as well as caste and sub-caste, the cooptation of elites like princes and landowners through patronage, and the creation of a new bureaucracy filled mostly by upper-caste Hindus, the British colonial administration solidified caste and religious differences that had previously been more fluid (Tejani 43-4).

In traditional Hinduism, caste is fixed for life—a person is born into a certain *varna* and *jati* (caste and sub-caste) and she dies belonging to these same categories. The only way to access a higher caste is through living a virtuous life and thus having good enough karma to be born again in the next life into a higher caste. Class of course is not fixed in the same way. A low-caste Hindu could theoretically become rich but could never transcend his caste. In fact, since the implementation of quotas, Dalits and lower castes have increasingly become more represented in universities and politics (Jaffrelot 162-3). However, higher castes in Indian society still tend to have correspondingly higher degrees of access to wealth. Furthermore, rather than being a pre-capitalist system of hierarchy that belongs to the pre-modern world, the Hindu caste system continues to function within and support the neo-liberalism of late capitalism.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Shabnum Tejani. “The Colonial Legacy.” *Pathways to Power: The Domestic Politics of South Asia*. Eds. Arjun Guneratne and Anita M. Weiss. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 21-104.

¹⁰⁰ Jaffrelot compares the four *varnas* to the “estates of prerevolutionary France” (160).

Set in 2004, Devi's novel illuminates the pernicious hold that the Hindu caste system continues to retain on modern India. For example, Subhadra lives a traditional life and conforms to the rules of caste and class that her husband and domineering mother-in-law subscribe to; however, she longs to transgress the rigidity of Hinduism—not just its caste system, but its obligatory pilgrimage to Kashi. Kashi is one of the names for the city sacred to Hindus on the Ganges River, and this pilgrimage to Kashi is more than just a gesture of devotion but represents the renunciation of “la vie matérielle” (70). In *Indian Tango*, Kashi represents the foreclosure that patriarchal Hindu society imposes on women who enter menopause, as if the end of childbearing years represents the end of “womanhood.” Subha's mother-in-law, Mataji suggests that the pilgrimage marks the time in Subha's life in which she must “préparer le *Samadhi* et d'apprêter à partir” (70).

Subha feels alienated from Mataji and from Jugdish, her husband, and she draws a parallel between her feelings of isolation and those of Sonia Gandhi. The novel takes place in 2004, when Sonia Gandhi is head of the Congress party and is elected Prime Minister. She is an Italian woman, and as such an outsider to Indian politics except by virtue of her famous last name.¹⁰¹ She married into the dynasty of Nehru, Indira and Rajiv, but she remains an outsider due to her heritage and race. Sonia Gandhi's status as an outsider mirrors Subha's own feelings:

Et pourtant, quelque chose chez Sonia, qui lui semble si indienne dans son sari pâle, attire et reconforte Subha. Une impression peut-être erronée de quelqu'un d'entier...Chaque femme n'est-elle pas étrangère à la famille de son mari, venue de

¹⁰¹ Rajiv Gandhi, son of Indira Gandhi, married outside of caste and religion when he married Sonia Maino. Indira Gandhi was India's first female prime minister and the granddaughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the famous nationalist and India's first prime minister. Sonia remains the president of India's Congress party and continues to hold office. There is no familial relation to Mohandas (Mahatma Gandhi), but Nehru and Gandhi were close allies in the fight for Indian independence.

l'extérieur, acceptée le plus souvent à contrecœur et avec résignation, comme si elle ne serait jamais tout à fait digne d'en faire partie ?

Subha has always felt apart from her mother-in-law and her family, and in Sonia Gandhi she sees a woman to whom she can relate. Despite her husband's dismissal of her politics and his own belief in the Hindu nationalist BJP, Subha secretly wishes for Sonia's success—as if she can reaffirm her own belonging, even her own existence, if India accepts Sonia as its leader.

Secretly supporting Sonia Gandhi's political campaign is an act of defiance for Subhadra that grants her autonomy from the oppression of her husband and mother-in-law. She also finds release from the strictures that seem to govern her life through music, dance and her sensorial responses to both, as the reader discovers in a scene in Subhadra's Delhi apartment. One afternoon, Subha is home with her mother-in-law and husband when Mataji again broaches to subject of the pilgrimage to Kashi. Subha suffers under the stare and the expectations of her mother-in-law: "Le regard de Mataji, lui, l'a déjà poignardée en mille endroits" (Devi 72). Finally, Mataji and Jugdish leave Subha alone and she begins to fantasize about her encounter with this mysterious stranger, the still unnamed and ungendered suitor. She thinks of a mouth, a body, and her own body's unfamiliar responses. She feels shame and the stare of others judging her: "Le regard des autres: tranche, tranchant, sur les gorges vulnérables et tendues" (74). This gaze attacks her vulnerable body—the same body to which she does not belong until she realizes that death through the other's gaze is rebirth: "mourir aux yeux des autres et naître à son propre regard" (75). Just as she realizes that her "real" self is born when she ignores the gazes of others, an unfamiliar music wafts in through the open window.

The music is "lente, et rythmée, langoureuse et vivace, " and it is not "une musique indienne" (75). Voices float in with the music shouting, "it takes two to tango, even in India"

(75). She listens with surprise and pleasure and the music evokes something inside her that corresponds to the newfound awakenings in her body that she has just experienced:

Two to tango...La musique s'étire vers elle, touche une chose noueuse dans son ventre, se répand en frisottis au creux de son abdomen...elle bouge malgré elle en réponses à ses vacillements...ce tango argentin qu'elle ne reconnaît pas fait bouger une chair quasiment anesthésiée. (75)

Music not only awakens Subha's previously "anesthetized" flesh, but also connects her to her suitor. Subha long ago gave up her love for the sitar as an impractical pastime, but she is still enamored of the instrument. The suitor plays the sitar, an acoustic evocation of the moment the two strangers first met staring into the window of a store selling sitars. The classical Indian music of the sitar changes with the intervention of the suitor. The music changes into the Tango, speeding up, its rhythm becomes more intense, and it mimics the sexual excitement leading toward climax: "La chair danse...Sinue, se fluidifie, se plastifie...Les doigts continuent de la démêler, de faire vibrer par effraction ses cordes intimes" (76). It is not just Subhadra who changes but the suitor as well:

Je me réveille, change. Je ne suis pas la même. Le souvenir de son toucher laisse des ailes sur ma peau. Je crois avoir imprimé un autre rythme à sa vie, lancé ses pieds sur un autre parcours, un tango indien qui l'empêchera, absorbée par sa danse, d'aller moisir ses sens à Bénarès. Mais, moi aussi, ce matin, je suis une autre cadence. (174)

Both women are transformed by their interaction, and instead of making the physical pilgrimage to Kashi, Subha's symbolic pilgrimage in the Delhi mosque becomes one of sexual awakening. The rhythm of the Tango imprints itself on both women's lives and changes the course of their steps, leading Subhadra toward a different destination altogether. As Scheller points out, "Small acts, fleeting encounters, spatial arrangements, and qualities as transient as the atmosphere of place can powerfully shape the processes of inclusion and

exclusion, the reiterated intangibles that enable or inhibit freedom” (38). Throughout *Indian Tango*, it is just such small acts that subvert the dominant power structures that seek to control both women’s—character and author, character and narrator or character and writer—lives.

In the penultimate chapter of *Indian Tango*, after the reader is made aware that the suitor is in fact a foreign woman,¹⁰² she and Subha have their first encounter at a mosque in Delhi (a mosque at the famous Qutb Minar), a Muslim mosque which transforms in the narrative to represent the sacred Hindu site at Kashi. This encounter becomes doubly transgressive, occurring at the site which would proclaim the foreclosure of Subha’s sexuality—the imagined place of pilgrimage at Kashi into the site of homosexual encounter. Subha opens the forbidden gate: “Elle va enfin franchir la porte. Cette Darwanza de tous les interdits” (182). As she literally walks through the door to the Delhi mosque, she is figuratively walking through the forbidden gate at Kashi; however, instead of forsaking her material life and female sexuality, she will instead forsake her life as a traditional Indian wife and mother. Inside the mosque, she finds herself alone. The music begins, first the sitar and the tabla and she dances as she has never danced before (184-5). Then the music changes, and the tango resonates again:

Mais, déjà, une autre musique s’élève, faisant taire la première. Ce n’est pas le sitar, le tabla et la voix du chanteur. Cette fois, c’est un accordéon plaintif et le piano, et une voix de femme, grave et rauque. Subha n’a plus de clochettes aux pieds mais des escarpins vernis à talon haut. Son corps change de rythme. Un partenaire invisible lui enserre la taille. L’autre main tient la sienne loin du corps. Elle n’a pas besoin de la voir pour savoir qui elle est. Elle reconnaît ses mains, sa finesse, son souffle. Subha

¹⁰² The reader first learns first of the woman’s gender due to the phrase: “Je me reveille, changée.” (Devi 174). The extra letter -e at the end of the adjective changé(e) indicates her gender.

éclate de rire, ferme les yeux, et se laisse ployer en arrière et entraîner dans ce tango qu'elle n'a jamais dansé, sauf dans le plus secret de ses rythmes. (186)

The woman's voice is low and rough, mimicking the rhythm in the music, the sexually charged music of the tango opposing the traditional devotional music of Hinduism one might expect to find at Kashi, and transgressing the sacred space of a mosque in which sex between two women would be equally forbidden. The author deploys sound and touch to articulate the sensuality of the scene. "Éclate de rire," "grave et rauque," and "l'accordéon plantif" seduce the reader into *hearing* the music and *feeling* through the text, like Subha, the "finesse" of the suitor's hands and her "souffle." This tango serves as the vehicle to Subha's empowerment, and it is through its unknown rhythms that she finds belonging with an unknown woman. The sensuality and sexuality of tango music underscores the erotic awakening that Subha experiences for the first time—an awakening all the more transgressive because it occurs with another woman. Not only is Subha casting off the trappings of a lifetime, but she is entering the forbidden. She "recognizes" both the woman and the music even though they are unfamiliar, and it is only after she walks through the forbidden gate, that she hears the music and finds belonging.

This scene at Qutb Minar challenges the divisions between Hindu and Muslim and consequently subverts the Hindu nationalism of the B.J.P party as does Devi's novel as a whole. Subha takes a taxi to Qutb Minar and when she arrives the reader learns that the famous site combines Hindu and Muslim styles of architecture: "En ce lieu, architectures musulmanes et hindous se rassemblent en un somptueux mariage de forms, de textures, de courbes..." (169). This "sumptuous marriage" of Hindu and Muslim architectural styles reminds the reader of Subhadra's son, who has fallen in love with a Muslim girl and keeps the relationship secret except from his mother who supports him, surprising even herself (133-4). The architectural marriage explicitly defies the taboo of Muslim and Hindu

intermarriage, and this breaking of taboos implicitly evokes Subha's transgression that defies the taboo of a female sexual relationship. Although we learn that Sonia Gandhi has been elected and that she has renounced the title of prime minister, "*Sonia Gandhi says "no" to India, 'annoncent les gros titres'*" (182), we also learn that her choice to renounce reflects her dedication to live according to her own rules and in her own way, rather than a giving up (183). Subhadra, like Sonia, chooses to "renounce" her life as it is and has always been, but in so doing, she opens up new possibilities.

In the last chapter, Subhadra reflects on Kashi and the pilgrimage that her other self might have taken (190). She watches as the members of her family make the preparations for Mataji's pilgrimage, one that they presume Subha will attend, and although they cannot see her, she observes them and conjectures that this group of women, Mataji, her mother-in-law and her subservient nieces, is likely to make the pilgrimage without experiencing any type of lasting spiritual transformation: "C'est ce petit groupe qui ira se heurter à la grandeur étouffante de Kashi? ...Le Gange ne transportera plus des déchets et des prières mais les récriminations de femmes mortes debout sans même le savoir, puisqu'elles n'ont jamais vécu" (190). For Subhadra, the sacred site on the Ganges has become a location where women who have never really lived come to express their mutual recriminations. By contrast, the mosque in Delhi becomes a site of sexual awakening, transformation and the true place of pilgrimage for Subhadra, metamorphosing into a metaphoric Kashi. As in Pyamootoo's text, Devi's narrative subverts the sacred and the place of pilgrimage by inserting taboos—marriage between Hindus and Muslims; homosexual desire and the rejection of the traditional Hindu family structure; and the political taboo of a wife defying her husband—into a space normally reserved for pious versus erotic devotion and for normative religious and sexual beliefs and behaviors.

The Elusive “Economic Miracle”: Rewriting Postcolonial Success

The global North and global South have become the most widely accepted scholarly terms to indicate global divisions: the parts of the world that have enacted colonization versus those that have been subjected to colonization. These terms also indicate “development,” with global South regions being less industrialized, more dependent on resource extraction and with less diversified economies. The global North is quite simply comprised of the rich countries that have historically profited off the labor and resources of the global South, yet both regions might contain aspects of the other in certain areas, e.g. the inner city of a rich country or the rich enclave in a poor country. These terms have come to replace the archaic “First World” and “Third World” labels and then the more recent “developed” versus “developing” world labels. Duras, who wrote well before these terms came into fashion, nonetheless foreshadows some of the current scholarship about development: what does development mean and who decides on this meaning? Do the so-called “civilized,” read developed, behave in manners consistent with their notions of the civilizing mission they purport to carry out? Appanah, Devi and Pyamootoo ask the same questions, if in diverging manners: how are migrants welcomed in the so-called “developed” world? How has development enriched those living in the global South versus the global North?

In the anthropological text, *De l'inégalité parmi les sociétés*,¹⁰³ Jared Dimond famously tried to answer these questions by writing a “non-racist” explanation for the uneven path of “development” that led to the world that we currently inhabit, in which some countries industrialized while others did not. He links this inequality to lines of latitude with the basic premise that resources, like access to steel and the materials that built firearms, along with an increased exposure to pathogens, enabled Europeans to “easily” colonize and

¹⁰³ Originally published Jared Dimond. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. Norton & Company, 1997.

enslave parts of the world in which different geographies created different conditions of production (11, 21). While Dimond's explanation oversimplifies current global inequalities as the result of geographic luck, and the text fails to question what "development" holds as superior to lack of development, his use of latitude as a defining factor in the structuring of the world's power remains compelling as a *spatial* explanation of inequality. In her book that examines space as a conceptual tool, Verena Adermatt Conley discusses Giles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's conceptions of space throughout their oeuvre. She writes of their discussion of latitude and longitude, which unlike Dimond's, conceives of these lines as generative:

Going even further, Deleuze and Guattari write that the world—which includes humans but without being anthropocentric—is composed of lines, segments and articulations of segments. Lines, be they of latitude or longitude, neither begin nor end. Active in essence, they detach themselves from a mental or physical territory. They deterritorialize while simultaneously, forming new territories and strata, they reterritorialize. At times they become lines of flight that lead to new compositions altogether. (98)¹⁰⁴

Rather than being deterministic, as in Dimond's explanation, these lines without end or beginning open up to a rearrangement of place and space. Similarly, toponyms rename and reconjure sites as sensorial realms: names do change our sensory perceptions of the precise locations as defined by latitude and longitude and thus remap our conception of the "torrid zone" (Aravamudan 6).

In all four author's works, space (and the toponyms used to describe this space) *act* upon the characters. Space has agency, becoming another character in and of itself. Toponyms circulate throughout their texts and function as tropes—they evoke certain

¹⁰⁴ Verena Adermatt Conley. *Spatial Ecologies: Urban Sites, State and World-Space in French Cultural Theory*. Liverpool University Press, 2012.

associations, both of past memories and future desires, in the regions that they name. The names, naming and renaming of cities in formerly colonized spaces come to signify specific colonialist, neocolonialist and neoliberal practices *and* the strategies that the characters employ to destabilize these practices. As a function of destabilization, the ambiguity and replicability of toponyms raise questions about fraud, authenticity, and origin. Diasporic inheritance is often framed as if the country of origin is the “father” and the diasporic community the “son.” The patrilineal narrative of diaspora implies that the community of origin is somehow more “real” or “authentic” than the community of diaspora. This in turn implies that the mixing and hybridization that occurs among diasporic peoples somehow dilutes the purity (racial, cultural and religious) of the community of origin. The authors of my corpus highlight the replication of names to play with the idea of inheritance as teleological and exclusionary, and in doing so, they create an alternative mapping of the regions of the Global South. Is the Bénarès of Mauritius a mere copy of the original? Is the Gaza of Mayotte less authentic than the Gaza of the Middle East? Does the Kashi of Devi’s novel remain sacred if it serves as the site of a homosexual affair? Is there a “real” and a “duplicate,” a “before” and “after,” or are the relationships between these eponymous regions more lateral and reciprocal than teleological and hierarchical? The authors deploy these toponyms purposefully to evoke certain associations, but their renamings create new meanings that illuminate their namesakes as much as their namesakes originally inspired their usage, if in a different geographical, geopolitical and cultural setting. These toponyms and their replications and alterations, like the alternative genealogies I explored in chapter II, destabilize the trope of the utopian island by establishing an “extra-territorial space” (Bhabha 9).

Destabilization, as the central theme of this dissertation, manifests from the tension between utopian fiction and lived conditions. The utopian fiction of tropical paradise and

economic growth and development is a particularly useful tool for capitalism to dominate the global economy further. If the inhabitants of the global South see promise in the form of future economic miracles, then the global North can continue to exploit the South's resources with the promise of said eventual "miracle." However, these economic miracles are proving elusive as climate change threatens the very existence of some island nations and once profitable industries fail as automation and cheaper factories elsewhere decimate former sites of production. In the next chapter, I look at how Devi and Pyamootoo's novels reappropriate the sites of failed production as sites of sensorial play and subversion. I continue to look at the agency of spaces, how they act upon their inhabitants, but with a focus on micro-economics and resistance from below.

IV. RECLAIMING THE SITES OF FAILED CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

Nalini Malani's film installation *Utopia* (1969-76) employs the technique of double projection to screen two films side by side, one shot in color on super 8 mm film and the other using 16mm film in black and white (Pijnappel 205, 210).¹⁰⁵ Stills taken from the film show a series of juxtaposed images, the right side depicting the promise of India's post-independence idealism while the left evokes the dystopian reality that resulted when the "Nehruvian dream of socialism" failed (Pijnappel 206). On the left, the first image shows a young woman, out of focus and shot from behind, wearing a sari and standing at the window of what looks to be a high-rise building. The next shots show close-ups of the woman, the first from the front, the woman's face looking into the camera with her features clearly visible and the second, shot from the side with only her hair distinguishable. The next shots show images of slums, replete with crumbling structures and repeating, geometric shapes: the squares of empty window frames, the triangles of rooftops, and the right angles that form scaffolding. The final frames return to the woman, this time with her back to the window, facing the viewer and lit from behind; then with the geometric shapes of the second film superimposed over her; back to the geometric angles of decrepit buildings; and finally, to a close-up of half her face, blurred and in shadow, looking directly at the camera.

On the right side of the screen projection, the eleven frames show a series of geometric, futuristic shapes in bright primary and secondary colors.¹⁰⁶ They are not immediately recognizable, but they evoke the infrared of night vision and the graphics of computer animation. The viewer sees the promise, a stylized neon blueprint, of modern,

¹⁰⁵ Eleven stills taken from the film are available for view on the website of the Museum of Modern Art New York

https://www.moma.org/collection/works/188790?artist_id=32825&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist

¹⁰⁶ The film projected on the right-hand side is Malani's previous 1969 film entitled *Dream Houses*. See Johan Pijnappel et al. *Nalini Malani Splitting the Other: Retrospective 1992-2009*. Hatje Cantz, 2010.

universal, high-rise housing (205).¹⁰⁷ Through double projection, Malani's side-by-side images counterbalance each other, reminding the viewer of the widespread, entrenched poverty and violence that has haunted India's idealistic, nationalist dreams since its independence (206).¹⁰⁸ Malani's rendering of both the futuristic, geometric shapes of the idealized housing project and the crumbling corners of the real buildings that populate India's slums create a visual representation of the disjunction between the promise of economic miracle and the postcolonial reality of economic collapse.¹⁰⁹

Malani's work often juxtaposes the idealism of India's post-independence economic and social policy with the lived poverty of India's slums (Perrenès).¹¹⁰ Early nationalist promises of welfare and advancement devolved into neoliberal deregulation that reached its climax in the 1980s and 1990s, with India opening its markets in 1991 (Jafferlot 134-5). India's subsequent economic boom is often held up as a global South success story, but Malani challenges the narrative of Indian economic progress and promise by reappropriating the physical ruins of capitalist production to stage her installations. Mauritian writers Devi and Pyamootoo similarly reappropriate the sites of failed capitalist production. These authors' respective texts reclaim sites that once produced sugar and garments—industries that first profited from the Mauritian labor force, made up of descendants of indentured laborers and enslaved peoples, and then led these same workers to economic ruin because of the industry's collapse. The authors refashion these sites that once represented European hegemony and

¹⁰⁷ For an explanation of the filmic techniques that Malani uses see Johan Pijnappel 205-206, 209-210.

¹⁰⁸ I have not been able to view Malani's film in person, but am basing my analysis of her work on the stills that are available through the Museum of Modern Art's (New York) website in addition to art criticism found in newspaper and journal articles. For a detailed analysis of the film, see Johan Pijnappel.

¹⁰⁹ "Brutal angles" is my own, liberal translation of "angles néfastes," a phrase that I take from Devi's novel *Ève de ses décombres* (13) and that I explain later in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Marie Perrenès. "Nalini Malani: une œuvre entre expérience intime et tourments de l'Histoire?" *Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions Magazine*. 16 December 2017. www.awarewomenartists.com/magazine/nalini-malani-oeuvre-entre-experience-intime-tourments-de-lhistoire/

capitalist production into sites that privilege local practices and manners of expression. The sugar mill, for example, is a symbol that evokes Mauritius' colonial past and the economic disaster that the industry's collapse, due to cheaper labor conditions abroad, brought about in the twentieth century. The sugar industry brought first African enslaved people and then primarily Indian indentured laborers to the island to work the plantations of wealthy French and British colonists¹¹¹. The garment factory was another once flourishing Mauritian industry until it too foundered due to increasing globalization and the accompanying availability of ever cheaper labor elsewhere. In her collection of essays, *The Known and the Uncertain* (2012), Lionnet reminds the reader that despite Mauritius's successes, in the "nation arc-en-ciel," persistent inequality remains (17). Today, tourism represents Mauritius's primary industry, but despite being a relatively wealthy country and often touted as a postcolonial success story, Mauritian society remains deeply stratified with a widening gap between the rich and poor that can be traced to the implementation of neoliberal policies beginning in the 1980s (18).

In the twenty-first century, economic inequality has reached previously unimaginable levels, and perhaps unsurprisingly Karl Marx and Marxism have reappeared (if they ever really disappeared), as Marxist language, thought and scholarship once again gains momentum in popular movements.¹¹² The disparity between the wealthiest few and the poorest multitudes and their consumption of resources also has devastating effects on the planet as Mbembe writes: "La concentration du capital en quelques mains n'a jamais atteint de niveaux aussi élevés qu'aujourd'hui. A l'échelle planétaire, une ploutocratie dévorante n'a cessé de jouer de l'ici et d'ailleurs pour capturer et séquestrer les biens de l'humanité et,

¹¹¹ Chinese indentured laborers also came to Mauritius and the population is extremely heterogeneous (Bragard and Ravi)

¹¹² "World's billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people" (Oxfam)

bientôt, l'ensemble des ressources de vivant" (18-19).¹¹³ The global pandemic of Covid-19 has further exacerbated extreme levels of inequality such that during the summer of 2020, the slogan "eat the rich" was trending on social media at the same time that protests took place across the globe to combat police violence. In the United States, politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez¹¹⁴ have reintroduced the word socialism into American politics and a new generation of voters is demanding the return of the welfare state. As neoliberalism has reached a new point of crisis, a reexamination of Jacques Derrida's classic work, *Specters of Marx* (1993), illuminates why Marxism has reentered the contemporary conversation around economic and social reform. Derrida argues that, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and failure of other communist regimes throughout the world, Marxism¹¹⁵ and its "specters" nevertheless continued to undermine the seemingly victorious world order of "economic and political liberalism" (64). The so-called "end of history" and triumph of liberal democracy and the market economy was in fact "haunted" by Marxism despite the widespread discourse in and among liberal democracies that asserted Marxism's definitive failure (67-8). What Derrida argued nearly twenty years ago is all the more evident today with the "specter" of Marxism coming to fruition in concrete political and social movements. The current moment of political crisis is of course very different from the one that informed Derrida's analysis. Few, or perhaps fewer, would argue that we have reached the "end of history" and the failures and inconsistencies of (neo)liberalism are ever more apparent as the global pandemic exposes how the economy is worth more than life.

¹¹³Mbembe cites Melissa Cooper, Aeron Davis, Iain Hay, Samantha Muller, Ian G.R. Shaw and Marv Waterstone, see bibliography.

¹¹⁴ Bernie Sanders has been calling himself a socialist for his entire career and there are many other, less well-known politicians who have and continue to use the term. These two politicians are some of the most visible in the current moment and have helped propel the term "democratic socialism" into the progressive mainstream.

¹¹⁵ Derrida argues for the relevance of the "*spirit* of Marxist critique" rather than "Marxism as ontology, philosophical or metaphysical system" (86). Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Routledge, 1994.

Marxist critique and language and its relationship to the crisis of neoliberalism inform many of the questions that this chapter seeks to address. Neoliberalism can easily become an overly general, catch-all term if it is not grounded in a specific time, place and theoretical genealogy. With this in mind, I understand neoliberalism primarily through the works of Foucault, Mbembe, Chari and Gago.¹¹⁶ Foucault, in his lectures on biopolitics (1978-79), traces the genealogy of how the state (in that the state is nothing more than “the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities”) comes to regulate the bodies, the actual *life*, of its citizens (77). More recently, in 2016 and drawing from Foucault’s discussions of biopolitics, Mbembe developed the concept of “necropolitics,” in which he explains how postcolonial democracy has normalized the permanent states of exception and emergency to regulate life and more importantly death. In his most recent work, Mbembe conceptualizes the phenomenon of *brutalisme*, borrowed from the architectural term, in which human beings become nothing more than “matière et énergie” as artificiality invades every aspect of humanity (15, 27). Neoliberalism and the invasion of capital into every aspect of life are at the center of *brutalisme*, yet Mbembe also infuses his critique with an inspiring and sometimes surprising optimism, explaining that the purpose of his critique is “la protection du vivant contre les forces de la dessiccation” (28). It is precisely to challenge these binary dichotomies between living and dying, hope and pessimism and resistance and oppression that this chapter puts Devi and Pyamootoo’s texts in conversation with Mbembe, Derrida and Foucault as they examine the global circulation of capital.

Neoliberalism also foregrounded Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics as he explores the evolution of liberalism and articulates how neoliberalism has transformed the tenants of

¹¹⁶ Anita Chari. *A Political Economy of the Senses*; Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*; Verónica Gago. *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*; Achille Mbembe. *Brutalisme*.

classical liberalism (31). Chari then picks up this critique in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Chari explains how the government bailouts of big banks following the 2008 crisis exposed the contradictions inherent to neoliberalism: “Instead the bailout and the subsequent stimulus...revealed the ambivalent relationship of the neoliberal state to the economy—this was a strong state when bailing out banks, a weak state when providing social services; a strong state when it came to policing, a weak state when it came to education” (2). Chari’s analysis goes on to explore how works of art, installations in particular, deploy neoliberalism’s own weapons to critique it from within, using Theodor Adorno’s concept of a “defetishizing fetish” (171). Chari calls these works of art a “theoretical Trojan horse: a gift unsuspectingly accepted by subjects in capitalist society that contains within it a critical weapon” (171). Let us take for example Malani’s installation that began this chapter: the fetish is the air raid shelter, or symbolically the commodification of war, defetishized when she exploits the shelter as housing for her artistic critique of that same commodification—doubly performed when the public purchase tickets to view the work, commodifying the installation that seeks to defetishize the commodity fetish. I view the texts of Devi and Pyamootoo as similar “Trojan horses:” novels participating in the publishing industry, vetted by publishers and the media, but that containing within a “critical weapon.”

In an interview with Alison Rice, Mauritian writer Appanah explains that Mauritian readers cannot afford the price of her novels, which are significantly more expensive on the island due to the inflation that results from the long shipping distance (186).¹¹⁷ Appanah’s 2016 *Tropique de la violence* for example, was published by Gallimard, a large publishing house based in France, making it easy for privileged Europeans and North Americans to purchase her works. Put in a different way: “The fact remains that the current visibility of

¹¹⁷ Nathacha Appanah and Alison Rice. “‘Le français, langue exotique.’ Entretien avec Nathacha Appanah: Réalisé à Paris en juillet 2006.” *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2008, pp. 184-197. *Jstor*. www.jstor.org/stable/25702114

postcolonial literature produced and disseminated by Western centers of knowledge is sufficient neither to disrupt power disparities nor to destabilize the universalist definitions of literature tied to and reinforced by the tastemakers and gatekeepers who control the conditions of evaluation and production of that literature” (Jean-François and Lionnet 1227). Despite the growing global interest in Francophone literature and the movement toward decentering Europe as the center of cultural capital, the large publishing houses still primarily reside in the global North. Lionnet and Bruno Emmanuel Jean-François’ 2016 article investigates the challenges and power dynamics of publication for authors of the global South. The article also looks at the migrations of the authors and their works from periphery to center and back again. The authors point to ways in which authors from the global South “readily adopt subversive tactics—rather than engage in frontal opposition—to resist the capitalist logic of the creative economy” at the same time that these authors desire the status and wider readership that larger publishing houses confer (1229, 1235). Devi and Pyamootoo both have a wide European and American academic readership, indicating the market forces that enable the global North (of which this dissertation and I are products) to consume the products of the global South. In a 2018 interview with Jean-François, Devi again takes up this question of global South authorship and explores the responsibility that writers have in addressing inequality and injustice¹¹⁸. Devi pushes back on the interviewer’s assertion that writers are “agents of cultural change,” but also concedes that her writing reveals unsettling truths about the global divide, or as she puts it, “one part of the world enclosing itself in artifice and glut, while the other part is dying from wars, hunger, and natural catastrophes” (143-4). Although Devi is reluctant to cast herself in the role of activist, she acknowledges that her writing exposes the inconvenient truths of global inequality. Yet, to reach a wide

¹¹⁸ Lionnet synthesizes Devi’s interviews spanning three decades in chapter 8 of *Writing Women*. Lionnet and Jean-François discuss Devi’s interview comments about global South authorship in their 2016 article “Literary Routes: Migration, Islands, and the Creative Economy.” *PMLA*

audience, global South authors often need Northern publishing houses, despite the more recent gains in smaller, local presses.¹¹⁹ The authors must adopt alternative strategies, the “subversive tactics” discussed above, to confront the hegemony of these same publishing houses through which their words are printed. Like the artwork that Chari analyzes which criticizes capitalism with its own tools, Devi and Pyamootoo’s texts critique the unequal level of access that makes their works more readily available to the wealthier, educated reader of the global North. Thus the authors ultimately subvert the very system that publishes and distributes their work.

Despite this uneven access and the undeniably exploitative relationship between global North and South, neoliberalism is not solely a top-down phenomenon produced by multinational corporations and governments. As Gago demonstrates through her conception of “neoliberalism from below,” migrants *participate* in informal economies, rather than simply being passive victims of market forces, such that they also drive neoliberalism. She explores the inconsistencies of neoliberalism in the context of what she terms “baroque economies,” which both take advantage of and coopt workers who traditionally exist outside of the formal economy (20). Gago examines the informal and illegal Argentine market, La Salada, to illustrate this type of economy in which the migrant worker is both exploited by and incorporated within a neoliberal framework. Gago argues that “neoliberal rationality is superimposed onto a repertoire of communitarian practices,” creating new economic forms that both cooperate within and subtly alter the neoliberal order (20). For example, “La Salada produces welfare” and reinforces communitarian practices at the same time that the market upends “distinctions between life and work” (47). So on the one hand this informal and illegal economy produces benefits and safety nets for its migrant workers, but on the other, it

¹¹⁹ “Widespread Internet access in the peripheries has enabled the emergence of small presses that successfully target a different and loyal readership” (Lionnet and Jean-François 1227).

reinforces the conditions of precarity that create the need for these benefits. Thus the neoliberal state that fails to provide benefits creates both the need for informal and alternative sources of welfare *and* the conditions that enable and profit from the illegal market that provides these informal benefits—they are mutually constitutive. Gago goes on to examine multiple contradictions in the ways that La Salada subverts and reinforces neoliberal logic: it copies the construction of Buenos Aires but also sabotages it, it produces fraudulent designer labels that thereby undermine the authenticity of the luxury brand, and it interacts clandestinely with the same textile workshops that produce legal goods (56, 69, 52). Resistance then is always modified as neoliberalism finds ways to coopt informal sectors of the economy at the same time that these sectors destabilize the neoliberal structure of power.

Although Gago focuses specifically on Latin America, her analysis of neoliberalism by way of the informal market sheds light on the processes of exploitative production and reappropriation in Mauritius that appear in Devi and Pyamootoo's texts. These authors depict tensions similar to those which Gago explores, that is to say, neoliberal exploitation that also destabilizes from within. Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* (2006) takes place in the fictional neighborhood of Troumaron, an economically depressed and violent area of Port Louis, Mauritius' capital city. *Trou-maron*, combines *trou*, hole, and *marron*, meaning brown or fugitive enslaved person.¹²⁰ The vulgar "brownhole" then names a despised neighborhood that evokes filth and disgust while *marron* conjures the images of flight, pursuit, capture and rebellion. "Nous sommes accolés à la montagne des Signaux. Port Louis s'accroche à nos pieds mais ne nous entraîne pas. La ville nous tourne le dos" explains Sadiq, one of four principal narrators, as if the city had body language to inflict shame on Troumaron (Devi 13). Despite its proximity to the capital city, Troumaron exists apart and ignored. The economic precarity of neoliberalism entrenches the conditions of poverty in which Troumaron's

¹²⁰ See Chapter III for a full analysis of the name

residents are forced to live, many of whom lost their livelihoods when the neighborhood garment factory moved its operations to a cheaper location overseas: “Mais finalement...l’usine a fermé parce que ça coûtait trop cher de produire les pulls et les chemises ici” (70). At the same time, Troumaron’s inhabitants invest in the ruins of capitalism by reclaiming the abandoned space of the factory as a gang headquarters where they produce new strategies for survival.

In Pyamootoo’s *Bénarès* (1999), it is the ruins of a sugar mill, a reminder of the once prosperous past, and another iteration of the industrial ruins that haunts the poverty-stricken town. The sugar mill once provided the town’s livelihood, employing virtually all of its inhabitants, with its closure leaving these same people economically devastated. The town was once bustling with residents, but now, as the character Jimi explains, “nous sommes environ deux cents. Autrefois nous étions bien plus nombreux, mais autrefois il y avait un moulin à sucre” (Pyamootoo 42). Like the *bande* of Troumaron and their vacant garment factory, the townspeople of Bénarès, despite their reduced number, reclaim the space of the sugar mill as their own. Unlike the garment factory, however, only the chimney of the former sugar mill has survived, leaving no interior space to inhabit. Instead, what remains of mill, the factory floor, transforms into an outdoor space of gathering and sport—a football (soccer) field.

Yet, these are not idealized subaltern struggles that fully dismantle the economic systems that first caused the factories’ closures. In fact, the townspeople of Bénarès and the young people of Troumaron are implicated in and reproduce hierarchies of power, economic, racial, gendered and otherwise, that govern their environments even as they claim to reject these same hierarchies.¹²¹ Discussing the ways in which the Global South struggles against

¹²¹ See Waters for Devi’s work and Mehta, B. for Pyamootoo’s

the dominance of the North is often problematic because it unintentionally reinforces the logic that oppression can continue because there will always be resistance to oppose it. Rather than framing these Southern strategies of being, living and working that do not conform to the dominant neoliberal framework—one that continues to privilege development, progress and efficiency at the expense of the environment and human welfare—as resistance, we can look to Gago who conceives “a definition of labor in which the history of *slave-migrants* demonstrates a fundamental reality: they are entirely integrated within, but also remain outside of capital” (34). Gago’s work focuses on the labor composition of La Salada in Argentina, “informal, illegal, precarious, innovative and entrepreneurial” (34). Although the characters in *Bénarès* and *Ève de ses décombres* are not undocumented migrants, they do form extralegal entrepreneurial networks that illustrate some of the same characteristics—like the labor force of La Salada, these characters create communities that produce their own forms of social welfare. Furthermore, the characters do not simply reclaim the factory or mill in a complete inversion of power. These are not “les derniers qui seront les premiers” that Fanon proclaimed to be necessary at the moment of decolonization (*Damnés* 40). As David Scott tells us, we need to ask different questions and address different “problem spaces” in this postcolonial present, and “give up constructing an image of colonialism that demands from us an attitude of anticolonial longing” (7). Pyamootoo and Devi’s characters do not fall neatly into the anticolonial “hero” narrative that Scott dismantles as a romance produced by modern subjectivity.¹²² They do not resist and then overcome (in this case the oppressive structures of our neocolonial present rather than the colonial past), but rather find imaginative ways to alter the circumstances from which they cannot escape.

¹²² Scott examines the story of Toussaint L’Ouverture in C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins*. David Scott. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Duke UP, 2004.

Trash in “Troumaron”

Malani’s depiction of the futuristic housing development evokes the Brutalist architectural tradition, both its aesthetic style and its purported political project to advance the welfare state (Mould 702). In *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* (1966),¹²³ Reyner Banham traces the history of Brutalism: its name, style, practitioners and goals. Banham explains that: “If there is one verbal formula that has made the concept of Brutalism admissible in most of the world’s western languages, it is that Le Corbusier himself described that concrete-work as ‘béton brut.’” (16).¹²⁴ Architects Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Alison and Peter Smithson are some of the famous names that became synonymous with the style, and it is Le Corbusier who states that, “l’architecture, c’est, avec de matières brutes établir des rapports émouvants” (10, 16-17). These “brute materials” become central to Mbembe’s appropriation of Brutalism as a political category. “The moral crusade of Brutalism for a better habitat through built environment” is undoubtedly what Malani expresses in the utopian half of her film projection, but like the film that exposes the lived consequences to such policy, the mass construction of housing projects came at a steep cost to the communities who previously lived in these neighborhoods (Banham 132). In the name of social welfare, entire communities deemed “slums” were razed to create these new buildings that would create better “habitats.” As Baynam states, “there were, in fact, fairly cogent sociological and even criminological reasons for breaking up existing living-patterns of the area [Park Hill, Sheffield, UK], which had become a notoriously blighted slum” (132). Although not explicit in Banham’s work, the subtext reads that the destruction and rebuilding

¹²³ Reyner Banham. *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966.

¹²⁴ Le Corbusier was a French architect whose building “Unité d’habitation” in Marseilles came to define the Brutalist style in the post-war years (Baynam 16).

of a community deemed a slum by those in power was justified for the greater good, which leads us then to the ethical dilemma of Brutalism's moral and political project.¹²⁵

In the wake of a contemporary revival that seeks to protect some of the historic Brutalist structures (of which many are housing projects), Oli Mould signals the importance of being attentive to the ethical as well as aesthetic properties of Brutalism. Despite the architectural school's modernizing vision, the "brutal angles" and cold austerity of brutalist structure has "dehumanizing" impact on the residents of such housing projects (704-5).¹²⁶ Here Mould offers a counter-argument, suggesting that Brutalist buildings have served as a convenient scapegoat to explain the problems associated with the urban housing project, the adjectives "brutal," "brute" and "brutish" becoming synonymous with the architectural style and obfuscating the human agency that is responsible for the disrepair of housing projects. Mould suggests that if the form, the buildings themselves, becomes responsible for the production of "slums," it absolves the concerted social and political disinvestment—for example the failure to provide basic maintenance that created the dilapidated structures of the urban housing project—that actually disenfranchised these same communities (705). Nonetheless, Brutalist architecture, known for its minimalism and "anti-beauty" aesthetic, has an "affective capacity" that impacts those living within its structures (Mould 706).

Although often associated with Europe, the Brutalist style was disseminated to Europe's colonies as Mould explains: "Architects schooled in the Miesian and Le Corbusian tradition of modernism were being commissioned to design a wide range of housing, civic and cultural provisions across Europe and to a lesser extent in the US (some of these

¹²⁵ "The New Brutalism" according to Banham refers to multiple periods of transition, different generations and multiple art forms. I am referring specifically to the idea that modern, housing projects in the Brutalist style could resolve social ills.

¹²⁶ Oli Mould. "Brutalism Redux: Relational Monumentality and the Urban Politics of Brutalist Architecture." *Antipode*. Vol. 49, no. 3, 2017, pp. 701-720.

traditions, including *brutalist design, made their way to the colonial worlds of India and North Africa*)” (Emphasis mine 703). In Malani’s film installation, the utopian promise of the Brutalist architectural style becomes intertwined with Jawaharlal Nehru’s (India’s first prime minister) socialist project of the welfare state. As Pijnappel notes, Malani designs a filmic representation of the idealistic urban housing project (the right side of the double projection), “in which poverty and housing problems could be solved through a master plan for the urban space in line with Corbusier’s dream city – Chandigarh,” thus evoking that same Corbusian tradition that Banham highlights as foundational to the Brutalist tradition (206). Yet, as the left side of Malani’s film elucidates, the dream city failed as the blueprints translated into an altogether different material reality.

Malani’s work juxtaposes the idealism of India’s post-independence economic and social policy with the lived poverty of India’s slums, challenging a singular and hegemonic narrative of Indian economic progress and promise.¹²⁷ As art critic Skye Arundhati Thomas puts it, Malani’s work illustrates how “the new India was not simply one of idealisms, but also broken, ephemeral and composed of multiple narratives.”¹²⁸ Mauritian writer Devi also challenges romanticized, nationalist narratives of origin, in this case the myth of Mauritian modernity and progress.¹²⁹ Like the idealized promise of India’s economic success that Malani critiques through visual art, Devi exposes the myth of the Mauritian “nationalist romance of economic miracle” through her written narrative (Ravi 7).¹³⁰

¹²⁷ The spectacular humanitarian failure of India’s current economic and social policy continues in 2021 as evidenced by the Covid-19 catastrophe that is devastating the nation. See “‘We are Witnessing a Crime against Humanity:’ Arundhati Roy on India’s Covid Catastrophe” (April 28, 2021) in the *Guardian* for an analysis of the current political situation and humanitarian disaster.

¹²⁸ Anundhati Skye Thomas. “Nalini Malani: Capturing Multiple Modernisms.” *Art Review Asia*. Winter 2017.

¹²⁹ See Doris Sommer on nationalist myths of origin. Doris Sommer. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. University of California Press, 1991.

¹³⁰ Although Srilata Ravi uses this phrase to describe another Mauritian novel, *Bénarès* by Barlen Pyamootoo, it is equally true of this novel and of Devi’s work in general. Srilata Ravi. “Banaras in the Indian Ocean:

Devi wrote *Ève* more than a decade ago in 2006. In 2021 the disparity between the wealthiest few and the poorest multitudes has become yet more pronounced—the wealthiest few consuming resources with devastating effects on the planet all while an ongoing global pandemic exposes how economic concerns prevail over the protection of human life. Mbembe's *Brutalisme* (2020) was published just before Covid-19 upended the global economy in the spring of 2020, yet his work takes on uncanny relevance, as the author notes, in the context of the pandemic: "Mais pour le reste, c'est bel et bien de la politique du vivant dans son ensemble qu'il était, une fois de plus, en question. Et c'est d'elle que le coronavirus est manifestement le nom." The global pandemic becomes a perfect iteration of Mbembe's *brutalisme*, just one of the many phenomena that threaten the extinction of the human and non-human species that inhabit our hyper-connected planet. A key component of *brutalisme* is the concentration of wealth and resources in a smaller and smaller percentage of the population as Mbembe writes: "La concentration du capital en quelques mains n'a jamais atteint de niveaux aussi élevés qu'aujourd'hui. A l'échelle planétaire, une ploutocratie dévorante n'a cessé de jouer de l'ici et d'ailleurs pour capturer et séquestrer les biens de l'humanité et, bientôt, l'ensemble des ressources de vivant" (18-19). The pandemic has even further divided the powerful few, the "ploutocratie dévorante," from the rest of the world, with the richest one percent augmenting their fortunes by 3.9 trillion dollars between March and December of 2020 (Berkout et al. 11). As Mbembe states, the pandemic has shown not only the interconnectedness of all humans on the planet, but of all species due to the zoological origins of the virus. The pandemic has also disproportionately affected communities of color and regions of the Global South that have more fragile health care systems, further illuminating the systemic racism and legacy of colonialism that contributes to inequality in

Circulating, Connecting and Creolizing Island Stories." *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*. vol 9, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-14.

health outcomes: “Pour la plupart d’entre nous cependant, surtout dans ces régions du monde où les systèmes de santé ont été dévastés par plusieurs années d’abandon organisé, le pire est encore à venir.”¹³¹ I read Devi’s novel through the lens of Mbembe’s *brutalisme* to examine how architecture, waste, violence and poverty interact with each other and with Devi’s characters in the shadows of the highly profitable Mauritian tourist industry. Reexamining her 2006 novel today sheds new light on the intersections of capitalism, systemic racism and climate crisis present in her work.¹³²

The English word “Brutalism” refers to an architectural style that celebrated minimalism, raw materials and the relationship between structure and inhabitant (Mould 704). Mbembe transforms the architectural term into a political one, *brutalisme*: “de jonction de l’immatériel, de la corporalité et des matériaux qu’il convient de localiser le brutalisme” (*Brutalisme* 8). In the phenomenon of *brutalisme*, human beings become nothing more than “matière et énergie,” the raw materials that are necessary for neoliberalism, “un gigantesque dispositif de pompage et de carbonisation,” to function (15, 47). Artificiality invades every aspect of humanity even as machines become more like humans and the digital world becomes more “real,” and capital invades every aspect of life (27, 64). Mbembe formulates three critical processes that comprise *brutalisme*: “calculation in its computational form,” the neurobiological form of the economy and the living as prey to a process of “carbonisation” (9). At the center of these questions he states:

Se trouve la question de transformations des corps humains, et de manière générale, du futur des « populations » et de la mutation technologique des espèces, qu’elles soient humaines ou non. Or les dommages, et blessures que causent ces déplacements ne sont pas des accidents ou de simples dégâts collatéraux. Si, de fait, l’humanité est

¹³¹ Achille Mbembe. “Le droit universel à la respiration.” *AOC Media*. July 7, 2020. www.aoc.media/opinion/2020/04/05/le-droit-universel-a-lrespiration/?loggedin=true

transformée en force géologique, alors l'on ne peut plus parler d'histoire en tant que telle. Toute histoire est désormais, par définition, géo-histoire, y compris l'histoire du pouvoir. Par brutalisme, je fais donc référence au procès par lequel le pouvoir en tant que force géomorphique désormais se constitue, s'exprime, se reconfigure, agit et se reproduit par la *fracturation* et la *fissuration*. J'ai également l'idée de la dimension moléculaire et chimique de ces processus. La toxicité, c'est-à-dire la multiplication de substances chimiques et de déchets dangereux, n'est-elle pas une dimension structurelle du présent ? Ces substances et déchets (les déchets électroniques y compris) ne s'attaquent pas seulement à la nature et à l'environnement (l'air, les sols, les eaux, les chaînes alimentaires), mais aussi aux corps ainsi exposés au plomb, au phosphore, au mercure, au béryllium, aux fluides frigorigènes. (10)

There is no distinction then between the human and non-human histories of the planet and “déchets dangereux” act equally on the environment, human and non-human species. Power is possible through extraction: of resources and of the material force of the human body as repression increases and the states of exception and emergency become permanent (10).

Mbembe's critique centers on the intersection of human beings with the planet and the forms of creation and destruction that ensue: “C'est cette dialectique de la démolition et de la création destructrice” en tant qu'elle a pour cible les corps, les nerfs, le sang et le cerveau des humains tout autant que les entrailles du temps et de la Terre qui est au cœur des réflexions qui suivent” (11).

Despite the omnipresent horrors that threaten the “ensemble du vivant,” because the existential threat of *brutalisme* affects the entire planet, “ce tournant planétaire du prédicat africain a son pendant, le devenir africain du monde,” human beings *must* act collectively to avert their collective extinction (11). The imperative to act then becomes the purpose of his critique, “la protection du vivant contre les forces de la dessiccation” (28). In Devi's text too,

we find the same processes of extraction and repression, bodies who are exposed to “déchets dangereux” and who become raw material for the prisons that propel the neoliberal order. Yet, despite the environmental, racial and gendered violence that her characters experience, Devi foregrounds the same demand to fight against the “forces de la dessication.” I argue that with her ambiguous novel, one that leaves questions unresolved and the ending open, Devi creates a space of uncertainty, hope and ultimately possibility. It is in this space where the reader imagines new endings and different outcomes and where we find new strategies for the “protection of the living,” not through unrealistic optimism, but due to the imperative to avoid existential destruction.

“Brutal Angles”/ “Angles néfastes”:

In *Éve de ses décombres*, the circumstances that imprison the characters take physical form in the space of Troumaron—in the “angles néfastes” that Devi uses to describe and personify the neighborhood’s buildings. I translate “angles néfastes” loosely as “brutal angles,” taking some liberty with the French so as to juxtapose the language of Mbembe’s *brutalisme* with Devi’s phrase. Although “néfaste” more conventionally translates as “harmful,” the adjective “brutal” better describes the effects that these buildings have upon their residents, “harmful” being too weak an adjective to express what the architecture of the urban housing project perpetrates upon those who inhabit its inhuman spaces. “Brutal” by contrast, gestures toward the cruelty and violence that these spaces impose, *by design*, on their residents. The French “angle” I translate to encompass multiple meanings, both the geometric “corner” or “angle,” and the “angle” of the camera. I propose that the space of Troumaron enacts what Mbembe theorizes as brutalism, with “brutal angles” becoming a repeating, organizing element of Devi’s novel. “Brutal angles” are structural and architectural, the physical “corners” that trap the characters while compartmentalizing the

space of Troumaron.¹³³ “Brutal angles” likewise evoke the angle of the shot, recalling both Nalani’s short film and the perspective of the reader/viewer and of the multiple voices who narrate the novel.

The four narrators reveal their respective stories through alternating chapters that are written in the first-person, sharing “narrative responsibility, thereby creating multiple temporal universes” (Tyagi 105). The four narrators inhabit the outskirts of Port Louis in a fictional slum that Devi names Troumaron. Although Devi sets her novels in real places—Mauritius, France, India—she also fictionalizes these settings: “The Mauritius I write about is a close sibling of the Mauritius I know, but it is not the real one” (Devi and Jean-François 143). Devi plays liberally with the geography of Port Louis, and her characters inhabit a *cit *, an urban housing project that does not exist anywhere in the outskirts of the real Port Louis. As Waters argues, with the image of the “French metropolitan *banlieue*,” Devi activates a trope familiar to the Francophone reader, the *banlieue* immediately conjuring an urban landscape of poverty, violence and racial segregation¹³⁴ (81).

The eponymous Ève has grown up in poverty with an abusive father and largely invisible mother. She begins using sex at a young age—first to exchange for simple goods beyond her means (“Un crayon. Une gomme. Une r gle”) and later for money (Devi 18). Although she does not describe them as such, these first sexual encounters are undoubtedly examples of sexual assault given Ève’s age of twelve at the time. Yet Ève, at least in her own first-person narrative, carefully portrays herself as in control of the men with whom she

¹³³ See Mbembe’s analysis of Fanon’s discussion of the compartmentalization of space in the colony in *Les damn s de la terre*. Achille Mbembe. *Necropolitics*. Duke UP, 2019.

¹³⁴ The geography of Port Louis and its environs is very different from what is portrayed in the novel as Waters explains, “The setting, landmarks and layout of central Port Louis in *Ève de ses d combres*, for instance, are instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with the Mauritian capital. There are also impoverished districts on the outskirts of the capital whose inhabitants, like those of Devi’s Troumaron, have not benefited from the rapid economic development of the city centre. Yet, as the fictional name of Devi’s setting already implicitly signals, in reality these quartiers tend to be sprawling agglomerations of poor-quality, single-storey structures rather than cit s of decrepit tower blocks like those inhabited by Devi’s characters” (81).

interacts rather than as their victim: “J’étais un enfant, mais pas tout à fait” (18). She uses these men, so she insists, to save money so that she can escape Troumaron, the neighborhood representing an omnipresent shadow that haunts the stories of the three other narrators with whom Ève’s story intertwines: Sadiq (Sad), Clélio and Savita. Sad is in love with Ève and has been since they were children, and he and Clélio belong to the same youth gang. Savita is Ève’s closest friend and their intimacy defies the patriarchal rules that govern Troumaron. The fifth narrator speaks anonymously, an unknown figure whose voice is indicated by italics, who watches Ève, addresses her as *tu*, and comments on her emotions and actions in intimate detail. This voice remains without gender or identity throughout the text. The voice is “extra narrative,” it remains apart from the four diegetic voices that belong to the defined characters in the novel, and it allows the reader to enter into Ève’s psyche in ways that her own words cannot express (Tyagi 108). The text gives clues as to who or what this voice in italics represents, a question that I will return to later, but no definitive answers. Like many of Devi’s works,¹³⁵ the text remains opaque, the identity of certain speakers unknown and the chronology uncertain until the reader receives the missing information, usually toward the end of the narrative, to untangle the text’s mystery. The first pages are written in Ève’s voice, but the events she describes in them do not occur until much later in the novel.

Sadiq, the first narrator to appear after Ève, introduces the reader to Troumaron and to the abandoned garment factory where he and his friends gather. In doing so, he simultaneously reveals himself: a young man with the soul of a poet who leads the life of a gang member. The name itself, “Sadiq” nicknamed “Sad,” plays on the English word “sad” and the French *sadique*: “Je suis Sadiq. Tout le monde m’appelle Sad. Entre tristesse et cruauté, la ligne est mince” (13). The character explains his name’s significance, setting the

¹³⁵ Some examples include *Indian Tango* (2006) and *Le Sari vert* (2013). See Francoise Lionnet’s discussion of Devi’s narrative style in chapter 8 of *Writing Women* (240-284). See also Ritu Tyagi’s *Ananda Devi: Feminism, Narration and Polyphony*.

tone for the story to come in which despair engenders cruelty and vice versa (13). Sad has lived since birth in Troumaron, this place where the displaced find themselves, Sad himself being “un réfugié de naissance” (13). Sad leads a double life, one in his *bande* and another as a successful student: “La nuit [...] je sors avec la bande [...] Au matin [...] je me rase, je me douche, je vais en classe. Cette double vie m’épuise” (16).

Sad, contrary to the norms that dictate his life in a gang where women are objects of sexual desire or family members, is in love with Ève: “J’ai tellement écrit sur elle que parfois je me dis que j’écris sa vie, et celle des autres, et celle de tous. (28)¹³⁶ Yet Ève remains unattainable and seems to float beyond the reach of Sad and his *bande*. Ève sins, as her Biblical name suggests, against the will of the male-dominated society of Troumaron. As Tyagi explains, Ève’s relationship with Savita is particularly transgressive as it violates the heteronormative and patriarchal norms that define the environment in which she lives. Although Eve’s sex-work inspires disgust and ridicule among the members of the *bande*, it does not violate the patriarchal order that gives them dominance in the *quartier* (63). Ève’s biggest transgression then, beyond defying the code of silence of Troumaron when she invokes the help of the police toward the end of the narrative, is flaunting her relationship with Savita (Waters 91). Despite the undeniably exploitative nature of Ève’s sex-work, in her own narration, Ève insists that she is not a victim: “Le prédateur c’est moi” (Devi 22). The word “prédateur” is particularly suggestive as it is often used to describe the racialized and therefore dangerous bodies of young men of color. By taking this terminology and applying it to herself, Ève positions herself as equal with the young men who belong to the gang but separate from Mauritian society that labels Troumaron’s residents as violent “predators.”

¹³⁶Sad’s words also create ambiguity about the origin of the voice in italics (Tyagi 105). Citing a different passage written in Sad’s voice, Devi alludes to this narrative ambiguity during a 2007 conference in Belgium (Devi in Bragard and Ravi 271-2). Does Sad in fact narrate the novel, telling or even writing the story? These questions of narrative identity have been amply taken up by scholars, and they illuminate Devi’s writing style that often blurs the line between character and writer. Devi asserts that the question of who the voice in italics is remains open and left to the reader to decide even if there are clues that Sad is in fact the novel’s writer (273).

Through the italicized, extra-narrative voice, the reader learns of the other side to Ève's sex-work, the trauma that she experiences as she becomes more prey than "predator" (Tyagi 108). Ève by contrast, views her *chosen* path of sex-work as "subversive and therefore empowering" (108). Both are true in the text: Ève weaponizes sex-work to gain money to escape Troumaron and views it as a powerful tool to manipulate men. At the same time that this sex-work inflicts psychological and physical trauma to her being. The subversive agency that Ève, along with the other members of Troumaron exercise to subvert the dominant power systems of the society in which they live do not erase or minimize the abuse and trauma that Devi foregrounds in Ève's narrative. Waters rightly cautions us to be wary of reading the narrative as a postcolonial valorization of the creative and local forms of "community making" that marginalized communities employ (79). By contrast, Troumaron, becomes a space of alienation for its female inhabitants and reproduces the same ethnic, racial and gendered dynamics of power that its inhabitants claim to reject (92). Yet, despite the undeniable patriarchy of Troumaron's hierarchical society and the exploitation and violence that the characters both experience and perpetuate, Devi's narrative also illuminates the ways in which the characters reimagine and reorder the space in which they live. This space, Troumaron, represents the counterpoint or dark side to the Mauritian tourist economy—an economy that thrives upon the utopian fiction of successful multiculturalism, social equality and development.

Devi personifies Troumaron, crafting a neighborhood that becomes more than a setting to develop into another character in the novel.¹³⁷ As Sad explains: "Comme tous ceux qui ont grandi à l'ombre jaune de ces immeubles, je n'ai rien compris leurs angles néfastes. Je ne voyais pas les fissures, nées à nos pieds, qui nous séparaient du monde (13)." The

¹³⁷ See Water's *The Mauritian Novel*, discussion of the personified city (88).

buildings themselves are “néfastes” as if with their “brutal angles” they act against the residents who live underneath and within them (13). Numerous studies examine the ways in which city planning, architecture and spatial design are informed by systems of power and control and perpetuate the hierarchies of race, gender and class.¹³⁸ The urban housing project in particular reinforces systemic racism and enables the school to prison pipeline.¹³⁹ The imagined tower blocks of Troumaron have none of the warmth of a home but are angular and inhuman spaces, evoking the Brutalist architectural concept, that imprison their inhabitants. The yellow of the building’s shadow evokes the color of urine, of spoiled milk and of rotting waste. Unlike the golden yellow of tropical sunshine that illuminates the fashionable quarters of Port Louis, the yellow of Troumaron’s shadows reflect the absence of light and the jaundice of decay. The cracks, forming at their feet and unseen as children, serve as visual reminders of the borders that separate Sad and his friends from the clean, well-maintained sidewalks that tourists trample just a few miles away. Waters explores the relationships between place, belonging, agency and gender in Devi’s novel, and suggests that the author uses place, specifically the imaginary housing project-like setting of Troumaron, to critique the communalist¹⁴⁰ divisions in Mauritian society. Devi portrays “violence as an inevitable, would-be purgative response to the inequalities and injustices maintained by existing geographic and social divisions: between ethnic groups; between different castes; between

¹³⁸ See W.E.B. DuBois, Michel Foucault, Judith Jack Halberstam, David Harvey, Dolores Hayden, Frederick Jameson, Henri Lefebvre

¹³⁹ See Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *Golden Gulag Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. University of California Press, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Communalist divisions plague Mauritian society that is multi-racial and multi-ethnic. There is a Hindu majority of Indian descent, Muslims of Indian heritage, a Creole population of mostly African descent, the descendants of Chinese indentured laborers and the White descendants of European colonizers. These groups are not of course wholly separate from each other as racial intermixing has occurred since the island has been inhabited.

rich and poor and...between men and women” (79). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Troumaron becomes the site of gendered and sexual violence.

Sexual violence subtends the novel’s plot, beginning with descriptions of Ève’s sex-work and culminating with the murder of Ève’s best friend Savita. In addition to the explicit violence, a highly gendered dynamics of power defines the male/female relationships in the *quartier* (Waters, *M.N.* 90-92). Sad describes how the members of his *bande* approach sex. For these boys who are “en manque,” the abandoned factory provides an ideal location for sexual encounters: “On se met à traquer les filles jusqu’à l’usine fermée qui a dévoré les rêves de nos mères” (14). Sad says that he and his friends pursue girls into the same factory where their mothers once worked, but Devi deploys the verbs, *traquer* and *dévoré*, both of which evoke animalistic images of predators and prey rather than romantic or sexual pursuit. Like Ève, Sadiq uses terms that mirror the racist discourse deployed against young men of color. These young men “hunt” young girls and the factory is personified as yet another type of predator, one who has “devoured the dreams” of the boys’ mothers. Sad paints a vivid and detailed portrait of this factory/character and also of the women who once worked there:

De l’usine, il ne reste plus qu’une coque de métal vide et des centaines de machines à coudre qui ont donné à leurs épaules cette courbe de défaite et à leurs mains des trous et des entailles en guise de tatouages. Il y reste les déchets de toutes les femmes qui ont travaillé ici. On voit qu’elles ont tenté de donner une apparence humaine à leur désolation. À côté de chaque machine, il y a une fleur en plastique mauve, des photos de famille jaunies, des cartes postales venues d’Europe ou bien une barrette rouge oubliée, avec son brin de cheveux arraché. Ou encore des symboles religieux—
crucifix, versets du Coran, statuettes du Bouddha, images de Krishna—qui permettent de deviner à quelle communauté appartenaient leurs propriétaires, pour peu qu’on ait envie de jouer aux devinettes. (14)

The structure of the garment factory endures, even if as nothing more than an empty, metal shell. Hundreds of sewing machines, once used to manufacture garments that were shipped worldwide, lie abandoned in the defunct warehouse, suggesting that labor, its machines, workers and location are both replaceable and disposable. However, in addition to the tools of garment manufacturing, the women's personal possessions populate the factory's abandoned space, immediately negating the disposability and anonymity of that same labor. These decaying belongings freeze the women's last day of work in time even as the factory crumbles around their collections of trinkets and souvenirs.

If the sewing machines indicate the women's physical wounds, "cette courbe de défaite," "des trous et des entailles," their belongings, or "déchets" as Sad calls them, evoke their emotional and spiritual suffering. These women attempted to humanize their sterile, mechanistic surroundings with small personal tokens: photos, hairclips, and cheap decorations, to differentiate themselves from the machines, and to assert an identity beyond being the "matière et énergie" necessary to propel the factory (Mbembe, *Brutalisme*, 15). A barrette, entangled with a piece of hair, becomes the last physical, corporeal trace of the woman who once worked there. The multitude of religious objects illuminates the island's diverse population and complex diasporic history, but this is not the successful multiculturalism touted by Mauritius' tourist bureau. Instead, in the detritus left behind from these women's past working lives, in the ruins of capitalism, we find the remarkably heterogeneous nature of precarity.

The factory represents the ruins of industry, but rather than the kind of industrial ruin that visitors might tour—the former sugar mill or textile factory that have been made into museums for instance—this factory belongs to the residents of Troumaron. No tourist would want or dare to enter the space of the factory, so it is in a sense reclaimed—reclaimed from the multinational corporations that outsource labor to the cheapest destinations and from the

tourist industry that markets Mauritius as a vacation destination—by the descendants of the women who once kept the factory’s machines running. Waste and trash were long missing in both realist and more abstract forms of fine art until postmodern artists began repurposing the remains, waste or “detritus” of myriad industries.¹⁴¹ In a similar fashion, the discarded garment factory, itself the waste of industry, becomes a museum of sorts which displays the precious belongings of a generation of women who were casualties of globalization and free-trade agreements. The field of waste has yet more layers, as the women’s belongings are also referred to as “déchets,” even as they inhabit a space that is wasting to ruin. Like installations that remain in flux, moving from place to place or ceasing to exist altogether, this factory museum is a living one, with the gang members and inhabitants of Troumaron coming and going and continuously repurposing the space.

What others discard constitutes the space that Troumaron’s residents inhabit, and Devi constructs the aesthetics of the neighborhood with the repeated use of words that evoke waste. Waste also figures prominently in Mbembe’s conception of *brutalisme* as we saw earlier, “toxicité, c’est à dire la multiplication des substances chimiques et de déchets dangereux” act upon nature, the environment and on the bodies who are most exposed (10). Devi, who often writes about abuse, trauma, deformity and the most marginalized, populates her novels with these same bodies, those who are most exposed to toxins, pollution, and filth, often in the particularity of the insular space. Devi crafts Troumaron with the imagery of human and environmental waste, introducing the reader to this defiled neighborhood through Sad’s words:

¹⁴¹ See Lucy Bell. Her article that dislodges waste theory from its Euro and US-centricity begins with a discussion of Patricia Yaeger’s argument that postmodern art has replaced an obsession with nature to one with trash (98) Lucy Bell. “Place, people and processes in waste theory: a global South critique.” *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 98-121, 2019. DOI: 10.1080/09502386.2017.1420810

Je suis dans un lieu gris. Ou plutôt brun jaunâtre, qui mérite bien son nom :

Troumaron. Troumaron, c'est une sorte d'entonnoir; le dernier goulet où viennent se déverser les eaux usées de tout un pays. Ici on recase les réfugiés des cyclones, ceux qui n'ont pas trouvé à se loger après une tempête tropicale et qui, deux ou cinq ou dix ou vingt ans après, ont toujours les orteils à l'eau et les yeux pâles de pluie. (13)

Again the color yellow figures prominently, this time a “brun jaunâtre,” here suggesting the urine and feces of human waste. “Entonnoir,” a funnel or bottleneck brings forth images of blockages in pipes and sewers, with poorer communities, like Troumaron, often more exposed to degraded plumbing, inadequate sewer systems and the contamination that results from decaying and neglected infrastructure. The “eaux usées,” used, contaminated, dirty water of all Mauritius makes its way back to Troumaron, the neighborhood becoming a kind of toilet to which all of the country's waste flows.

As Lucy Bell argues, waste theory has often centered the perspective and experience of the global North, as a result not taking into account “the global South where countless people live on a day-to-day basis with, on, and off waste” (98). Bell uses the term Global South not as a geographic region but “as a social indicator” to include vulnerable communities even if they reside in the rich nations of the global North, just as the global North can comprise privileged communities that exist geographically in the global South (99-100). In Devi's fictional Troumaron, we might use this same definition of global South. Mauritius belongs as a nation to the global South and Troumaron is a further marginalized community within the island. But Troumaron also exists on the margins of the richer, tourist-driven regions of the capitol that we might think of as global North regions within the greater global South context of Mauritius.

Sad further expresses this contradiction between a metaphoric global North and South, the tourist's paradise and his neighborhood that is “un parcours de combatant” (14):

Parfois, quand le quartier est calme, il me semble que les bruits du pays, autour de nous, sont différents. D'autres musiques, des sonorités moins funèbres, le claquement des tiroirs-caisses, le clinquant du développement. Les touristes, eux, nous narguent sans le savoir. Ils ont l'innocence de leur argent. Nous les arnaquons pour quelques roupies jusqu'à ce qu'ils commencent à se méfier de nos gueules avenantes et fausses.

(15)

Troumaron is so close to the more gentrified neighborhoods of Port Louis that Sadiq can hear the different sounds of development. The music is less somber there and most importantly, the cash register clinks open and shut as the tourists spend the money that keeps Mauritius' economy running. Tourists do appear in Troumaron, not because it offers any attraction for them, but because they have wandered off course to find themselves in this forgotten *quartier*. These tourists unknowingly taunt Sad and his friends, "les touristes, eux, nous narguent sans le savoir" as they flaunt their (often White) privilege. Yet Sad and his friends gamely exploit the "innocence" of wealth and play on the tourists' naiveté to swindle a few *roupies*. The gang members don the false masks of the welcoming, native population that the tourist brochures promise.

Mauritius solicits tourism in the manner of a female sex-worker seducing a client: "Le pays met sa robe de ciel bleu pour mieux les séduire. Un parfum de mer sort de son entrecuisse" (15). She, the country or the sex-worker, wraps herself in a dress of sky blue, the clear blue sky being a familiar image in any tourist advertisement for a tropical location. The "parfum de mer" that emanates from between her thighs is an even more overt sexual metaphor, leaving no doubt that for Sad, Mauritius prostitutes itself on the altar of tourism for profit. When the tourists wander into Troumaron however, they fail to see the human beings and their impoverished conditions right before them and instead remain blindly within the fantasy promised to them: "D'ici, nous ne voyons pas le maquillage de dehors. Et leurs yeux

éblouis de soleil ne nous voient pas. C'est dans l'ordre des choses" (15). Sad seems to accept that he and his friends remain invisible to the tourist's blinded eyes as just the "order of things."

Yet, Sadiq and his friends do find a way to combat this inequality. They militarize their world and take ownership of the streets as they realize their own parents' ineffectuality. As their mothers sink into the depression of unemployment and their father escape into the bottle, "l'autorité, c'est nous, les garçons" (15). Troumaron is their "champ de bataille" and their "cimetière" (17). Sad and his friends are autonomous, weaponized and as the neighborhood's name suggests, organizing for future revolt in the tradition of *marronage*: "nous serons invincibles et le monde tremblera" (17).

Although Devi's novel makes no reference to the exploding popularity of a newer phenomenon, slum tourism, a word here is necessary to address this particular practice that commodifies misery into a spectacle for entertainment. As Gago argues, citing the work of Brazilian sociologist Beatriz Jaguaribe, the invisibility of the subaltern makes less sense and even becomes anachronistic with the advent of industries such as slum tourism. Such tourism, like favela tours, points rather to the contradictory "hypervisibility" of the subaltern (43). It is not then beyond the realm of possibility that a neighborhood like Troumaron could function similarly, as an attraction *because* of its filth and misery, adding yet another layer to the semantic field of waste that Devi deploys throughout the text. This hypervisibility, however, does not necessarily negate a kind of metaphoric invisibility. Despite the commodification of misery and its packaging into a highly visible tourist attraction, this type of tourism does nothing to amplify the actual voices of the people inhabiting these neighborhoods. In other words, this tourism does not enable the tourist to *see* these neighborhoods in any meaningful sense any more than the tourists in Devi's novel can *see* the inhabitants of Troumaron.

Another of Troumaron's inhabitants, Clélio, a boy in the same *bande* as Sadiq, perhaps best incarnates the stereotypical image of a young gang member: he has been arrested multiple times, is known to the police, and with his "tête de récidiviste," becomes the first suspect after Savita is killed (117). "Je suis Clélio. Je suis en guerre," Clélio tell us, conscious of the fact that his existence is one of constant conflict and tension. Clélio inhabits the "corps racisé" that Mbembe tells us is necessary for *brutalisme* to function: "En réalité, la fonction de la loi n'est pas de rendre justice. Elle est de les [corps racisés] désarmer afin d'en faire proies faciles. Le brutalisme ne fonctionne pas sans une économie politique des corps" (47). Prison is at the center of this "gigantesque dispositif de pompage et de carbonisation" that is neoliberalism, and Clélio serves as the raw material, the "easy prey," that these prisons require (47). Clélio lives within a system in which he is one of the "vies superflues dans le capitalisme contemporain" (Devi 24, Mbembe 45). Although he runs with the same group as Sadiq, Clélio is driven by rage that keeps him apart from the others: "Je ne peux pas m'extraire de ma rage. Un jour, c'est sûr, je tuerai quelqu'un" (24). Unlike Sad, whose perception and poetry grant him a type of armor against the outside world, Clélio cannot channel his rage toward any constructive outlet. His mother once worked at the factory before her job was sent overseas for cheaper labor, and Clélio feels drawn to visit the abandoned space, alone and at night: "L'usine sent la graisse de moteur, les déchets pourris, les sandales éponges abandonnées, les corps gaspillés. Parfois je viens ici tout seul, juste pour voir comment la vie ment aux pauvres. C'est salubre" (69). Similar to Sadiq's description, Clélio comments on the "dechets" left behind in the factory and echoes the same imagery of waste and putrefaction. Here the garbage is rotting, evoking the sense of smell to expose the filth. The factory stinks of oil and rot and the abandoned flipflops are yet another example of the ubiquitous plastic waste that pollutes the ocean. The flipflop has particular poignancy as it summons both the image of tanned, tourist feet enjoying the pristine sand of tropical beaches

and the tons of ocean plastic that wash ashore on the very same beaches. Troumaron exemplifies the intersection of racial and environmental discrimination. Later in the text, Clélio explains that his family's home was destroyed in a tropical storm: "La maison qu'on avait avant le cyclone, lui et ma mère l'avaient achetée. Ils avaient fini de la payer et, même si elle était branlante comme leur propre cerveau, c'était leur maison à eux. Alors, quand le cyclone l'a détruite et qu'ils ont tout perdu, plus possible de recommencer (118). His family lost everything twice, once due to a catastrophic tropical storm that devastated those who were already living in poverty and again due to the storm of globalization that stripped his mother of her income.

Empty shoes, in this case flipflops, also serve as a reminder of the women who have wasted away, leaving only their shoes behind. Not only does this factory contain the waste of industry, but also turns the bodies of human beings into waste. "Les corps gaspillés" refers to the women left jobless after sacrificing their wasted bodies to the back-bending and eyesight destroying, labor of sewing. Clélio's mother was one of the casualties of the factory as she became "plus petite, plus grise" as her body too was wasted by the labor of sewing. Clélio tells the reader that he goes as a reminder that life lies to the poor, and he explains further that "c'est pas de l'injustice, c'est la logique économique (70). As Clélio's father spells out, Mauritius is but a "fourmi" in the global market that the powerful US and Chinese economies think nothing of crushing underfoot (70). Clélio like his mother before him, refuses to give up, "Elle n'est pas une perdante, ma mère. Elle est une battante, comme moi" (70). He returns again and again to the abandoned factory as a pilgrimage to these women whose lives and bodies were wasted in the service of global capital.

At the end of the novel, the gang gathers in the "usine désaffectée" to prepare for battle. They prepare molotov cocktails, get on their motorbikes and prepare to burn the city down. Although one motivation for their vengeance centers on Ève and the need to punish

her for her betrayal of speaking with the police, what is more important is that they protect Troumaron:

Dans l'usine désaffectée, ils se réunissent pour décider d'un plan d'action. Il faut barricader Troumaron, disent les uns. Non, il faut s'attaquer à ceux qui menacent Troumaron, disent les autres. Mettons le feu au poste de police. Fracassons quelques vitrines de magasins. Renversons des voitures. Montrons-leur à qui ils ont affaire. Ils vont pas faire de Clélio un bouc émissaire. On va les obliger à le relâcher, sinon ils vont le tuer en prison, c'est plus facile que d'attendre le procès. Ça c'est déjà vu. Ils vont nous faire le même coup. Après ils vont dire qu'on est tous pareils, on est tous tueurs, on mérite rien de plus qu'un mur autour du quartier, un mur sans issue. Ils feront de Troumaron notre prison, notre camp.

The factory that subjugated the population of Troumaron becomes the site of rebellion as the gang attempts to overthrow the tourist economy that functions at their expense. As Bauman has shown (and as Bragard and Lindo point to in their article citing a different passage) “Globalization has become the third, and currently the most prolific and least controlled ‘production line’ of human waste or wasted humans” (Bragard and Lindo 246, Bauman 6).¹⁴² Rather than accepting their fate as the waste of the tourist economy or conversely the “matière et énergie” necessary to keep the prison economy populated, the modern-day *marrons* of Troumaron stage their revolt at the factory, erect barricades in the revolutionary tradition and attempt to reclaim their neighborhood.

Football on the Factory Floor:

¹⁴² Zygmunt Bauman. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Polity, 2004. Véronique Bragard and Karen Lindo. “Débris d’humanité: alterité et autodestruction dans *Ève de ses décombres* d’Ananda Devi.” *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l’alterité*. Harmattan. 2014.

Mauritian author Pyamootoo's novel, *Bénarès*, tells the story of economic precarity that faces three young men in the small village of Bénarès and two young women in the capital city of Port Louis. These characters are unemployed, underemployed or work outside the formal sectors of the economy. Pyamootoo instrumentalizes the colonial legacy of the extraction economy, in this case the production of sugar, to critique the social inequality in Mauritius. Sugar and the legacy of its production and cultivation recur as a symbol throughout the novel: the sugar mill's spectral chimney looms over the formerly prosperous sugar producing town and the unworked sugarcane field divides the town in half. The townspeople are haunted by the specter of sugar, as the past intrudes into the present, reminding them of their once promising and now worthless inheritance. Yet "there is no inheritance without a call to responsibility," as Derrida explains, and Pyamootoo's characters are the sugar industry's heirs (Derrida 114). The author's narrative illustrates how this inheritance compels them to a kind of symbolic activism against the exploitative labor practices that defined the economy of the island on which they live and which in the narrative takes the form of play. The cultivation of sugar once served as the town's principal industry, but as the garment industry increasingly supplanted the sugar industry in Mauritius during the 1970s and 1980s, many sugar mills closed, leaving behind economic disaster for those who were once employed (Mehta, B. 50). So while Pyamootoo's characters inherit the economic devastation of these closures, they also inherit the spirit of Marxist critique, "the critique of the market, of the multiple logics of capital" (Derrida 117). Pyamootoo critiques capitalism by way of the multiple themes of diaspora, sex-work, and identity as the specter of the sugar mill intrudes repeatedly into the narrative, haunting the characters present even as the epoch of sugar production recedes further into the past.

The critique of capital surfaces at the novel's beginning when Nad, the narrator, introduces the reader to Bénarès with a description of the town and his apartment: "Ma

maison n'avait qu'une pièce, mais elle avait une cour qui agrandissait quand on ouvrait la porte et la fenêtre, et au milieu de la cour, un arbre se déployait qui cachait le soleil et donnait de l'ombre toute la journée, c'était agréable quand il faisait chaud" (7). The one room of Nad's home indicates his socioeconomic status, and the reader understands that Nad is not economically prosperous. This first description of the aesthetics of Nad's home gestures toward the reciprocal movement, between the economic precarity induced by neoliberalism on one hand and the imaginative strategies that destabilize neoliberalism on the other, which occurs throughout the text. Outside his door the courtyard "agrandissait," multiplying his one room into the infinite space of nature. A tree grows, its roots presumably digging deep beneath the earth on which Nad's one room sits, upward toward space where it protects the residents underneath from the heat of the tropical sun's rays. As Jill Casid demonstrates in *Sewing Empire*, the resistance of the enslaved person's garden modifies the landscaping of imperialism (197). Casid investigates how the farms, plantations and ornamental gardens that colonizers imposed onto the spaces of the colonies are all physical examples of the power relations of imperialism. She also explores how native practices of gardening and the "counterknowledge of feared terrain" function as "modes of resistance" to these imperial practices (197). In *Bénarès*, where once the ordered and enclosed space of a sugar plantation stood, now lies open, common ground. The plenty of Mauritius' natural wealth, wealth that remains despite the legacy of colonial exploitation, serves as a counterpoint to the economic need indicated by Nad's one room home. However, this is not a European vision of exoticized and abundant nature, like that found in *Paul et Virginie*, but the local expression of a tree of life, symbolic of nature's continuity and benevolence versus the seemingly omnipresent economic oppression of neoliberalism.

After Nad's description of his home, the narrative draws the reader's attention to the geography of the town of Bénarès. Like his apartment, Bénarès is full of contradictions as its lived conditions of poverty and unemployment challenge the fiction of the island as paradise:

Un chemin de terre bordait la cour, il était fréquenté par les amoureux et ceux qui s'en allait fumer leurs joints ou qui en revenaient, le chemin menait à la mer et à une plage vaste et discrète. Il était aussi fréquenté par les hommes qui buvaient, mais eux ne bougeaient pas, ils restaient collés à la boutique, qui était loin de la mer. Et plus loin encore se trouvaient le dispensaire, le bureau de poste et des maisons dont plusieurs étaient inhabitées depuis longtemps, puis il y avait un immense champ de cannes qui donnait l'impression de couper le village en deux, et suivaient en file indienne l'école, la maison de mes parents et celle de Mayi. (7-8)

Although the path provides an idyllic location for lovers, it also invites alcoholics, "les hommes qui buvaient." The pathway leads to a large and discreet beach, and although not described in detail, the reader intuits the sunshine, blue skies and calming waves s/he might find there. Yet the imagined wonders of this beach do not attract these men who drink, and they do not move toward the promise of the pathway's destination. Like the *clandestins* in Appanah's *Tropique de la violence*¹⁴³ who never experience the beautiful beaches of Mayotte despite living so close to them, the desperation of alcoholism and its paralysis cut off these men from the vast beach, and they remain "collés à la boutique qui était loin de la mer." The beach that is at once very near and impossibly far emphasizes the two different yet interconnected worlds that exist side by side in Bénarès. The unemployed who drink are the human consequences of the sugar mill's closure: the beach is not the leisure paradise of sunbathing and swimming for the local population.

¹⁴³ See chapter II

The dispensary and post office, both sites established by the French colonizers for health and communication with the outside world, do remain even as the houses are *uninhabited*. Their inhabitants have fled, leaving behind their households due to the sugar mill's closure. These abandoned houses constitute another iteration of the *déchets* and of the ruin that Devi mobilizes in her novel. Pyamootoo writes in a cinematic style, his terse but descriptive prose resembling a screenplay more than a novel. Here, the abandoned houses next to the sugar cane field become an open-air museum as the passage converts the reader into a spectator. The uninhabited houses along with the omnipresent sugarcane field form a tableau that the reader/viewer can easily imagine as a tourist attraction, complete with ticket sales, that performs the story of sugar production's rise and fall in the twentieth century. Yet for the villagers, no such tourist attraction exists and the enormous and unworked sugarcane field that "seems to cut the village in two" is instead an immovable reminder of economic devastation and unemployment. Despite the years since it acted as the town's chief industry, sugar still dominates the landscape of Bénarès.

Mehta analyzes how Pyamootoo portrays the economic ruin of Bénarès while creating characters who "are not victims for they can still resist through memory" (49).¹⁴⁴ If the Pyamootoo utilizes the character's remembrance to destabilize the dominant mythologies that define post-independence Mauritius Mehta suggests, he also centers the landscape of Bénarès as the locus of the tensions between resistance and exploitation. Mehta comments that the opening pages of Pyamootoo's novel describe "economic ruin" and "a lonely, sterile existence," yet these same pages paint a seemingly contradictory portrait of Bénarès's natural landscape: one that is at once lush and barren, bountiful and fallow. These pages are

¹⁴⁴ Mehta's analysis uses Glissant's theory of the rhizome, Reinhardt's adaptation of the rhizome-memory, Brathwaite's tidalectics, and Torabully's theory of coolitude.

dedicated to long, physical descriptions of both the village of Bénarès and character descriptions:

Puis il s'est rapproché de moi, il [Mayi] avait des yeux qui dormaient, un peu perdus, et il m'a demandé une cigarette. Il en tiré une très longue bouffée et il a renversé la tête en arrière pour rendre la fumée, par le nez et par la bouche, et ça a duré longtemps. C'était étrange comme ses yeux éclairaient son visage à mesure qu'il rendait la fumée et qu'elle montait au plafond. Quand il n'avait plus de fumée à rendre, il a éteint la cigarette et il s'est mis à tousser. Il a glissé deux doigts dans la poche de son short, en a sorti un mouchoir qui était sale et chiffonné et il s'est essuyé le nez, la bouche et tout le visage. Puis il m'a fait un sourire qui le rendait encore plus beau : la veille, il avait gagné aux cartes et il voulait qu'on ramène chacun une femme à la maison, pour cette nuit. (10)

Nad's friend Mayi is a fisherman, mockingly called "un pêcheur de deuxième division" because he is afraid of strong currents and thus will not fish "au-delà du lagon" (8). In keeping with Pyamootoo's style, the passage reads like a screen play, complete with detailed instructions for the framing and action of each shot. At the beginning of the passage, the reader/viewer's gaze focuses on Mayi's eyes, and here he resembles the "men who drank" from the previous passage, with his air of being lost, perhaps confused. The gaze shifts down from his eyes to his mouth as he inhales the smoke of his cigarette and then remains focused on his nose and mouth as he exhales. The gaze returns to his eyes and then follows the curling path of the smoke toward the ceiling, as we can imagine the camera panning slowly upward. Finally, the gaze returns to his eyes, and as he smokes, Mayi's eyes brighten and he comes to life with animation, his smile making him "encore plus beau" when he tells Nad of his gambling winnings. Srilata Ravi points to the irony that enables the impoverished villagers to afford sex workers:

In what can be seen as an ironic twist to the story of the Mauritian economic miracle of the 1980s and 90s, the villagers who have lost their jobs in the sugarcane fields and have had to find alternate sources of income can now afford to consume the pleasures offered by a growing prostitution industry that has accompanied the urbanization of modern Mauritius. Thus we find that running parallel to the tourist brochure narrative and the story of economic boom is the story of prostitution and ennui in the village of Bénarès. (7)

While what Ravi asserts is undoubtedly true and she is right to highlight how Pyamootoo's novel weaves a tale that counters the tourist narrative, for the character Mayi, his gambling earnings represent an exceptional windfall rather than a more generalized state of financial well-being. His excitement at his gambling winnings and the unexpected "luxury" of purchasing sex-workers that the money will afford him suggests that his profession as a fisherman is not lucrative. His gambling winnings rather than labor wages provide him entry into the urban world of capitalist exchange in which women's bodies circulate as currency.

The passage's emphasis on the smoke of Mayi's cigarette also echoes the imagery of the defunct chimney, again leading the reader back to the sugar mill. These visual details—the cigarette smoke that curls lazily from Mayi's mouth and nose, his sleepy eyes and nervous excitement coupled with Nad's impatience and exhaustion after a day of work—paint a vivid picture of the monotony of life in the small, formerly sugar-producing, town. They set the stage for a novel that focuses on the internal musings and intimate conversations of its characters rather than their actions. In fact, few events *happen* in the novel. Instead, the story is rich in lyrical descriptions of nature, first-person narrations, meandering, sometimes banal conversations and flashbacks of the past.

One such conversation begins with Nad and Mayi who, together with another friend Jimi, journey to the capital city of Port Louis. Jimi acts as driver for the three as they embark

on their search for female sex-workers in the capital city. When they arrive in the city, they find the streets deserted of women and find “que des hommes” (12). After unsuccessfully soliciting one woman whose pimp explains that she will not go with them because, “[c]’est trop loin, Bénarès, elle ne connaît même pas,” they discover that female sex-workers are all aboard a ship at harbor with the *marins* and thus “vaudront cher cette nuit, parce que rares” (13, 16). They decide instead to go to an unusual brothel: “chez ma Tante” the women work during the day so that they can return to their husbands and children at night (17). In *Bénarès*, the fantasy of the sex-worker dissolves, a fantasy that leaves little room for the real-life details of the workers in question. These women are multidimensional, with families and personal stories, and they expose the contradictions between exploitation and empowerment that sex-work engenders. The brothel’s exterior aesthetic beauty and interior shabbiness reinforce this contradiction. The men marvel at the abundance of the roses in front of the house, carefully illuminated by judiciously placed lights: “[U]ne maison qui était illuminé et qui avait un jardin avec des roses de plusieurs couleurs. C’était sûrement pour les roses qu’il y avait de la lumière au-dessus de chaque porte et de chaque fenêtre : pour ne rien perdre de leurs couleurs. Un sentier traversait le jardin, il était droit et étroit et tellement propre qu’il brillait autant que les roses” (19). The path is extremely clean, so much so that Nad compares its brilliance to that of the roses, suggesting that such beauty and cleanliness is jarring when found outside a brothel.

If sex-work has historically been portrayed as an occupation that dehumanizes those who practice it, here the opposite occurs, exploitation and empowerment are again put into conflict as Nad muses upon the professions and lives that these women might have led: “J’ai regardé la maison et je me suis figuré les personnes qui y habitent et quelques métiers qu’elles pouvaient exercer” (19). Evoking Mauritius’ racial diversity, the brothel’s rose garden is particularly splendid because of its colorful variety: “Chaque rose déployait son

halo de clarté comme une pierre précieuse, et je pouvais distinguer sans peine les moindres nuances des teintes, mais il m'était impossible de désigner par mots l'infinie diversité des jaunes, des blancs et des rouges" (20). The spectrum of colors defies that binary divisions of black and white just as creolization subverts the essentialist categories of race and ethnic heritage. The roses also represent the diverse women who work inside the brothel, but not in the too facile interpretation of their aesthetic beauty. Rather, the "infinite diversity" negates the essentialist and orientalist trope of the exotic female sex-worker. Like the island's illusion of successful multiculturalism that hides systemic racism and poverty and like an overly idealistic reading of the processes of creolization that effaces the colonization, slavery and rape necessary to these same processes, the beautiful façade of the brothel crumbles upon entry: "Ça a été un choc terrible, tellement ses couleurs contrastaient avec celles du jardin : la pièce n'était pas peinte et le crépi de ses murs avaient pris la teinte du moisi, c'était un mélange de vert, de gris et de marron, et en plus elle sentait le ciment" (23).

Once Mina and Zelda agree to the terms of the transaction, rather than progressing toward the expected sex scene, the narrative instead accompanies the characters on the long drive back from Port Louis to Bénarès. As Ravi elucidates, "In Bénarès, the journey from Port Louis to the lost and abandoned village of Bénarès flows counter to this tourist brochure narrative of tropical paradise and the nationalist romance of economic miracle" (7). The economic transaction is suspended as the car ride lends itself to conversation and the time and space of the car's interior slows to calm and stillness even as the exterior scenery flashes by at speed. Ravi rightly asserts that Pyamootoo highlights the "existential happiness" of the characters during the car ride rather than the social "tragedy" that foments sex-work and poverty. The car ride disrupts the economy of sex-work in the novel by leaving the transaction unfulfilled and instead privileges the voices, through their dialogue, of the locals who remain in Bénarès and the women, Mina and Zelda, from Port Louis. None of the

characters mention or allude to sex during the drive, rather they delve collectively into the history of B  nar  s and into soccer. In answer to Mina and Zelda’s questions, Jimi explains the history of B  nar  s and the closure of the mill. All that remains of the mill he says, is the chimney that resembles a “monument aux morts” since the owners of the mill restored it (43). In Ravi’s analysis, Pyamootoo’s novel flips the tourist narrative on its head: “Ironically, the owners, having benefitted from their own economic diversification policies, have renovated the now defunct chimney as a reminder of their glorious past. The chimney thus signals the death of an era and the birth of modern and globalized Mauritius” (7). Despite the devastation that the mills closure wrought on the town, the chimney is refurbished into a monument. Although the owners may have intended the chimney to honor the “glorious past” of sugar production, much in the manner of a museum to sugar cane, in practice the chimney takes on funerary rather than celebratory symbolism. The sugar mill’s chimney pays homage to workers rather than owners, and it becomes a memorial, similar to the phallic obelisks that occupy capitols throughout the world in honor of those who have died in war. These workers are equally the casualties of war, this time of capitalism’s war against the laborers whom it has left behind. Unsurprisingly, the owners of the sugar mill claimed to have closed the mill because of their increasing losses, due to having too many mills for not enough sugarcane, but in reality, the closure was simply to increase these owner’s profits (44). Zelda murmurs that “c’est toujours comme   a,” implying that she understands this forever unequal relationship between owner and worker—perhaps because of her own “propri  taire” Maman, who, like the sugar mill owners, always seeks to maximize her own profit at the expense of her workers. However, the “toujours” of her statement also takes on a temporal dimension, implying that the worker/owner relationship of exploitation defies placement in the earlier era of sugar production and remains equally true in the characters’ present.

The bygone era of sugar production intrudes further into the present as Jimi reveals that he himself had once worked at the mill and tells the characters more about the circumstances of the mill's closure:

J'ai fait comme tous ceux qui sont restés, parce que beaucoup ont quitté Bénarès pour chercher du travail ailleurs... [ellipsis original] J'avais les mains dans les poches et j'arpentais le village toute la journée, durant des semaines, des mois même. Je regardais le ciel, les montagnes, les champs, le moulin bien sûr, mais on regardait surtout la route. On guettait l'arrivée de quelqu'un du gouvernement qui nous aiderait à trouver du travail ou qui ramènerait les propriétaires à la raison. On a mis du temps à comprendre que personne ne viendrait. Bénarès s'est alors senti délaissé, abandonné de tous. (46)

He, like the other suddenly unemployed townspeople, waits in vain for help to arrive. The passage again evokes the aimlessness of wandering, like the earlier passages, in conjunction with the natural geographical features of the village. The sky, mountains and fields give the impression of infinite space and time stretching out before the desperate workers, with the road representing the hope of a lifeline. Bénarès then becomes the abandoned ruin as its inhabitants flee, leaving only the traces of themselves marked into the landscape.

But Jimi's memories of the mill are not exclusively traumatic. Despite the owner's greed and the worker's exploitation, the mill represented familiarity and safety. As the villagers experience the timeless "éternité" of unemployment, they begin to reminisce:

Et quand venait le soir, on se rassemblait devant le moulin et on se rappelait le bon vieux temps : l'aube, les yeux embués de sommeil, mais la longue marche à travers les champs qui commençait, et toujours ce sentiment de faire qu'un avec la terre, avec les pierres qu'on entassait et les cannes qu'on dépaillait ou qu'on coupait, et cette enivrante odeur d'absinthe qui montait à chaque fois qu'il pleuvait, et nos pas

silencieux dans la boue jusqu'au moulin, dans la fine poussière ou parmi les herbes folles et grimpantes, et le moulin qui était notre repère, on n'avait qu'à lever les yeux pour s'en rapprocher, pour ne pas s'égarer quand les cannes nous dépassaient, mais le moulin était bien plus qu'un repère, il était comme une maison pour nous, et je me souviens que chaque fois qu'on pouvait se faire photographier, c'était devant le moulin qu'on le voulait, c'est vous dire à quel point on l'aimait, et pourtant les propriétaires n'étaient pas gentils avec nous, il fallait les voir, les écouter, ils n'étaient que trois mais ils criaient comme cent des ordres qui claquaient comme des insultes, et c'est étrange quand j'y pense maintenant, avant que je ne rencontre des touristes, je croyais que les blancs étaient tout méchants [...] Mais on avait vite fait d'évoquer le passé, et quand on avait épuisé tous nos souvenirs, on levait les yeux au ciel et on regardait les nuages s'en aller par-delà les pylônes et les toits des maisons vers des pics, d'autres cimes : les montagnes. (47-8)

We see the townspeople as they begin their working day, but is not the processing, exporting and manufacturing of sugar that resonates for them, but the connection to the land on which they worked. The passage evokes all five of the reader's senses: we see the fields, the mill and the mountains; we can smell and taste the absinthe after rain, we hear the footsteps in the mud, and touch the rocks and the sugarcane. Only three White owners control the working lives of countless workers of color (presumably Indo-Mauritians in the novel but possibly Creole as well), yet it is not the owners to whom the mill belongs, but the workers. It is their point de "repère," it is where they stage their photographs and it returns to them in the end as we will see.

In the last scene of Pyamootoo's novel, the characters finally arrive at their destination, "Bénarès" Jimi cries out, immediately followed by Zelda who exclaims, "Les champs sont immenses," drawing the reader's eye again to the enormity of the sugarcane

fields. In this season, the sugarcane is in flower, lining the side of the long, straight road (90). Jimi then directs the passengers' attention to the chimney, asking Mina and Zelda what they think of it and Mina agrees with Nad's earlier remark, the sugar mill's chimney, with its spectral presence looming over the village, does in fact resemble a "monument aux morts" that gives her "des frissons dans le dos" (90). The gaze lowers from the "monument to the dead," symbolic of capitalism's waste to the floor of the old mill:

Du moulin lui-même, il ne restait plus que le sol. Il était fêlé par endroits, mais propre, comme s'il venait d'être lavé, nettoyé. « C'est là qu'on joue au foot », j'ai dit, « et avant chaque match, on enlève toute la paille qui nous vient des champs », et j'ai montré les poteaux. (91)

Not only has the soccer field beneath the "monument to the dead" been repurposed for the living, but has metamorphosed from a site of exploitative work into one of play. Only the floor of the factory has survived, "cracked but clean" due to the care of the townspeople. The surrounding fields continue to offer up their bounty, unusable dry straw that collects on the factory floor, but rather than harvesting, cutting, and processing the sugarcane as they once would have, now the amateur soccer players clean away the fallen canes so that they may play their sport. Although the chimney of the former sugar mill withstands destruction, refurbished by its previous owners to remind to the townspeople of their previous exploitation, by converting the former factory floor into a soccer field, the characters of Pyamootoo's novel reimagine the site and transform it into one of celebration. For the characters, soccer represents leisure, the freedom and energy to play sport because they are not exhausted from back-breaking labor, and it is uniquely their own.

"Simple et double et multiple à la fois"¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Devi, *Ève* 150

In the preceding sections, I have shown how Devi and Pyamootoo's characters find subtle ways to express agency and freedom that alter the conditions in which they live and trace alternative histories. Yet, the subjects remain embedded within the economic structures against which they struggle. The residents of Troumaron and Bénarès do not find success defined in economic terms nor do they explicitly escape poverty and violence. The novels pointedly do not offer the easy answers of happy, resolved endings precisely because such Global South success stories pander to the Global North's desire for the absolution of its overconsumption, exploitation and past as a colonial power and enslaver. *Ève de ses décombres* and *Bénarès* subvert the reader's expectation for closure, leaving their endings open to multiple interpretations, asking the reader to reimagine what waste constitutes.

Lucy Bell argues that “an altogether different theory of waste might emerge if we turn our attention towards the experience of those whose existences are marked principally not by the production or disposal of waste, but rather by experiences, livelihoods and lives in/with/of waste” (101). In keeping with this idea, Devi and Pyamootoo's novels grow from the fertile ground that the so-called wasted site produces, urging the reader to reimagine the meaning of what is discarded, of what is trash, and that we see and hear the bodies that are deemed disposable. The novels further ask that we explicitly rethink what constitutes a ruin or ruins as indicated by their respective titles. *Eve de ses décombres* is translated into English as *Eve out of Her Ruins*, but this translation erases the unusual French syntax of the original title. The English title adds the word “out,” presumably to make the title flow more easily in English, but a more literal translation would be “Eve of,” or perhaps “from her ruins.” In an interview with Thomas Spear, Devi uses the word “rubble,” another possible translation of “décombres,” and explains the ambiguous, truncated, even awkward title: “It's not a sentence, something is lacking in *Ève de ses décombres*: who is this girl, what is this rubble

she's coming out of, or from?" (32:00).¹⁴⁶ Rubble, ruins, debris, wreckage are all possible English translations of "décombres," and they all signal the key position that waste and its multiple iterations occupy in Devi's text. Pyamootoo's title is at first glance both less ambiguous than Devi's and less vulnerable to the pitfalls of translation. However, the name of Bénarès and its geographic reproduction evoke similar questions about pollution and waste. Benares (Varanasi) sits on the Ganges river, simultaneously one of the most sacred and most contaminated rivers in the world.

Devi's novel ends ambiguously with Sadiq calling the police to avert the full-scale riot that the members of his gang planned from the space of the abandoned factory (154). Sad offers to take the fall, to subvert Ève's fall, after she murders her teacher as revenge for the teacher's murder of Savita. Ève refuses: "Je n'ai pas besoin de toi" she insists to the end, reaffirming her autonomy (155). Ève takes Sad into her arms for the first time, and then Sad's final words as narrator, or perhaps as transcriber of the story, end the novel:

Je regarde les dégâts sur son corps. Elle a été sculptée comme une roche basaltique. Je ne comprends rien à la violence ; elle est là, partout. Un poison suspendu dans l'air. Mais j'ai au moins une certitude : pour elle, avec elle, pour une saison ou plusieurs, je suis prêt à aller en enfer. Tout le reste m'indiffère. Je passe la main sur sa nuque, sur sa tête rase. Même sous le muret, l'eau nous noie. Mais elle a un bon goût sur mes lèvres. (155)

Here Sad's words again evoke the imagery of waste, this time in a way that dialogues with what Bell conceptualizes as "living waste [...] a useful point of departure for a reconceptualization of waste that might simultaneously root itself in lived experiences of waste; in 'empty-belly' and/or peripheral contexts; in human lives and other-than-human life

¹⁴⁶ Ananda Devi and Thomas C. Spear. "Ananda Devi: Literary Talks Series."

forms; and in understandings of waste in all of its materiality and agency” (117). The “dégâts” damage, on Ève’s body are multiple: we can imagine the literal traces of her teacher’s blood and bone, a type of human waste, that cover her after the shooting, the bruises and marks that she bears from the violence of her father’s blows, and her shaven head also a kind of violence she has wrought against this symbol of her femininity.¹⁴⁷ But she is not a “wasted life” to borrow Zigmunt Bauman’s phrase. Ève becomes the antithesis of the disposability of *déchets*, but is rather a “roche basaltique,” an enduring image that is part of the materiality of the island itself, forged from a volcano. As Waters puts it, “the identification of the female protagonist with the island’s natural geology – particularly with the latent, destructive power of the volcano – is underlined in the geological and seismic imagery repeatedly used to describe Ève’s body” (101). For Waters, the female characters find a sense of belonging, one that eludes them in Troumaron, in the island’s natural landscape, in its volcanos and its marine imagery (101).¹⁴⁸ Belonging to the island gives Ève agency, enabling her “not only to escape, but actively to destroy, the island’s repressive, man-made social and spatial structures” (101).

The “repressive, man-made and spatial structures” of which Waters speaks are yet another way to express the “brutal angles” that order the space of Troumaron. By identifying Ève with the physical landscape of the island, Devi unites her character with the earth in a way that explicitly rejects the right angles and cold simplicity of the Brutalist building, or the “angles néfastes” of Troumaron. Instead, Ève is “sculptée” like the columnar shape of black, basaltic rock. Despite the damage to Eve and to the island, the violence that Eve has suffered and the environmental violence that the island experiences, both emerge at the end of the narrative if not as triumphant, as enduring.

¹⁴⁷ See Bragard and Lindo p. 241.

¹⁴⁸ Waters is careful to note the essentialist trope that equates femininity with the natural world but argues that Devi attempts to reclaim this ground with her female protagonists (*Mauritian Novel* 101-2).

Devi discusses the ambiguity of her novel and explains that she intentionally left spaces of possibility in her narrative: “J’ai voulu laisser quelques indices dans ce roman pour montrer que ce n’est pas un meurtre inutile, qu’il y a malgré tout des voies d’ouverture possibles dans *Ève de ses décombres*” (Devi and Ravi 271). She points to the fact that the reader might imagine Clélio being exonerated with the help of his new lawyer and that we might imagine Ève getting off lightly due to “circonstances atténuées” (271). The last sentences of the novel also gesture toward an opening that echoes Mbembe’s call for “la protection du vivant.” The last act of both Ève and Sad is the protection of the other. They both offer their lives and freedom to save the other and in doing so, save themselves. I read this last scene as representative of the novel’s greater meaning, a metaphoric example of what Mbembe describes as “devenir autre:”

“*Devenir autre*, franchir les limites, pouvoir renaître, une autre fois, en d’autres lieux et en une multitude de figures autres, une infinité d’autres sommés par principe d’engendrer d’autres flux de vie—telle était l’exigence fondamentale, au sein d’une structure du monde qui n’était, à proprement parler, ni verticale, ni horizontale, ni oblique, mais *réticulaire*.” (Emphasis original 224)

The relationships between the characters and the island are not vertical or horizontal. In this last scene both Sad and Ève belong to the physical space of the island, to nature, rather than to the “brutal angles” that structure Troumaron. The island, with its powerful symbolism of water and drowning, has the last word. Even under the “muret,” a wall, a man-made structure, the water, in this case rainfall, drowns Ève and Sad. Whatever happens after the novel’s end, the reader is left certain that the natural forces of the island will triumph over artificially imposed spatial divisions: that the island’s volcanic flows and rushing water will eventually erode all of the “brutal angles” of Troumaron.

Rather than the imagined tower blocks that Devi imports to Mauritius's slums, Pyamootoo's characters inhabit the single-story, dilapidated structures that characterize the poor neighborhoods of the island. Yet, nature and the island's resilience similarly frame Pyamootoo's closing image. Nature has reclaimed the sugar factory, grass growing over the factory floor. Pyamootoo's novel ends with ambiguity as the characters remain in the car looking out, beyond their soccer field, at a panoramic view of B  nar  s: "Derri  re l'un d'eux, on pouvait apercevoir tout B  nar  s," Nad comments. The last image that remains imprinted on the reader is a cinematic shot of the town, from the perspective of the car and framed by the goal posts of *their* converted soccer field: a reversal of the tourist's postcard, reshot from the gaze of the locals. Devi and Pyamootoo allow their characters, who are the outcasts, the throwaways and the waste of global capitalism, to finish their stories on their own terms, beyond the time of the narrative, leaving the reader in a state of uncomfortable uncertainty. Uncertainty, ambiguity and discomfort characterize the affective responses that both the characters and the reader experience, within and as spectators of these novels. In the next chapter, I look at how these same two authors exploit the sensorial realm to reimagine agency and subjectivity.

V. SENSORIAL SUBVERSION, SEX-WORKERS AND SUBALTERN BODIES

In her third film, and second 16mm film in black and white, *Onanism* (1969), Malani explodes the taboos that regulate and foreclose female sexuality in India by explicitly depicting female desire and masturbation. The black and white film shows a woman in black on a black and white striped bed cover with a white bedsheet between her legs. The film shows a series of shots in which the woman writhes uncontrollably, echoing hysteria as much as pleasure (Pijnappel 94). The woman's face is visible only in the last shot, "upside down with eyes wide open, engaging the viewer with a brazen gaze challenging the taboo" (Duplaix and Pijnappel 208). Malani explains that although her films were also exercises in artistic experimentation "the main motive was to stand up to society's orthodox mores regarding female sexuality" (Pijnappel 94). The repression of female sexuality is certainly not unique to India—the subjugation of women being a universal that Malani critiques within her native culture and by looking outward toward Western societies that purport to give women a more equal role while simultaneously reinforcing the patriarchy that subjugates them. Malani's work deliberately provokes, just as Appanah, Devi and Pyamootoo's writing provoke, jarring the reader/viewer's sensibilities to critique injustice. Yet, Malani's critique highlights female pleasure and agency whereas the writers of this corpus portray a more complicated relationship between sexual victimization and sexual agency.

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* traces a genealogy of sexuality in European society.¹⁴⁹ He opens his work with the claim that Victorian sexual morality drove pleasure, or any expression of sexuality outside of the conjugal norm, into the "brothel and the mental hospital" (4). Then and now, the brothel becomes an illicit place, where societal norms do not apply, outside of the common morality and consequent restrictions of a given society.

¹⁴⁹ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*. Vintage. 1980.

Although sex-work often connotes exploitation, anti-feminism and violence, it can also provide agency and even serve as a path to empowerment for its practitioners.¹⁵⁰ This agency does not necessarily negate the experiences of trauma and exploitation that may also be present in sex-work, but it demonstrates how alternative strategies of working and living deserve recognition as legitimate professions and forms of expression. Women who work in brothels might be shunned, yet in patriarchal societies, they also exercise power that they could not in socially accepted spaces.¹⁵¹ An example of the prohibited body entering into just such a space, the space of aristocracy, was a notorious courtesan marrying into the *noblesse* as Carol Mossman documents in her book that traces the rise of nineteenth-century French courtesan, La Mogador, who married to become the Comtesse de Chabrilhon. Mossman examines the power and agency that the “prostitute” figure deploys in Céleste de Chabrilhon’s novels to destabilize patriarchal structures of power, and how the Comtesse reconfigures agency through the writing of her own memoirs and in counter to those who wished to silence her (5).¹⁵²

Not all sex-workers are women of course, and male and non-binary sex-workers merit attention and study. In this chapter however, I am primarily interested in how the experience of those who identify as women, specifically those who are already marginalized in society by reason of sex and race, might use sex-work and the space of the brothel to exercise autonomy and choice. It is also women who disproportionately suffer from sex-trafficking, violence and rape, so any discussion of agency within sex-work must simultaneously acknowledge the real, high risks inherent to sex-work.

¹⁵¹ See the edited volume *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature* (1984) for a study on the role of the prostitute figure in modern literature and *The Literary Companion to Sex: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (1992) for a more comprehensive anthology of sex in literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. See Claire Soloman’s 2014 work *Fiction of a Bad Life* for a more recent analysis of the prostitute figure in Latin American literature.

¹⁵² Carol Mossman. “Worlds Apart: Mapping Prostitution and the Demi-Monde.” *Writing with a Vengeance*, University of Toronto Press, 2009, p. 43–,

I locate sex-work within the broader framework of what I will refer to as the sensorial realm. By sensorial realm, I mean the embodied—acts, speech, and gestures—of the characters, objects, spaces in the texts and of the text itself, and the affective—desires, feelings, and needs—of these same characters, objects, spaces and text. I examine the sensorial realm as an alternative field of being and knowing that challenges the heteronormative and patriarchal power structures that continue to inform postcolonial Caribbean and Indian Ocean societies. Mimi Sheller conceptualizes “erotic agency” as a way to think about embodied forms of resistance and in this chapter, and I explore the power and the limits of this agency in four narratives.¹⁵³ Sheller elaborates that “the concept of erotic agency [...] offers alternative ways to think about the deep-seated relation between the self, the social, and the sacred; agency, structure, and the metaphysical; autonomy, subordination, and divinity; and the body, the state, and the spirit” (47). Scheller expands the erotic to encompass multiple domains ranging from the metaphysical to the embodied, and it is within this broader definition that I locate the textual examples of this chapter. These texts explore the exchange of bodies for capital (though not always in the explicit realm of sex-work), sexual agency in the domestic sphere and in the space of the culturally forbidden, and sexual violence in the systems of indentured servitude and slavery.

First, I briefly return to the two works of chapter IV, Pyamootoo’s *Bénarès* and Dévi’s *Ève de ses décombres*, this time with a focus on the authors’ depictions of sex-work. Both novels activate the sensorial realm as a space of contention, a theme that I will continue to examine in Devi’s *Indian Tango* (2006), set in contemporary India, and Appanah’s *Les Rochers de Poudre d’Or* (2003), set in nineteenth century India and Mauritius. These Indian Ocean novels portray multiple iterations of sexual empowerment, sexual exploitation and

¹⁵³ Mimi Sheller. *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. Duke UP, 2012.

violence, and they avoid the binary simplicities of framing all sex-work in the terms of abuser/victim. As Scheller proposes, these texts expand the definition of erotic agency to encompass multiple forms beyond the strictly “sexual.” These novels focus on the women who instrumentalize sex and the sensorial to transgress the systems of power and control—patriarchal, traditional Hindu society, postcolonial poverty, and the colonial system of indentured labor—that attempt to subjugate them. The novels also tell the stories of the colonizers, abusers and enslavers who use sexual violence to dominate subaltern women. These two ideas are in constant tension and opposition as the women are neither portrayed as solely victims or as completely empowered through their “erotic agency.” What then are the limits of agency in the domain of sex work? Throughout these novels, agency and victimhood are inextricably linked as the authors repeatedly pose the above question, ultimately exposing the societal faults that make sex-work necessary.

Power and Performativity in Port Louis

Chapter IV focused on space—architecture, environmental waste, abandoned buildings—and the effects of spaces on their inhabitants in *Bénarès* and *Ève*. Derelict spaces alienate their inhabitants and create the circumstances from which sex-work springs as a viable alternative to the hopelessness that the housing project or abandoned factory engenders. Devi and Pyamootoo’s novels represent sex-work as a means of escape, and although neither author romanticizes the profession, they both humanize it and push back against the trope of women as powerless victims. Pyamootoo’s novel challenges the idealized “coolie romance,”¹⁵⁴ the narrative of Hindu-Indo-Mauritian economic progress and success: it foregrounds the unemployment and sex-work that also expresses the Indo-Mauritian

¹⁵⁴ Srilata Ravi writes that “the economic miracle achieved by the island state and the development of Hindu political power combine to form the powerful national narrative of coolie romance” (3-4).

experience and then through the sex-work transaction, tells the story of both female agency and exploitation. Likewise, as I showed in chapter IV, Devi's protagonist Ève is both predator and prey, transgressor and victim, as she uses the men who simultaneously victimize her.

Sex-work then is fundamentally ambiguous: it rejects the traditional feminine roles of wife/mother/sister/daughter and the accompanying dependence, and it reinforces female sexual and financial subservience, often to a male, but sometimes female pimp. The ambiguity of sex-work is reproduced textually in both novels, especially evident in the unexplained questions, unfinished endings and ambiguous images that close both narratives. The physicality of both the island's topography and of the bodies of the female sex-workers emblemize contradictions: those of sexual difference, of innocence and knowing, of victim and predator.

The closing image in *Ève de ses décombres* is of Ève's body, "Elle a été sculptée comme une roche basaltique,"—a body that is both boyishly anti-feminine and hyper-sexualized—unified with the basalt of the island (Devi 155, Waters 102).¹⁵⁵ Ailbhe O'Flaherty, in an essay in the collected work *Écritures Mauriciennes au féminin*, discusses how, in another novel, Devi collapses her eponymous protagonist in *Soupir* with the topography of the island in a "voyeuristic or scopophilic representation of the island topography as female" that highlights the tension between fragility and strength in both the female body and the island (47). Similar to her description of her character Soupir, Devi renders Ève's body both as a weapon and as abused, a physical representation of the tension between sexual autonomy and exploitation.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ As Waters suggests, the association of women's bodies with geographic spaces is not new and reiterates the exoticized and oversexualized trope of the creole woman but the Devi's usage of the trope runs counter to its historical usage from the male gaze (*Mauritian Novel* 102).

¹⁵⁶ Waters cites the passage in which Ève describes her abused body, "Je suis en négociation permanente. Mon corps est une escale" (102).

Ève's body is contradictory, collapsing opposing traits onto one corporal self and thus upsetting notions of sexual difference. Amaleena Damlé thinks with Deleuze and Guattari, deploying their concept of nomadism, along with its subsequent feminist interpretations, to read Devi's work. She looks at how both Ève and Subhadra of *Indian Tango* claim multiplicity to refuse the "binary categories of sexual difference" (159).¹⁵⁷ To describe the process for Ève, she states: "Ève, whose body is circulated within the consumerist patriarchal world she inhabits, seems to evade the imposition of confinement through the appropriation of violence inflicted upon her" (160). Damlé posits that Ève appropriates violence and then becomes an agent of violence, and that her transgressive relationship with Savita ultimately illuminates the connection between Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism and Luce Irigaray's "fecundity of the caress" (161). Ève's sex-work, belonging to the "phallogocentric logic of dominance," enables her to transform into a predator herself, subjugating her clients and usurping the traditionally "male" role of client/oppressor/victimizer. At the same time her work provides power, agency and access. It is the empowering relationships that she shares with both Savita and Sad that unravel the heteronormative and patriarchal world in which she lives (160-1).

In keeping with many scholars, Damlé argues that it is Ève's relationship with Savita that is "truly transformative" because it subverts the male dominated space of Troumaron. For Damlé, Ève and Savita's relationship primarily serves to illuminate the "multiplicity of sexual difference" (163). The multiplicity of sexual difference in turn belongs to the sensorial realm, again deploying the affective and the embodied as primary modes of destabilization and bringing us back to Scheller's erotic agency. Although Ève's sex-work seems to exist in

¹⁵⁷ Amaleena Damlé. *The Becoming of the Body: Contemporary Women's Writing in French*. Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

counterpoint to her relationship with Savita, the former seemingly violent and exploitative while the latter incarnates desire and subjectivity, both are examples of erotic agency.

Although subjected to multiple acts of violence, often recounted in Ève's own words, Ève remains sole proprietor of her body, even if this requires that she seal parts of herself off:

La nuit je vais hanter l'asphalte. Les rendez-vous sont pris. On m'emmène. On me ramène. Je reste froide. Si quelque chose en moi est changé, ce n'est pas la partie la plus vraie. Je me protège. Je sais me protéger des hommes. Le prédateur c'est moi (22).

"Someone" or "they" (*on*) picks her up and brings her back, *emmener* and *ramener* as two reciprocal and ordinary actions, taking place in the present, perhaps daily and with the banality that one might use to describe a chore or errand. Her sentences are short with no connections between them, the parataxis limiting any appeal to the reader's emotions. Eve's tone is cold and clinical, that of an observer rather than participator. What she describes is similar to how victims dissociate from abuse and shows up again in the text's italicized passages. These passages have no indicated speaker, but we presume the voice to be either Ève's psyche or an omniscient narrator, and they affirm the trauma of Eve's encounters in a way that Ève's passages, her conscious thoughts, refuse to acknowledge. For example, in this unknown voice, the reader discovers how Ève struggles to eliminate the memories of the sexual transactions that become more and more violent as she continues: "Tu marches pour te défaire de la mémoire. Tu ouvres la bouche et laisses entrer un vent brûlure qui carbonise la menace de souvenir" (32). Ève's subconscious speaks in the second person, further evidence of the dissociation that she uses to survive. She must not only burn to cinders (*carboniser*) the threat of her memories (*souvenir*), but dismantle her *memory* (*mémoire*) itself, almost as if she must erase, or at least suppress, all of who she is and what she has experienced (Tyagi 108).

Yet in the first person, Ève casts herself not just as remote and unmoved, but the victimizer herself. She has no pimp, and although she lives more dangerously due to this lack of male protection, she retains autonomy over her clients and types of transactions. Bragard and Lindo describe Ève's disassociation from herself and body as "une femme qui doit devenir autre pour ne pas être aussi facilement saisissable (247). In Sad's limited view, she doesn't *need* to sell sex, but chooses to: "Mais elle? Ne me dites pas qu'il n'y avait pas une autre voie, pour elle (*Ève* 36). Sad cannot understand why Ève—unlike the desperate migrant sex-workers without papers whom he observes on the streets of Port Louis, "elles, elles n'ont pas le choix,"—would choose to sell sex to earn the money she needs to escape Troumaron rather than attempt other means like Sad himself. Sad plans to use his scholastic ability and poetry to escape while also living a double life.¹⁵⁸ He is blind to the reality of Ève's desperation, the italicized voice explains addressing Ève, "Tu n'as pas le choix" (32). Sad's gender, his belonging to a gang, afford him certain rights and privileges that he takes for granted but that Ève cannot access. The only other type of labor in which a female character engages in the text is the physical labor of sewing at the garment factory. Clélio's mother, older than Ève, ruined her eyesight working there and was ultimately cast off as disposable "déchets." Despite the differences between the two types of physical labor, sex-work endangers the body just as the garment factory did before its closure.

For Ève, the different physical labor of sex-work becomes necessary, her only material asset, when she realizes its power: "Pour la première fois, mon cartable n'est plus vide. J'avais une monnaie d'échange: moi" (20). Instead of her cartable being filled with the schoolbooks and homework of a child, it is filled with her body, her currency of exchange. Ève is a child throughout the novel, she is seventeen at the end, and her sex-work is a crime, making any discussion of her having agency legally impossible. As a child she *cannot* have

¹⁵⁸ See chapter IV

agency when it comes to having sex with adult men, and her “acts” are all instances of rape, no matter how the character describes them.

Devi subtends her novel with this theme of underage and illegal sex-work without ever explicitly naming it. The first description of Ève’s body comes from Sad and he describes her in the past tense, as a child: “On l’appelait le squelette parce qu’elle était si maigre, mais c’est aussi pour masquer une affection inavouée” (13). On the next page, returning to the present tense he describes her differently, as a teenager and object of sexual attraction: “Ève, à la chevelure de nuit écumeuse, quand elle passe dans ses jeans moulants, les autres ricanent et grincent des dents, mais moi, j’ai envie de m’agenouiller” (16). Sad, as I mentioned in chapter IV, worships Ève. Although it is Rimbaud who fascinates Sad, here he gestures to Baudelaire’s poem “La Chevelure,” to capture her effect. Like in Baudelaire’s poem, Eve’s mane of hair conjures the black of night and the froth of the sea: “Dans ce noir océan où l’autre est enfermé /...Cheveux bleus pavillon de ténèbres tendues” (Baudelaire 58).¹⁵⁹ Ève is mixed-race, with Asian and African heritage, like the object of Baudelaire’s poem, “La langoureuse Asie et la brulante Afrique,” but in Sad’s words, the reference loses the French poet’s orientalist gaze. Sad wants to embody the French, lyric poetic tradition just as his life in Troumaron feels completely disconnected from the impractical pursuit of beauty in art. Yet, by appropriating Rimbaud and Baudelaire as his own, Sad creates a new aesthetic form that is unique to his world.¹⁶⁰

Unlike Sad, the other young men are unmoved by Ève and seem to have progressed from a protective role toward “le squelette” to a kind of derisive desire. Ève describes her own physique and its impact on her relationships with the boys of Troumaron in much the same way as Sad: “Parce que j’étais minuscule, parce que j’étais maigre, parce que mes bras

¹⁵⁹ Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs du Mal* (ed. de 1861). Gallimard, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter IV for further discussion of Sad’s poetic graffiti.

et mes jambes étaient raides comme des dessins d'enfant, les garçons un peu plus grands me protégeaient" (18). She describes her first sexual encounter (an illegal assault although she does not present it this way) and how the boy caresses her undeveloped breasts and how she disassociated from herself and body: "Moi je ne ressentais rien. J'existais en dehors de mon corps. Je n'avais rien à voir avec lui" (19). In this passage, the child-like asexuality of Ève's body creates an obscene dissonance for the reader. The assault of the boy's touch makes the reader profoundly uncomfortable, a witness to rape and the subsequent trauma of a minor.

At seventeen, her age in the present of the novel, Ève is far from fulfilling the trope of a voluptuous courtesan, "je suis transparente" she tells the reader, retaining a skeletal build, "le squelette a une vie secrète gravée sur son ventre" (21). Her physique also gestures toward a resistance to gender normativity: "Je crois que je ressemble à beaucoup de choses, organiques, minérales, aux mues étranges, mais je ne ressemble pas à une femme. Seulement au reflet d'une femme. Seulement à l'écho d'une femme. Seulement à l'idée déformée que l'on fait une femme" (60). She does not look like a woman, and despite the condemnation evident in her words and in addition to the doubling and splitting of herself that I have already discussed, "au reflet d'une femme" also evokes her relationship with Savita that transgresses the heteronormative, dominant and patriarchal culture of Troumaron. Despite her slenderness, "un corps si frêle, si maigre, si cassable; un corps à chérir et à détruire," she possesses strength that counteracts the fragility of her build (61). Her body may be a commodity, but also has a "surface de pierre" and "métal au coeur" becoming a weapon when Ève deploys it as such (61). As we have seen, Devi foregrounds the harsh angles of Troumaron's architecture to illustrate the harmful effects of housing projects on their residents. Similarly, Ève's skeletal shape has no curves but is all angles. Yet, Ève's corporality is compared to rock and metal that refuses to break under the weight of Troumaron's impersonal and cold architecture that relegates its inhabitants to material:

“Architecture et politique sont donc affaire de disposition en règle de matériaux et de corps, affaire de quantités, de volumes, d’étendues et de mesures, de distribution et modulation de la force et de l’énergie (Mbembe, *Brutalisme* 8) Rather than disappearing as suggested by words like “transparente,” “reflet,” and “echo,” Ève’s body is grounded in the island, firmly planted and as we saw above, possessing the hardness of volcanic rock.

Ève reverses the abuser/victim and male/female dynamic when she makes Savita’s murderer, her teacher/client, kneel with a gun in his mouth.¹⁶¹ She also evokes the Hindu destroyer goddess Kali. As Hugh Urban points out, in the British colonial imagination, “The Indian female was imagined to be excessively sexual and seductive, insatiable in her carnal appetites. Embodied in the horrific image of the violently sexual goddess Kālī, India was at once seductively mysterious and bound up with ‘debauchery, violence and death’” (56). Urban refers to the Occidental reception of *Tantra*, a form of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism that is often associated with taboo sexual practices and licentiousness, and how this depiction of *Tantra* arose with the rise of imperialism and became a category produced by Orientalism. Tantra is also often associated with temple courtesans and a mixing of the sacred and profane. In Western Orientalist imagination, Kali is often seen as sexual, frightening and depraved. Seen from a different perspective, Kali is one aspect of the mother, the destroyer and consort of Shiva and the protector of the innocent (Urban 6). Although Devi’s novel takes place in Mauritius and not in India, Hinduism is a principal religion on the island and Devi often weaves Hindu mythology into her narratives.¹⁶² Ève then, as the embodiment of goddess Kali would activate collective knowledge and heritage for a Mauritian reader and seem familiar to any reader of Devi. When Ève kills Savita’s murderer, she incarnates Kali, destroying him to avenge Savita and protect the innocent. With her hair shaved off she

¹⁶¹ The phallic symbolism and reversal of the oral sex act has been amply analyzed, see Lionnet *Writing Women*, Tyagi and Waters.

¹⁶² See chapter 8 of Lionnet’s *Writing Women*

becomes a “lionne” and as Ève tells the reader, “Je suis devenue invisible, à peine humaine, l’incarnation d’une volonté qui, seule, parvient à me maintenir debout à me mouvoir” (134). The removal of this quintessential aspect of femininity, her *chevelure* or her mane, paradoxically transforms her into a lioness/goddess. In her own words, she is no longer human, but the incarnation of some other force that drives her. Like the goddess Kali, with her opposing sides, creator and destroyer, and like mythic, sacred temple courtesans who access a certain power while also experiencing exploitation and subjugation, Ève inhabits a space of contradiction. She is at once fragile and powerful as paradox and ambiguity characterize her persona and her character’s arc in the novel (Urban 8). The novel leaves Ève’s outcome uncertain. The last passage is written in her first-person voice and opens a moment of meta-awareness in which she seems to refer to the novel of which she is a part: “Quelle est la suite de cette histoire? Sad c’est ton boulot, ça, que de raconter” (153). Yet despite this ambiguity and her imminent arrest, at the end of the novel, the reader is left with the feeling that Ève has nonetheless triumphed, that she has exacted her revenge and that justice has been done. In the lawless environment of Troumaron, where the law does not protect children from sexual assault and abuse, Ève takes the law into her own hands. Ève describes her feelings after killing her teacher:

Il a rassemblé tous les autres derrière ses yeux fermés. Je sors dans la pluie qui s’est mise à tomber. Elle est lente et tiède. Elle mouille mon crâne pratiquement nu, colle mes vêtements à ma peau. Elle est si abondante que des flaques naissent à mes pieds, s’élargissent et les noient. (153)

Whatever may come, Ève has been washed clean by the pouring rain. Not washed clean because her choice of sex-work is dirty, rather she is absolved of murdering her teacher. She destroys him to protect and avenge the innocent. He stands in for all the other abusers (Il a rassemblé tous les autres derrière ses yeux fermés). She is therefore exculpated as evidenced

by the rainwater that is slow and warm, evoking the loving cleansing of a gentle shower. Even the choice of the verb “noyer,” coupled with “naître” the image of birth, suggests the absolution of baptism and rebirth rather than the violence of death and drowning.

In *Bénarès*, sex-work foregrounds the novel’s plot, symbolically articulating an embodied performance of Mauritius’s economic inequalities, with the sex-work transaction highlighting the gendered, racial and class hierarchies that undermine the illusion of the nation “arc-en-ciel.” Pyamootoo tells a story of postcolonial trauma with the sex-work transaction epitomizing the commodification of the subaltern body. To describe the subaltern body, the author writes in long and descriptive sentences. He focuses on the faces, expressions and body language of the two sex-workers, Mina and Zelda, but leaves out the details that would define their bodies. Pyamootoo purposefully leaves out the more voyeuristic details that one might anticipate or expect when introducing sex-work into the narrative. Like in *Ève*, a similar tension exists between the agency of sex-workers and the exploitative nature of their work, leaving the reader with the same unanswered questions about autonomy, exploitation and agency. Unlike in *Ève*, no sexual acts are described despite the narrative that centers on prostitution. The first introduction to the two women occurs after the three male characters have searched the streets of Port Louis for the sole purpose of finding female sex-workers. Before they succeed in locating the women however, we see Mayi have a brief emotional and angry outburst that is never fully explained in the story, but that seems to relate to his frustration at the difficulty of finding women to hire for sex:

“Et les femmes?” a-t-il demandé, et il a regardé furtivement tout autour de lui, comme s’il voulait éviter mon regard. Puis il a fermé les yeux et baissé la tête, et j’ai cru un moment qu’il s’était endormi. Quand il a rouvert les yeux, il donnait l’impression de se réveiller d’un affreux cauchemar, il avait tout le visage qui était livide. Ses lèvres s’agitaient sans articuler le moindre son et ses yeux erraient et clignotaient comme

ceux d'un homme anxieux, traqué. "Je pensais que c'était facile," et il m'a souri sans desserrer ses lèvres qui continuent à s'agiter. (30)

The passage indicates that Mayi has experienced or inflicted grave trauma, for he seems to suffer from something akin to post-traumatic stress disorder. His eyes dart around him, he seems to sleep and then wake from an unseen nightmare. He seems chased by invisible demons. Nad tries to calm Mayi down, wondering why he has become so upset over "pas grand-chose." The episode takes on a more disturbingly sexual turn when Mayi grabs his genitals as a kind of self-soothing mechanism: "Puis soudain il a agrippé son sexe et l'a caressé en le remontant lentement: 'Il n'y que les marins qui en (les femmes) ont.' Il a répété la phrase au milieu de son rire, tandis qu'il défroissait son pantalon quelques tapes. Tout son corps trépidait, agité d'un tremblement régulier qui semblait maintenir en équilibre, comme un balancier" (31). What had been in the text a somewhat indifferent search for sex-workers takes a pathological turn, suggesting that, for Mayi at least, the compulsion to find women for the evening is rooted in sexual deprivation, something more psychologically complex than simple desire.

Pyamootoo neither presents his male characters as good or bad, virtuous or immoral, and although the author presents sex-work in relatively neutral terms, Mayi's outburst signals that a hidden violence subtends the transaction. The link between violence and sex-work then, surfaces here in Mayi's outburst rather than explicitly, like in the abuse enacted by Ève's clients. Perhaps we can attribute Mayi's outburst to nervousness at the thought of his first sexual encounter with a woman, yet his agitation more closely resembles a psychotic episode than adolescent nervousness. Binita Mehta interprets this passage to be Mayi's first trip to the capital and first experience with women, citing as her evidence an interview in which Pyamootoo states that his novel is one of initiation in which these young men have their first sexual experience (50, 61). She further suggests that Pyamootoo conflates love with

the commodity exchange of sex for money, but while I agree that Pyamootoo writes from a male gaze that sometimes flattens the subjectivity of his women characters, he does not equate sex-work with love. The author uses the vocabulary of trauma and mental illness, “anxieux,” “traqué,” and “cauchemar,” versus the language of love or even sexual fantasy. Mayi’s unbalanced reaction to the search for sex-workers *highlights* rather than obfuscates the commodity exchange. Mayi feels entitled to easily find sex-workers and his anger is rooted in his deflected expectation as a customer.

When Nad, Mayi and Jimi finally arrive at the house of “Maman,” the madam who runs the brothel, they encounter two young female sex workers, Mina and Zelda. Maman, parades her merchandise, women who are no more than goods to be exchanged for capital, in front of the young men: “Deux femmes sont entrées dans la pièce et l’ont traversé comme pour un défilé. Elles ont marché lentement, sans nous regarder, le port décidé et les bras le long du corps, peut-être pour nous laisser le loisir de l’admirer” (35). The women do not look at the young men at first but walk slowly with resolute demeanor and arms at their sides to allow the men to admire them. They do not engage or interact with the men but seem merely to wait for Maman to conduct the financial transaction that will allow these men to purchase their services. However, as if to negate the image of these women as mere goods to be bought and sold, when Jimi then asks Maman how much she wants for the women, it is Mina who responds, “sept cent roupies par femme” (37). Jimi immediately counters with “six cents” and then it is Zelda who replies, “Sept cent...c’est pour toute une nuit, il ne faut pas oublier” (37). The women do in fact have agency over the price they demand, belying the first impression of them as merely goods on offer with no voice.

The narrator intercedes into this process of bargaining, “marchander,” and he agrees that the price of seven-thousand rupees for each woman is “honnête.” (39) The narrator explains that each woman must give a percentage to Maman, probably fifty percent of their

earnings, and he further insists that the price is fair given that these women perform a “*métier qui n’est pas commode*” (39). Even though the narrator is in the process of hiring these women, and is aroused by the prospect—he explains: “*J’ai mis la main dans la poche de mon pantalon et j’ai cru un moment que je ne pourrais plus la retirer, tellement je bandais*”—he is also aware of the exploitive nature of this transaction in which he has just participated (41). He acknowledges that the “job” of these prostitutes is “not easy,” (“*un métier qui n’est pas commode*”) and should thus be justly compensated (39). The question then remains, if the women’s job is hard and the young men understand this, why do they continue the transaction? Why do they feel entitled to hire these women and subject them to an act that they consciously understand to be uncomfortable, hard and difficult for them? Why do the male characters count their own right to pleasure as justification for subjecting women to perform something difficult? These questions are perhaps too facile, explaining why Pyamootoo does not ask or answer them, as they are rooted in the unequal power dynamics that underpin the sex-work transaction. As Rebecca Solnit argues in reference to the recent incel movement: “Sex is a commodity, accumulation of this commodity enhances a man’s status, and every man has a right to accumulation, but women are in some mysterious ways obstacles to this, and they are therefore the enemy as well as the commodity” (cited in Srinivasan 119). Pyamootoo’s male characters unthinkingly perform the misogyny implicit in the act of purchasing sex even as they are aware of it. Pyamootoo interrogates the formation of male desire in his novel as based on deprivation and need. He then critiques the sex work transaction via the interpersonal connection that develops between the characters—the human connection that ultimately undermines the economic logic of the commodity exchange.

When Mina and Zelda enter the room, it is in much the same way as enslaved peoples who were once paraded before their prospective buyers, yet Pyamootoo withholds corporeal descriptions of them as if to insist that the women are *not* solely merchandise. Instead, the

insistence on their expressions reinforces their humanity over commodity. Zelda has a “beau sourire” and Mina “plutôt l’air triste” (36). Mina exudes exhaustion, as if recovering from an illness but Zelda seems younger, “avec une expression songeuse et malicieuse à la fois” (36). The narrator tells us that Zelda has “un regard si profond” that he feels compelled to turn his eyes away from her (37). Unlike in *Ève*, the sexual act never enters the narrative. Although the reader might expect that it occurs after the novel’s end, by omitting this final scene, Pyamootoo deliberately derails his reader’s expectations. He withholds the tantalizing and voyeuristic elements of sex-work, playing with the reader’s frustration, and instead privileges small moments of empathy and tenderness between the characters. Why does Pyamootoo choose the pursuit of sex-workers as the premise for his novel that seems to focus more on diasporic memory and the legacies of globalization, than on the specific plight of sex-workers? Perhaps because sex-work, as Amia Srinivasan puts it, is a “deeply unequal transaction—one scarred by patriarchy as well as by White supremacy, poverty, and colonialism” (153).¹⁶³

Srinivasan’s book, *The Right to Sex*, contains a series of essays about pornography, consent, power and desire, that reevaluate a century of feminist scholarship from a twenty-first century perspective. She ultimately asks what the consequences are of expecting a “capitalist, carceral state” to enforce laws that are supposed to protect those most marginalized by that same state, and thus she objects to anti-prostitution feminist’s efforts to criminalize sex-work because these laws tend to harm sex-workers rather than create systemic change (155). Srinivasan fiercely defends the right of sex-workers to better wages and legal protections while recognizing the power differential of exploitation and subjugation that facilitates sex work, stating: “So long as women need money to pay their bills and feed

¹⁶³ Amia Srinivasan. *The Right to Sex*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2021.

their children, so long as sex-work is better than available alternatives, and so long as women's subordination is eroticized, there will be prostitution" (155). The author "dwells [...] in discomfort and ambivalence" throughout much of the book as she examines the contradictions within feminism. One such contradiction she discerns in the contemporary feminist reluctance to interrogate desire outside of the sphere of consent—the idea that "anything goes" as long as both adults consent:

Yet it would be disingenuous to make nothing of the convergence between sex positivity and liberalism in their shared reluctance to interrogate the formation of our desires. Third-wave feminists are right to say, for example, that sex work is work, and can be better work than menial labor undertaken by most women. And they are right to say that what sex workers need are legal and material protections, safety and security, not rescue or rehabilitation. But to understand what sort of work sex work is—just what physical and psychical acts are being bought and sold, and why it is overwhelmingly women who do it, and overwhelmingly men who pay for it—surely we have to say something about the political formation of male desire. (83)

Pyamootoo's novel does not delve into the "political formation" of his male character's desire, except to gesture toward sexual deprivation as one driving factor. Nowhere in his narrative does he interrogate the premise that it is completely natural, even healthy, that his three protagonists go to the capital city to purchase prostitutes. Sex work is largely symbolic in the text, a representative of the larger themes of postcolonial disappointment and the longing of diasporic peoples, but sex work in and of itself is never examined. This is why there is no real examination of the psychic or physical trauma that the women in the story might experience. Unlike in Devi's *Ève*, where the reader enters into the complex relationship that the character has with her profession, in *Bénarès*, the author glosses over trauma in service of an anti-globalist, albeit ambiguous, story of remembering and connection. The

male character's "manque" (need or withdrawal) comes to signify the collapse of the promised postcolonial Mauritian economic miracle, the impotence of unemployment mirroring the sexual deprivation that these young male characters experience. At the end of the novel however, by not engaging in sexual acts, the characters subvert the market logic that commodifies women even as the characters manifest and reinscribe patriarchy.

India to Mauritius: Temporal and Geographic Migrations

If Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* and Pyamootoo's *Bénarès* explore the inconsistencies and ambiguities of sex-work, empowerment and exploitation, Devi's *Indian Tango* explores another aspect of forbidden or elicit desire: caste transgression. Appanah's *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or*, on the other hand, portrays violent sexual assault as a weapon of colonization and economic exploitation. To analyze how *Indian Tango* and *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or* depict bodies and the economic systems that these bodies subvert, I first return to the continuing presence of the caste system in both India and Mauritius. As I already demonstrated in chapter III, Devi's novel *Indian Tango* reveals the continued relevance of the caste system in contemporary Indian society. In this chapter, I focus more on the economic implications of the caste system and the sensorial and embodied forms of resistance that both Devi and Appanah employ. In his book *Provincializing Europe* (2000) Dipesh Chakrabarty posits that India seems able to remain simultaneously ancient and modern—holding on to “the whole of its past history” (48). When describing India, he remarks that observers often point to the false “paradox” or inherent contradiction between India's economic boom and its ability to hold on to its traditional culture¹⁶⁴ (49). Chakrabarty points to three social practices in India that appear to defy the logic of late capitalism: “India seems to resist these capitalist

¹⁶⁴ “This is trope that depicts the Indian capitalist/consumer subject as capable of doing the impossible: ‘Indians are capable of living in several centuries at once’” (49). Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton UP, 2000.

ideals: dissolution of the hierarchies of birth [...], sovereignty of the individual [...] and consumer choice” (49). Marx wrote in 1853 that India, “Hindustan,” is cut off from “the whole of its past history,” seeming to insist on the death of India’s traditional culture at the hands of British colonization and the introduction of capitalism.¹⁶⁵ On the contrary, the clash and coexistence of India’s very *living* “traditional” culture with modernity has become the trope by which the West (in this case U.S. newspapers) describes India in order to write it into the historical time defined by Europe (Chakrabarty 49). However, as Chakrabarty suggests, it is not that Indians “are able to live in several centuries at once,” but that historical (European) time does not allow for the coexistence of these seeming temporal “contradictions” (49).

The Hindu caste system, that determines hierarchies of birth, is one such example of contradiction. This “pre-modern” caste system co-exists with late capitalism in a way that European feudalism could not. Gayatri Spivak writes, in the introduction to the edited volume, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, that part of the purpose of subaltern studies is to write against the “grand narrative” that defines Indian history through its transformation, due to colonization, from “semi-feudalism into capitalist subjugation” (3). This “grand narrative” of transformation from the hierarchical caste system into a hierarchy of economic class was *never* a neatly defined break with the past. Chakrabarty writes against the same “grand narrative” by explaining that: “To think of Indian histories in terms of Marxian categories is to translate into such histories the existing archives of thought and practices about human relations in the subcontinent; but it is also to modify these thoughts and practices with the help of these categories” (71). He posits these histories as “History 1” and “History 2”—the

¹⁶⁵ Karl Marx. “The British Rule in India.” *Marx & Engels Internet Archive*, 2005.

first being Marx's universal history that gets disrupted by "the various History 2s" that exist outside of European history (71).

The other central fallacy that Eurocentric interpretations of the Hindu caste system fail to acknowledge are the equally embedded and inescapable forms of "caste" that permeate Western, liberal democracies, albeit under different names. If we follow this attempt to "provincialize" Marx's conceptualization of history, we might start by situating India's economic trajectory within a different "grand narrative," one that mediates the country's economic shift from colonial, to semi-socialist to neoliberal through a lens that acknowledges how birth into a specific caste permeates the "liberal" economy. Although birth circumstances may not be fixed for life nor be rooted in religion and history, class under neoliberalism is often just as intransigent and contrary to mythic stories of upward mobility, equally fixed for life.

The luxurious upper-class shopping mall in Delhi of Devi's *Indian Tango*, is both a site of "conspicuous consumption" and one that is modified by India's specific history of caste difference.¹⁶⁶ The luxury mall of Devi's *Indian Tango* is the result of years of India's increasing economic liberalism, and this mall serves as both a high-caste (birth status), and high class (economic status) site. However, because the illusion of class mobility allows certain flexibility into the Hindu caste system, these sites—boutique malls, restaurants, clubs, etc.—can also become sites of class and caste subversion.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ "High-bred manners and ways of living are items of conformity to the norm of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method" (Veblen 75). The mall serves as a place for both the upper-caste and class and lower castes and classes to consume "conspicuously".

¹⁶⁷ Jaffrelot writes that one of the consequences of India's economic liberalization is that: "Luxury—formerly the prerogative of princes, maharajahs and other nawabs—became the trademark of Indian capitalists, both those who inherited companies and those who founded their own businesses" (137). However, although this liberalization "democratized" luxury to a certain extent (many successful industrialists come from the Vaishya caste), it did not redistribute wealth to the lower castes, nor help the extreme poverty in India.

In Devi's novel this luxurious mall in Delhi becomes just such a site of class and caste transgression. Devi's novel tells the story of Subhadra and an unnamed and, at first, ungendered, suitor whom Subhadra meets in front of the window of a sitar shop. Bijli is the Dalit¹⁶⁸ woman who comes to clean Subhadra's Delhi apartment. Subhadra is fascinated by the way that Bijli defies social norms and seems unaffected by how others perceive her. Subha envies Bijli's comfort in her own body and the way that she seems to find pleasure and sensuality even in the most mundane or unpleasant task: "Même dans ses tâches les plus dégradantes, elle [Bijli] dégage une aisance de corps que Subha lui envie" (68). Not only does Bijli enjoy inhabiting her body, but she does so as she performs the "degrading" tasks seen as only fit for untouchables. She therefore doubly defies social norms by delighting in tasks considered shameful by the hierarchical caste system, and by freely exhibiting the taboo of female sexuality while doing these tasks. Bijli recalls the woman in black in Malani's film, freely and even "hysterically" performing bodily enjoyment, a type of self-pleasure, and provoking discomfort in the viewer. She exudes an ease (aisance) in her body physically, indicating a comfort with her own (subaltern) identity—an identity that others denigrate but that she fully inhabits. Her character also points to the complicated manner in which subaltern subjects "strategically" appropriate parts of the dominant culture while actively resisting others, contradicting a totalizing Marxist narrative that posits the relation between dominant and marginalized cultures as "a simple story of unrelenting appropriation and commodification" (Gopinath 38). That is to say that as Bijli exhibits an ease with herself and her right to a place in society, she conforms and seems to delight in the commodities that characterize wealth in modern India. Simultaneously, she subtly rejects the capitalism that

¹⁶⁸ Dalit is the name for the no-caste group formerly called "untouchables" in India. This group traditionally performed tasks such as washing and laying out the dead, cleaning bathrooms, tanning and shoemaking, and any other task that involves touching products from the Hindu's sacred cow (Jaffrelot 159).

attempts to permeate every corner of Indian life, and she “respond[s] to [her] own fetishization and commodification in strategic and imaginative ways” (Gopinath 39).

One day, as Subha is returning home she catches sight of Bijli smiling and singing. Subha feels weighed down by her life, the looming pilgrimage to Kashi, her culture, and all of its beliefs, traditions and doubts— “cette terre, de ses traditions, de ses croyances, de ses doutes”—and she wonders paradoxically whether if she were an untouchable, might she feel less burdened, lighter: “fallait-il être une intouchable, nettoyeuse de latrines, pour se sentir légère?” (Devi 129). Her remark signals that rather than the conventional conception of untouchability as a restrictive state, Subha believes that this lack of caste, Dalits are both at the bottom of the social order and considered to be without caste, might deliver Bijli certain freedoms. Historically and in relation to the Indian diaspora, the losing of one’s caste, for example when crossing the ocean, “*kala pani*,” could signify the trauma of loss, or it could signify the freedom to be without caste as in the case of indentured laborers who leave India for Maurice or the Caribbean. As Bragard suggests, the crossing could further signify the creation of creole identity, “coolitude,” following Torabully by way of Glissant’s *Poétique de la relation* through “the encounter between the Coolie and the Other” (177). In India however, caste remains much less fluid than in the diaspora.

Subha, from her place of relative privilege and high-caste status, is fascinated by Bijli’s seeming freedom, and without making a conscious decision, Subha finds herself shadowing Bijli’s steps. Subha follows Bijli to a mall that has just opened in a chic neighborhood of Delhi. At the entry of the mall, Bijli is immediately stopped by the guard. Earlier in the narrative, we learn that Bijli is a woman with dark skin, “sombre de peau,” who nonetheless insists upon her rights as a Dalit woman, “aujourd’hui, les Dalits ont des droits!” (86). In this scene at the mall, the guard asks if she has a “carte de crédit” as if to suggest both that Bijli has no right to enter the mall, and that she has not the financial means with

which to buy any of its products (68, 129). Subha, on the other hand, passes by the guard without incident. Because of Bijli's dark-skin and manner, the guard recognizes her as a Dalit or perhaps from another "lower" caste, while Subha passes by without a glance: "Subha l'avait suivie sans que le garde lui demande quoi que ce soit" (129). The reader can infer that Subha, perhaps due to her lighter skin, manner of dress and comportment, exhibits physically certain markers of her caste and class, thereby signaling to the guard that she has a "right" to enter the mall, that she belongs in the space of luxury.

For her part, Bijli refuses to be intimidated by the guard. Rather than being cowed into leaving this mall to which the hierarchical Hindu caste system insists that she does not belong, she challenges the guard by saying suggestively that her credit card is hidden somewhere on her person and that he may try to find it: "...elle [la carte de credit] est enfouie si loin qu'il te faudra fouiller très profondément pour la retrouver, petit ! Je ne sais pas si tu as jamais connu un puits pareil ! Ça te tente d'essayer?" (129). That she dares the guard to try to find the credit card and touch her intimately constitutes what would be a transgressive act on the part of the presumably higher caste guard (129). Although the name "untouchable" was formally made illegal in India by article 70 of the Indian constitution of 1950, the word has literal implications—a higher caste Hindu would be dirtied and made unclean by "touching" the "untouchable" (Jaffrelot 109). Therefore, when she taunts that the guard to touch her, Bijli makes a statement that is both sexually suggestive and one that transgresses the rules of class and caste. Bijli openly flaunts her sexuality in ways that challenge patriarchal aspects of Indian society and the guard's believed dominance as a higher caste male in a position of power. When the guard asks that Bijli show proof that she has the financial means to enter this mall designed to cater to the wealthy, he signals that he believes Bijli to belong to the wrong class as well as to the wrong caste to enter the mall. The guard feels superior to Bijli—he feels that he has the right, through his higher social status

(caste) and the authority of his job (security officer) financial means, to demand that she legitimize her presence with the credit card that he does not believe she has. Bijli cannot access the world of credit that would allow her to shop in this luxurious mall whose products cost more than a lifetime of her labor: “...les prix [qui] dépassaient son salaire d’une vie” (129). However, Bijli overturns the power dynamic between the guard and herself. She discomfits him with her suggestion that a search of her body would provide him with unparalleled pleasure, and she calls him with the familiar “petit” and uses the informal “tu.” She succeeds in embarrassing this young guard to the point that he moves aside to let her pass into the privileged space of the mall.

Once inside the mall, Bijli delights in the sumptuous products on offer. Her delight is sensual rather than acquisitive. She does not buy anything, thereby subverting the purpose of a mall that sells luxury, but she nonetheless revels in this luxury that she is able to experience without actually paying for any of the items beyond her financial means—she manages to apprehend the goods on display without making a single purchase. For example, she bares her shoulder to better enjoy the mall’s air-conditioning and she enjoys the free samples of perfumes and skin creams that the sellers would wish to refuse her:

Pendant plus d’une heure, elle s’était proménée dans les boutiques, caressant les produits, s’exclamant...riant en soulevant entre deux doigts un string rouge délicieusement impalpable...exigeant avec la plus grande délectation les offres gratuites dont les vendeurs étaient obligés, bien malgré eux, de la faire profiter. Ainsi avait-elle bénéficié d’un soin pour la peau, goûté à des chocolats belges et du vin français et même joué à une partie sur une console de jeu vidéo en s’amusant comme une folle. (130)

Promener, caresser, s’exclamer, rire, profiter, bénéficier and *s’amuser* are all verbs that express carefree delight and tactile enjoyment. Bijli caresses, exclaims and laughs—making

her sensual pleasure known to all about her without the least nod to decorum. That she caresses these products particularly subverts her status of “untouchability” since, according to strict Hinduism, she contaminates these products through her physical contact with them. She enjoys herself like a crazy person, *une folle*, and in addition to touching, she tastes—both French wine and Belgian chocolates. These European luxuries are not accidental but indicate the high status of European products in the formerly colonized India that Bijli is able to access despite her lack of actual capital and lack of caste.

Bijli insists on her rights—both to access pleasure and the privileged space of the mall. Subha envies Bijli her pleasure and confidence and Subha too, wishes to access her rights and pleasure. She longs to transgress the rigidity of Hinduism—not just its caste system, but its obligatory pilgrimage to Kashi. Kashi is one of the names for the city sacred to Hindus on the Ganges, and this pilgrimage to Kashi is more than just a gesture of devotion, but also represents the renunciation of “la vie matérielle” and of a woman’s sexuality (70). Subha is not ready to renounce this material life and all of its accompanying pleasure, and she holds Bijli up as the antithesis of this pilgrimage meant for “femmes asexuées” (71). In fact, it is exactly this material life that Bijli so exuberantly enjoys in the Delhi mall, despite her class and caste. Bijli inhabits her body in a way that disturbs the “distribution of the sensible” to come back to Rancière. Bijli’s desire at the luxury mall could easily be misinterpreted as capitalist longing—that she simply wishes to access a higher caste and class and thus attempts to consume what is beyond her “capital.” But Bijli does more than simply covet the material goods that she cannot afford, this is not a case of window shopping on Fifth avenue.¹⁶⁹ Her physical touch actively contaminates these goods. Ultimately, consuming

¹⁶⁹ Brandon J Pelcher. “Window Shopping with Duchamp: Commodity Aesthetics Delayed in Glass.” *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2085>.

Unlike in Pelcher’s article about Duchamp and window shopping, Bijli’s enjoyment is not simply acquisitive. Pelcher, following Althusser’s notion of interpellation, conceptualizes window shopping as commodity acquisition: “The interpellation of the passerby into a potential-consumer, into a subject of consumer capitalism begins with their turn towards the shop window just as Louis Althusser’s infamous police officer transforms

through the sensual pleasure of sight, smell and touch without purchase thwarts the central premise of capitalism—to acquire with capital.

Indentured labor instrumentalized a type of embodied capital different from the system of chattel slavery that originally supported the colonial plantation system: the contracted labor of the desperately poor replaced the human capital of the now freed enslaved persons and brought into being a century of indenture that fueled the production of various export crops. Unlike Devi's contemporary characters who (sometimes) manage to subvert the systems that seek to regulate their bodies, in Appanah's *les Rochers de Poudre d'Or*, the bodies who identify or read as female experience violence and foreclosure. Appanah writes of the nineteenth-century indentured bodies who become trapped within the economy of forced labor that transports Indians to Mauritius. In her novel, four characters are seduced by the offers of a better life, and ultimately capital, across the ocean in Mauritius. Badri, a teenaged boy, leaves to avoid telling his parents about the money he has lost gambling, Vythée leaves his impoverished village to join his brother who has already made the voyage, Chotty Lall leaves in order to pay off the debts that his father incurred and which Chotty can never pay off, and Ganga, a young Brahmin woman, leaves to avoid joining her husband on his funeral pyre. For diverse reasons, these characters choose to leave India, believing the promises of the different *maistry* (agents paid by the British to recruit Indian workers) that offer better pay and escape from poverty-stricken regions of India. Yet none of these characters understands the system of forced labor that they enter.

This system came into being in order to provide labor to the sugar plantations after slavery was abolished and Appanah's characters are the first generation of "coolies." Once they arrive in Port Louis, these four characters are taken to the plantation, *Poudre d'Or*. The

individuals into subjects as they turn towards the officer's interpellation. That is, subject formation occurs not only in the acquisition of a commodity, but already in the turn towards the shop window that theatrically, aesthetically displays it (9). I argue rather, that in Devi's novel, Bijli's transgressive, sensual enjoyment of the commodities *without* consumption destabilizes their function in capitalist society.

author draws our attention to the histories of colonization that necessitated this indentured labor on French owned plantations:

Malgré la bataille de 1810 où les Français avaient dû céder l'île de France aux Anglais, les établissements sucriers étaient toujours aux mains des vaincus. Après l'abolition de l'esclavage, les Anglais leur avaient fourni une main-d'œuvre indienne peu chère et docile. Les Français étaient là depuis deux générations parfois et l'administration anglaise s'en arrangeait bien. (Appanah 145)

Although the British have won the island of Mauritius, the sugar plantations remain run by their French owners, and workers are recruited from India to provide cheap labor now that slavery has been abolished. The characters have no idea that they are going to work the plantations in the place of newly emancipated enslaved peoples, but merely believe that they are going to earn money that would be impossible to make in India. Appanah's novel both undermines the myth of diasporic origin in the Indo-Mauritian community and gestures toward the legacy of inequality between the descendants of enslaved peoples and indentured people that continues to inform modern-day Mauritian society. Appanah foregrounds the affective, sensorial and embodied experiences of her diverse group of indentured characters, both their trauma and the different treatment that gendered bodies receive in the hierarchy of colonial exploitation. This chapter will focus on Appanah's representation of two of the four characters: Badri, the teenaged boy, and Ganga, the windowed Brahmin woman.

Badri Sahu, a young man who had never before left his village, encounters horror and exploitation, but by virtue of his gender he avoids the sexual enslavement that the female character, Ganga, meets on the island. Badri is a spoiled and unworldly young man, and what he wants most, apart from games of cards, is to see the ocean (Devi 15). Like Bijli, he enjoys the sensual and tactile pleasures of life, gambling being his favorite and the cause of his self-imposed exile. Badri has been warned away from cards by his family, but cards call to him,

occupying his thoughts and arousing him: “Elles (les cartes) lui étaient familières désormais et Badri les promenait partout, cachées au fond de la poche de son dhoti. Quand il s’asseyait en lotus, elles glissaient et venaient se reposer sur son sexe et c’était bon.” (13). Gambling transforms the acquisition of capital into a sexual and phallic activity, providing an escape from what Badri finds to be the dull life of farming. His male gendered body affords him the freedom and the possibility to sustain his secret addiction, a young woman of his age and caste would have no such agency, but cannot ultimately save him from the huge financial loss that precipitates his desire to flee India.

He has heard from a friend that in Calcutta, the English give enormous tips to the coolies who load rice onto the many ships in this busy port city. For Badri, Calcutta signifies riches and excitement. One day, he is playing a forbidden game of cards. He wins the first round, and although he knows that he should stop there, he is unable to: “Il aurait pu s’arrêter là mais comme ses pensées de Calcutta, des Anglais et de leurs pourboires, des valises et du kala pani¹⁷⁰ ne le quittaient plus, il misa tout” (17). He cannot stop thinking about the promise of the sea and large tips from the English, and instead of stopping, he bets all of his money. In the next round, he loses everything, the five rupees he has stolen from his mother and the rupees he has just won. He imagines how his father will react when he finds out, and rather than facing the shame of having lost a month’s worth of food in one game of cards, Badri flees his village to go to Calcutta to find his friend and the promise of English money.

Badri first goes to Agra where he begs on the street until he can find this friend who had told him of the English boats. While begging, a *maistry*, Lagoo, asks Badri if he wishes to work instead of begging. Badri is amazed by Lagoo’s elegant sandals and clean *dhoti*, and Badri signs a contract that he cannot read that binds him to five years of labor in Mauritius (22, 25). Even after boarding the boat in Calcutta and hearing from the Englishman that he

¹⁷⁰ Kala pani is the name for the Indian Ocean, the sea where Hindus lose their caste if they cross it.

will be working the fields in Mauritius, Badri still believes that he will somehow escape the fields and instead work for the English on their boats:

Badri pensa qu'il trouverait toujours un moyen de faire autre chose que du travail aux champs. Il devait bien y avoir des Anglais avec des valises dans cette île Maurice, non ? Content de lui, le joueur de camphrier dit oui, prit de dix roupies et retourna dans son coin. Dix roupies. Deux fois de quoi jouer une bonne partie de cartes. (29)

Once on the horrific boat that brings the Indians to Mauritius, Badri's optimism falters as he begins to understand the conditions he will inhabit, yet it is his card playing that allows him access to the privileged world of the English above-deck. The first chapters that describe the conditions that lead these four characters to leave India are narrated in the third person, but the boat journey is narrated through the first-person journal entries of Doctor Grant. The doctor is responsible for caring for the Indians and ensuring their survival during the voyage, and through the doctor's voice, we learn that the Indians must remain below-deck in subhuman conditions that result in rampant dysentery and many deaths, like that of the character Chotty Lall. Here Appanah's language evokes the transatlantic voyages that African enslaved people endured after they were stolen from Africa; however, Appanah carefully distinguishes the two forms of enslavement, forced labor versus chattel slavery later in her text.

Although the doctor is on board to medically care for the Indians, he hates them and gives the bare minimum of medical care: "Je déteste les Indiens...Ma trousse de médecin contient le strict minimum" (78). In one of the journal entries, we learn that Badri faints and as he recovers, he explains that he would like to play cards with the English (101). Because his presence amuses the doctor, much in the way of an exotic animal, and his more sympathetic assistant, Badri escapes the abominable conditions that his fellow Indians endure during the voyage. Badri uses the capital that he has traded his body for—the money that he

receives as payment to board this boat to Mauritius on the condition that he sign a contract pledging him to five years of service—to access the card game that allows him temporary escape from his indentured servitude. Although irritated that Badri’s rupees are of less value than the money the English play for, the doctor too is amused by Badri’s skill at cards. Although the doctor hates the Indians for whom he must care, briefly, during the card game with Badri, he forgets this young man’s status “beneath” him, and the social order is momentarily suspended due to this gambling:

Et c’est comme cela que la partie a commencé. De façon inégale, parce qu’une roupie valait moins de trois shillings. Sahu nous étonna. Ses doigts caressaient les cartes. Il réfléchissait vite, misait sans peur et gagna cinquante shillings en une heure. J’avais moi perdu dix shillings. Il était tard en j’annonçai que je me retirai mais ça ne fit aucun effet sur les autres. Edward avait offert une cigarette à ce Sahu qui tirait de la fumée en crachotant et en souriant bêtement. Au début, moi aussi j’ai pris plaisir à la partie. Moi aussi j’ai oublié que c’était un Indien qui menait la danse. Moi aussi.

During these games, Badri reverses the power relations between the Indians and the English. The doctor calls Badri “Sahu,” a common surname in the subcontinent, as a way to deny Badri individuality and agency. Like Bijli’s sensual pleasure at the mall she is not supposed to access, Badri delights in card playing—caressing the cards, spitting and smiling stupidly. In his enjoyment and skill at this game normally reserved for the English crew members and officials, Badri subverts the colonial system that positions him below the English colonizers of India by physically moving from below to above—he leaves the Indian’s obligatory below-deck position and moves above-deck to insert himself into the card game creating yet another disturbance to the “distribution of the sensible.”

However, once he arrives in Mauritius, Badri’s card playing ceases to offer him sanctuary. Although the work is hard for all that arrive at the plantation at Poudre d’Or, Badri

in particular, is unable to cope with the physical labor. He is unable cut enough sugarcane, and he is whipped repeatedly for his lack of productivity (199). One day, Badri cannot endure any more punishment and he sees a hole in the hedge surrounding the plantation (201). He runs as fast as he can, hoping to reach the sea and a boat that can bring him back home (203). He finds refuge with a group of formerly enslaved people. Badri fears these men as one points out, “T’es comme tous les malabars, toi? Dans ton pays, on dit que les Noirs mangent des hommes, c’est ça?” (209). The man exposes the anti-Black racism and colorism that permeates Hindu and Indian society. Despite their taunting, these men take pity on Badri and offer him sanctuary for the night. However, one of the men resents Badri and the Indians in general because he believes that they feel superior to the formerly enslaved Africans. He alerts the authorities to Badri’s escape, the runaway indentured servant, and he explains his reasoning:

Je t’ai eu, malbar. Vous vous croyez supérieurs, hein, tous, tous autant que vous êtes ? Vous venez ici, vous léchez le cul des Blancs, vous faites vos villages, vous amassez de l’argent, vous achetez des terrains et ensuite, vous vous prenez pour des Blancs.
(218)

Here, the narrator draws our attention to how the economies of slavery and indentured servitude differ. Despite the horrific conditions that Badri *thinks* that his body cannot endure, he still earns a wage, even if insufficient for even the most basic of one’s needs. Despite the cruelty, rape and suffering that Indian immigrants experience, they are workers and not enslaved peoples. When their contracts finish, they establish communities and buy property. As Bragard points out, Appanah points to the hierarchy within the “coolie-créole” relationship in this scene between the formerly enslaved peoples and Badri, the indenture (171). The “engagés” [Indian indentured servants] make a decision to come to Mauritius, if an uninformed one, whereas enslaved people were taken against their will, signed no contract

and received no wages. Indians bring their spouses and children and culture with them, and once they complete their work, they then position themselves as superior to the formerly enslaved peoples who also make up Mauritian society. Vaughan writes that although Indians received much of the same racist treatment that formerly enslaved peoples had endured, their “Indian origin acted as a compensating factor” (275). Furthermore, she brings our attention to the fact that Indians were able to build communities “based on real and imagined common origins” (276). As we saw in chapter III, in Pyamootoo’s *Bénarès*, with the twin city of Bénarès existing in Mauritius, Indians were able to imagine a common past that they then sought to recreate in Mauritius.

Of course, the division between formerly enslaved peoples and indentured workers served the colonial powers well, and the French and British were expert at fomenting interracial and inter-religious rivalries to shore up their own power. Gopinath delves into the legacies and the erasure of Indian indenture in the Caribbean specifically, arguing that: “indentureship is central to processes of racial, gender and sexual subjugation” (179). She further states that indenture relied on the sexualization and “immorality” of Indian women immigrants, indentures, in opposition to the “moral” women brought later to marry male indentured laborers. Although Badri traded his body for capital as a laborer, by virtue of his gender, he escaped the sexual slavery more commonly faced by female indentured laborers. Badri suspends, if temporarily, the colonial power structure with his gambling, yet Ganga has no such means at her disposal. Ganga, rather than finding the freedom she had hoped for, finds herself trapped in a different system of sexual exploitation. Although as an indentured laborer she is not technically enslaved, and will not be faced with suttee, the situation that she finds herself in *is* a system of sexual slavery.

Like Badri, Ganga is unused to physical labor, and she cannot work as hard or as fast as the other women who come from backgrounds that necessitated physical labor. Ganga is

whipped for her laziness, and she goes before Madame Rivière, the mother of Hippolyte, owner of the plantation. Madame Rivière inspects Ganga's hands and feet and remarks, "Ça lui plairait...", although at this point, we do not know exactly whom she will please (196). Ganga is relieved, thinking that she has pleased the mistress and will be able to do easier work. Unlike Vithée and Chotty, characters that fled India to escape poverty, Ganga grew up in the highest of India's castes and enjoyed the accompanying wealth that came with being the daughter of a king. Ganga fled death rather than poverty, but in this scene of extreme violence, Ganga realizes that she has not escaped at all and she describes the experience of rape as similar to her nightmare of being burned alive: "Quand il l'avait pénétrée, la brûlure était semblable à celle qu'elle avait imaginé dans ses cauchemars. Mais alors, elle n'était pas sous le poids d'un corps lourd qui ahanait. Dans ses cauchemars, elle était la fille de Rajah de Sira qui brûlait sur le bûcher des veuves" (227). Compared to the sex-workers in Devi and Pyamootoo's novels, Ganga has even less choice and agency over her body. She cannot refuse a customer or bargain for a better price but is at the mercy of the plantation's owner. Ganga's story ends with the image of her lying in bed, blood running down her thighs, after having been raped by the "mâitre" (226). Ganga is the highest caste character in the novel, "la fille du Rajah" and it is her high caste that leads to her role as the master's mistress.

For indentured workers, traversing the Kala Pani causes Hindus to lose their cast and identity. While this loss might be freeing to Hindus of lower castes, for Ganga, her high caste status marks her as desirable, vulnerable and an easy victim. It is Ganga's high caste that both would have required her to participate in suttee in India and that tragically leads to her rape in Mauritius. Thus Appanah, like Devi, harshly critiques the Hindu caste system. She points to the arbitrary injustice that befalls members of all castes and signals the plight of women no matter their caste.

The Limits of Erotic Agency

These novels elucidate the economic mechanisms through which colonialism functioned and the legacies of these mechanisms that endure today. These novels also point to the fictions that equate commerce and consumption with well-being. In *Indian Tango*, Bijli accesses the promised happiness of consumption without actually consuming anything whereas in *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or*, the promises of happiness made to the characters tricked into migrating to Mauritius fail spectacularly when they find themselves in the hellish situation of indentured servitude. The manner in which these texts subvert the trope of happiness through commerce and consumption brings to mind the Enlightenment injunction to critique and the specific ambivalence of Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1780). In Book IV of Tome I, Diderot writes that as colonizers, the French must be kinder and more just than the other European colonial powers. He also specifically equates the proliferation of commerce and goods with the happiness of the "barbares:"

Vous ne craignez plus, quand vous ne serez plus haïs. Vous ne ferez plus haïs, quand vous serez bienfaisans. Le barbare, ainsi que l'homme civilisé, veut être heureux. Les avantages de la population & les moyens de l'accélérer sont les mêmes sous l'un & l'autre hémisphère... Ne multipliez pas seulement les productions, multipliez les agriculteurs, les consommateurs, & avec eux toutes les sortes d'industrie, toutes les branches de commerce. (Raynal 547)

The barbarian wishes to be happy just as the "homme civilisé," and Diderot follows this phrase with a list of actions that can facilitate this happiness. He calls for managing resources humanly so that they increase (more farm workers, more consumers) which then enables the expansion of commerce. In both hemispheres, increasing production, industry, agriculture and consumers will contribute to the overall happiness and well-being of the region's

inhabitants. Diderot was an abolitionist, but his vision of soft colonization à la française left intact a patriarchal system that perpetuated, with paternalism, colonial practices. Although Diderot's writings predate the indentured servitude that brought the coolies to Mauritius, he is writing during the period that the first Indians were being brought to the island from the south of India. Furthermore, the same logic that Diderot uses, equating production and prosperity with happiness, surfaces in the present-day stories that romanticize both India and Mauritius as examples of "Third-World" success stories, irrespective of human rights violations. Although Mauritius can be viewed as "a rational example of well-managed cosmopolitanism" and a capitalist success story with a "well-developed high-tech industry...; a flourishing research university; a manufacturing industry; attractive tourist resorts; and offshore banking," Lionnet also asserts that Mauritius is a "nation in crisis due to mounting twenty-first century global inequalities" (91, 99). These crises of global inequalities, whether in India, Mauritius or another region, are the same crises that the Mauritian authors, Devi and Appanah, take up directly and indirectly in their novels. Their characters either find misery within the system of commerce as in Appanah's text, or as in Devi's *Indian Tango*, find happiness not in the accumulation and exchange of late capitalism, but by subverting these same processes.

Despite these characters' best efforts, subverting the exchange of capital while living under capitalism is impossible, and is thus always subject to the limits of capitalism itself. Erotic agency, as it manifests under current social and political structures of power and knowledge, is always modified and curtailed by the limits of patriarchy even as it continues to push against these same limits. Srinivasan makes this argument in her collection of essays with the example of an initiative to provide safer, drive-through brothels in Cologne. On one hand, these drive-throughs reinforce a system that subjugates women as sex-workers, "looking so much like live-stock," or their ultimate "dehumanization." On the other, the

initiative is a “pragmatic response” that acknowledges the ubiquity of sex-work under the current economic conditions and responds in a way that tries to reduce harm (151). Safe-sleep sites as an answer to the problem of homelessness might be another example that reduces immediate harm but does nothing to address the systemic inequality that drives homelessness. Harm-reduction versus total abstinence or reform versus revolutionary change, are both iterations of arguments that resonate throughout multiple sectors of society outside of sex-work: addiction treatment, labor reform, and protests against racial injustice to name just a few. Srinivasan frames this argument yet another way when she cites a debate between Silvia Federici and Angela Davis that illustrates the tension between “revolutionary and reformist” action and the perspectives that inform both. Federici proposed wages for women’s housework while Davis proposed that abolition of women’s housework would be the truly revolutionary demand (156-7). Srinivasan rightly signals the tensions within feminist thinking and philosophy around the issue of sex-work, yet in the realm of fictional representation, the novels in this chapter allow for a less Manichean binary. They do not give the reader the satisfaction of either/or simplicity. Fiction opens up a space of ambivalence that is not possible in the fields of law, public health and other iterations of real-life decision making. Literature invites the reader to empathize with the characters, representations of sex-workers, clients, victims and abusers, in a way that refuses easy distinctions between right and wrong.

That is not to say that the novels are not concerned with morality. There is a distinction between erotic agency that challenges the power systems that subjugate women, as in *Indian Tango*, and sex work that is a condition of and reinforces this subjugation, as in *Les Rochers*. Yet, they both function within the same larger systems of patriarchy. To claim that sex-work, as represented in literature, can be a valid form of embodied labor that might serve as a path to empowerment for women, is not to claim that this form of labor is not also

a product of patriarchy and female subjugation. As Heather Berg argues in her article about sex-work and agency, “labor *is* coercion, but that coercion does not foreclose resilience, resistance, and pleasure” (Emphasis mine 694).

VI. CONCLUSION: THE LAST LAUGH

Although this dissertation focuses on the *literary representations* of affective and embodied micro-actions that effectively destabilize the neoliberal regimes that foment our current, ongoing humanitarian crises, the questions raised about agency, subjectivity and resistance are not simply representational or theoretical. In a time of increased political precarity for the most vulnerable of political subjects, of migrant and refugee crises, of rising extreme-right nationalism, and of climate emergency, I would argue that the significance of this dissertation is that it calls attention to political action and activism on the micro level: Pyamootoo's townspeople turn a defunct sugar mill into a soccer field; Devi's "untouchable" servant *touches* the goods on display in an upscale mall; Appanah's undocumented migrants reclaim the wrecks of abandoned cars. By focusing on embodied and affective micro-actions, this dissertation attempts to span the divide between theory and practice as these micro-actions do not belong solely to the world of representational fiction nor to academic theory, but are real-world practices that directly combat our most pressing global crises. Theorists like Pakistani economist Akmal Hussain advocate for micro-loans to promote inclusive social development while Indian activist Vandana Shiva *enacts* these strategies. Yet scholar Veronica Gago complicates an overly idealistic vision of bottom-up economics with her theorization of "neoliberalism from below," that asks us to reevaluate the systemic effectiveness of just such micro-actions. At the same time, the global climate crisis necessitates that we acknowledge the grave effects of human agency *and* de-center the human if we hope to survive.

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I have shown how Appanah, Condé, Devi, Duras and Pyamootoo use representative fiction to articulate the experiences and legacies of colonialism and diaspora. Chapter II explored the time and space of affective memory among diasporic populations through the articulation of an alternative genealogy of Francophone women writers. Chapter III was more spatially focused, looking at how

coloniality pervades the duplication of names in Global South geographies. Chapter IV turned toward economics, considering the imaginative strategies used to disrupt neoliberalism and how neoliberalism in turn coopts these same strategies. Finally, chapter V investigated the embodied and affective dimensions of democracy, and how the sensorial realm can be used as space of resistance and destabilization.

The corpus destabilizes classification, periodization and canon, and through the use of multiple voices and subject positions, the texts further upend the linear, forward progress that we often assume to underpin a literary or historical narrative. Polyvocality highlights the hybridity and multiplicity of diasporic populations as Hall reminds us in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” as any explanation of cultural identity that presumes a single origin for diasporic populations “imposes an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas” (224). My corpus of texts exposes this dispersal and fragmentation via narratives that zigzag through time and space, period and genre, language and place of origin. The novels destabilize the subject positions of reader, narrator and character, they disrupt the linearity of the text and they call into question the essentialized, postcolonial subject. Glissant explains in *Le Discours antillais*, that one of the tragedies of colonization results in the oversimplification, or even negation of all subjectivity that is not Occidental in origin:

Une nouvelle contradiction se fait donc jour ici. Les histoires des peuples colonisés par l’Occident n’ont *dès lors* jamais été univoques. Leur simplicité apparente, du moins à partir de l’intervention occidentale, et encore plus quand il s’agit de peuples « composites » comme les peuples antillais, oblitère des séries complexes où l’exogène et l’endogène s’aliènent et s’obscurcissent. (274)

This oversimplification of identity is then forced upon the people of the Antilles (and Indian Ocean) and it obscures or “obliterates” the enormous multiplicity and variance within any

given subject. Multiplicity challenges this oversimplification by insisting on the diverse voices, linguistic and figurative, that make up the cultural hybridity the Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions.

To project identity onto an individual or group strips away its agency, yet these texts respond by highlighting micro-actions that reorient notions of subjectivity. Moreover, it is the specific exuberance of laughter that functions throughout these texts as the ultimate tool of resistance and subversion. Subversive laughter creates community amidst agony, it defies the conventions of gender and class and it destroys oppressors. Although it may not dismantle systemic injustice or the hegemony of capitalism, laughter transcends the intellectual pretensions of subjectivity as it emerges from the body, and it multiplies and expands with the ease of a contagion. We might recall Hélène Cixous's laughing medusa: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885).¹⁷¹ Medusa, with her hair mane of snakes, recalls the goddess Kali, gleefully devouring her enemies as her necklace of skulls dances round her neck. These iterations of terrifying, embodied, devouring pleasure show up in each novel, implicitly and explicitly, as the mad laughter of Duras's beggar-woman's echoes through the other texts, finding different iterations in time and space.

In Appanah's *Tropique*, Moïse reclaims the exuberant joy of a child diving into the ocean for one sublime moment before he drowns: "Sans ralentir, je fais alors comme tous les enfants de Mayotte au moins une fois dans leur vie, je fais décoller mon corps de l'embarcadère, ma poitrine s bombe, mes jambes and mes bras se soulèvent" (175). In Condé's *Traversée*, laughter terrifies Francis Sancher even as it frees the unhappily married Rosa: "Oui! J'entends le rire du vent que la nuit n'a pas pu garder enfermé dans sa geôle et

¹⁷¹ Hélène Cixous et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875–93. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239>. Accessed 28 Jan. 2023.

qui bat la campagne” (193). Sancher is haunted, obsessed and pursued by demons, but in their brief affair, Rosa attains pleasure, even if fleeting, outside of the confines of Hindu patriarchy. The laughter of the wind that haunts Sancher, instead, opens a space of transgression for Rosa. Laughter as revenge defines the ending of *Le Sari vert* as three generations of women laugh together in triumph as their abuser lays dying. Bijli’s laughter suspends the relations of power that define caste hierarchy in Devi’s *Indian Tango*, and Pyamootoo’s characters’ laughter inside the space of a car momentarily suspends the hierarchy of economic injustice and the gendered inequities that fuel the sex industry. Ève and Savita’s laughter reorder the power dynamics of male dominated Troumaron, briefly creating a space of feminine power and sexuality on the dance floor. Finally, laughter as a motif of subversion reaches its apex in Devi’s most recent novel, titled *Le Rire des déesses*. While reading the novel, I was struck by how that the multiple strands of argument that weave together my chapters take fictional form in Devi’s recent novel. She articulates in her trademark, poetic prose, exactly what I would wish to say to conclude my analysis of this literary corpus. In lieu of a more traditional conclusion, I would like to offer Devi’s most recent literary interpretation of subaltern power and agency as evidence of her and my ongoing, urgent preoccupation with the difficulty in representing and analyzing forms of resistance.

Sex-work in India foregrounds Devi’s *Le Rire des déesses*: her main characters are the women most marginalized by society: women who turn to selling sex after being shunned by their families or who never had families, and *hijras*, women born biologically as male, who are revered spiritually but who are reviled socially. These women do not form a community of ideal sisterhood—there is rivalry, violence and theft. They do, however, rise up in mutual protection, and they unite to protect the child among them (a girl whom the Brahmin priest covets): “Nous avons besoin de rassembler une armée...l’armée des femmes de la Ruelle et

de la Maison des hijras” (157). The women, like Ève, find justice in revenge as the law will not protect the child of a prostitute, taken to be raped by a Brahmin priest.

Devi’s novel unfurls in her characteristic, lyrical style that jars as it describes the ugliest and most monstrous side of humanity, disturbing the reader as the crime of pedophilia is perpetrated by allegedly holy figures. Devi shocks as she indicts the sexual depravity of the Brahmin caste—suggesting that the false piety of redemption the Hinduism allows for its male practitioners enables their abuse. Yet her writing evokes beautiful and intimate acts of tenderness that persist despite the abject violence and poverty that her characters endure. Her novel both highlights the resilience of her characters who engage in sex-work and is a damning indictment of the systemic injustice that forces their work to continue. The women enact justice as revenge, what little power they have amplified when they unite: “À cet instant précis, nous ressemblons toutes à Kali, la déesse souveraine et souterraine, dévoreuse de foies et de cœurs” (231). They incarnate Kali together, their fierce protective, maternal love becoming terrifying to behold. They invoke the goddess to their side in complete condemnation of the false devotion deployed by the Brahmin priest to convert followers and insulate himself from oversight.

After the women find the child Chinti and kill the priest, they pass her from one to the other: “Puis elle est passée de bras en bras, chacune l’embrassant, lui offrant cet amour entier que savent offrir celles qui ont tout perdu” (234). The women have lost everything, but they can offer the warmth of their bodies to the child that is a symbol of hope for all of them. Their power manifests through their laughter: “Surprises, nous partageons un rire involontaire: de rage, de détermination, de connivence. Comme une force née, brûlante, de la profondeur même de notre désolation” (158). Their collective joy, terror, anger, hopelessness and power is incarnated in the “rire des déesses” (laughter of the goddesses). It is this laughter that ultimately destroys the priest, and it is laughter that that saves Chinti. Laughter

in the text is emblematic of embodied wisdom: “Et nous éclatons d’un rire frais et fragile comme la paix descendue sur la ville juste avant que les déesses se réveillent” (235). Devi writes of laughter that is fragile but also sweet and fresh that emanates from the women, incarnated as goddesses. It is laughter that portends the waking of the divine. Yet, laughter is not enough to save them all. It will not dismantle the rising Hindu nationalism that threatens India’s democracy, and it will not alleviate the poverty that persists in the world’s most populous nation. Devi does not suggest this anymore than I believe that literary representation will dismantle capitalism or save the planet. However, writing *is* a political act, just as my choice of corpus is a political act. The action of reorienting the canon and establishing an alternate genealogy of writers allows the texts of Dévi and Duras to approach each other thus allowing us to see that Duras’s beggar-woman would be equally at home in Devi’s narratives. It allows Duras and Fanon to articulate together a colonial madness, and it approaches what Lionnet has conceived as the “creolizing of theory.”

What Devi does in her latest novel is to unlink resistance from the individual, from its Western definition, and put it back into the collective, evoking cultural memory and spiritual knowledge. She may condemn the hypocrisy of the falsely pious, but she also celebrates the wealth of cultural mythology that circulates in the subcontinent. Laughter is embodied and spiritual, and when deployed by the masses, has the power to subvert the reality of the characters’ lived conditions. Laughter is a trope that evokes centuries of literary representation even as it reorients the reader’s relationship to the text. Laughter centers the collective—not the individual with its illusion of autonomous agency. Throughout this corpus of texts that wrestle with expressions of resistance and cooptation, laughter itself becomes a political act.

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