

A CREOLIZING CURRICULUM  
Multicultural Education, Ethnopolitics, and Teaching *Kreol Morisien*

By

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*Pou Bruno*

*Pou mo bann paran*

*Pou bann seki finn transmet nou langaz-la*

*E pou saki kontign fer langaz-la viv*

## ABSTRACT

In January 2012, *Kreol Morisien*, the main *lingua franca* of the Republic of Mauritius, was officially introduced within the *National Curriculum Framework* as one of the country's ancestral languages. Since the colonial period, the teaching of ancestral languages has served to preserve the ancestral heritage, cultural identity, and ethnic 'purity' of the various diasporic communities that make up the Mauritian population. But while the Creole island prides itself of its long-standing commitment to multilingualism, the terms of this late adoption by the education system remains a controversial subject. Given its significance as a transethnic language that is also unique to Mauritius, many have advocated for the nationalization of *Kreol Morisien* since the country's access to independence in 1968. As such, while the institutional recognition of this local vernacular is largely justified by claims for equity, social justice, and historical reparation vis-à-vis the mixed descendants of enslaved groups, its official status as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles brings to the fore the tensions and paradoxes that result from the normalization of the Rainbow nation's ethnocultural politics by the multicultural curriculum.

Investigating these tensions and paradoxes, this dissertation historicizes the ethnonationalist discourse of the Mauritian curriculum; its endorsement of ethnic separatism; and its subsequent abjection of the local Creole people, culture, and language, as they relate to the legacy of slavery, and to processes of *métissage* and creolization. Focusing on the emergence of an Afrocentric Creole identity movement in the 1990s and 2000s, the project further discusses how the gradual essentialization of the local Creole people and culture correlates with the 'ethnicization' of *Kreol Morisien* and its adoption as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles within the national curriculum. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that, beyond the scripted

guidelines of the ancestral language framework, the presence of *Kreol Morisien* in schools paradoxically generates a ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ that unsettles official categorizations of culture and ethnic identity long represented as stable, bounded, and fixed by the multicultural curriculum.

Keywords: Mauritius; *Kreol Morisien*; multicultural curriculum; creolization; ancestral language

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>CHAPTER 0: ENN ZOUR DAN ENN PEI .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: KI SA ZISTWAR-LA SA?.....</b>	<b>5</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	6
MAURITIUS: A CREOLE ISLAND, A MULTICULTURAL NATION .....	8
KREOL MORISIEN: A LONG-ABJECTED LANGUAGE OF THE LOCAL EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	15
<i>KREOL MORISIEN</i> AS A LANGUAGE MATTER OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM .....	18
FROM A CREOLE/ <i>KREOL</i> CURRICULUM TO THE CREOLIZING OF THE CURRICULUM.....	23
<b>CHAPTER 2: KREOLIZASION—KI FER POU KIFER?.....</b>	<b>29</b>
INTRODUCTION: CREOLE AND CREOLIZATION AS PARADOX .....	30
CREOLE’S <i>DÉTOURS</i> .....	35
CREOLE IDENTITY AND (AFRO-)CREOLE ESSENTIALISM IN MAURITIUS.....	40
CREOLIZATION(S) .....	44
GLISSANT’S APPROACH TO CREOLIZATION .....	49
FROM PRINCIPLES OF CREOLIZATION TO A CREOLIZING CURRICULUM .....	53
<b>CHAPTER 3: KOUMA? .....</b>	<b>59</b>
INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS, DECOLONIAL METHODOLOGIES.....	60
METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES .....	64
WORKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES, THINKING RELATIONALLY .....	68
THE ‘MAKING’ OF NARRATIVES: HISTORICIZING OBJECTS, ANALYZING STORIES .....	70
CORPUS SELECTED .....	74
<i>Interviews</i> .....	75
<i>The written corpus</i> .....	78
ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS NOT ADDRESSED IN THE STUDY .....	81
<i>The definition of the context</i> .....	82
<i>Engaging with super-diversity in Mauritius</i> .....	83
<b>CHAPTER 4: ISI KOT NOU ETE.....</b>	<b>85</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	86
A CREOLIZED SOCIETY, A MULTI-ETHNIC NATION .....	90
<i>Mauritian Ethnonationalism and its (un)recognized constituents</i> .....	93
<i>The ‘multiculturalizing’ of the national curriculum and the abjection of Creole people and culture</i> .....	99
MAURITIANISM: A FAILED ATTEMPT TO NATIONALIZE <i>KREOL MORISIEN</i> .....	108
THE REINFORCEMENT OF ETHNONATIONALISM AND THE ONGOING ABJECTION OF CREOLES IN THE CURRICULUM .....	116
<i>The othering of Creoles as “those-who-are-not”</i> .....	118
<i>The absence of Creole people, culture, and language in the curriculum</i> .....	121
<b>CHAPTER 5: KI TO ETE TWA?.....</b>	<b>134</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	135
“ <i>LANGAZ ARYER GRAN DIMOUNN</i> ”: <i>KREOL MORISIEN</i> AS ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE.....	138
<i>Ancestral vs national: tensions in the Addendum</i> .....	146
“ <i>Languages of forefathers</i> ”: Ancestral for ‘All’ vs for a ‘marginalized minority’ .....	149

<i>Language recognition and political empowerment: How ancestral languages became ancestral in Mauritius</i> .....	157
<i>KREOL MORISIEN, (AFRO-)CREOLE IDENTITY, AND THE STRUGGLES FOR LEGITIMATION</i> .....	167
<i>The “C-Word” Again</i> .....	170
<i>An inclusive definition that ultimately excludes</i> .....	181
<i>The Creole “disease” and its cure</i> .....	185
<i>Afro-Creole curriculum or ‘creolizing of the curriculum’?</i> .....	191
<b>CHAPTER 6: KI PASE LA?</b> .....	<b>200</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	201
A PARADOXICAL PROJECT: AMBIVALENCE AND AMBIGUITY IN THE CURRICULUM .....	206
<i>An ambivalent curriculum</i> .....	209
<i>Ambiguous Representations</i> .....	219
CREOLIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES AND RELATIONAL METHODOLOGIES .....	230
<i>Creolizing epistemologies</i> .....	232
<i>Creolizing textualities as a relational method</i> .....	251
<b>CHAPTER 7: LERLA... MO TOM ISI</b> .....	<b>265</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>280</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>303</b>

## TABLE OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: The ethnic division of the Mauritian population
- Figure 2: Cover of *Rémi et Marie*
- Figure 3: The story of Christiane, the “little” Creole girl in *Moisson du monde*
- Figure 4: Manghalkhan represented as a bandit terrorizing the local population
- Figure 5: Activity on the diverse origins of the Mauritian population in the Grade 6 History Geography textbook
- Figure 6: Activity on the cultural heritage of Mauritius in the Grade 6 History & Geography textbook
- Figure 7: Enrichment activity on Mauritians of African origin in the Grade 9 Social & Modern Studies textbook
- Figure 8: Cover of the Addendum to the NCF: *Kreol Morisien*
- Figure 9: Covers of *Ki pase la?* textbooks
- Figure 10: Original illustration of Vanessa in the Grade 1 *Kreol Morisien* textbook
- Figure 11: Cover of *Kreol Morisien* Grade 7 textbook
- Figure 12: Leo, Tikoulou, and Vanessa in their quest for the dodo
- Figure 13: Leo, Tikoulou, Vanessa in the caves of Roches Noires
- Figure 14: Footage from *Lame la Kone* showing a traditional *ravann*

## CHAPTER 0: ENN ZOUR DAN ENN PEI<sup>1</sup>

*January 11, 2012: Mauritius, the main island of an oceanic republic bearing the same name. Mauritius is part of the Mascarene Islands, an archipelagic formation located in the southwest of the Indian Ocean, about 500 miles east of Madagascar, more than 10,000 miles from the United States of America—"very far away" as many would say 'here'.*

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<sup>1</sup> The English equivalent would be "Once upon a time".

## *IN MEDIAS RES*

Giling! Giling! Giling!

It is the first day of the school year. Young pupils—including some for whom it is their first-ever day at school—in an establishment located on the southwestern coast of the island, are told by their teachers to line up in the front yard. The principal is waiting at the entrance gate. She wants to make sure that everything is well in place. Dressed in an exquisite saree, she looks elegant but nervous. Her face is moist as small drops of sweat run down her forehead. They are not only due to the warm temperatures of January, the hottest month in this tropical island of the southern hemisphere. Nor is it because of the usual stress that comes along with the first days of school. After all, she is a seasoned administrator. She has many first days under her belt.

That morning, the children of the locality and their parents are not the only ones to gather in the schoolyard. Unknown visitors, photographers, cameramen, and journalists join the party. This is a circus the principal is not used to. Le Morne Government School is a humble establishment that never receives much media attention. Neither does the poor village that bears the same name: a small fishermen community, where luxurious cars with running A/C and tinted windows only drive by, on their way to more glamorous beaches and resorts further away along the south coast of Mauritius. Down the road, somewhere on the left, stands an iconic mountain where hundreds of runaway slaves used to live once. Many say that, on the darkest of days, they decided to jump off the cliffs, collectively...

The hustle and bustle of the schoolyard suddenly comes to a stop. A small motorcade makes its way through the entrance gate. The principal rushes to greet a most distinguished visitor. The Minister of Education sets foot out of the black sedan; he is all smiles as he notices the attendance gathered in the schoolyard on this sunny Wednesday morning. He nods at the

intrigued pupils waving their tiny red, blue, yellow, and green Mauritian flags. In no time, more villagers amass in the schoolyard. This must be an important event. “A historic event!” some members of the crowd would say.

The Minister is here to officially launch the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* or Mauritian Kreol<sup>2</sup> as an optional subject, in the elementary schools of the republic. Among the guests, besides government officials, representatives from the University of Mauritius (UoM) and the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), listen with great attention. Several activists have also come to witness this long-awaited milestone in the history of the nation. Some of them nod approvingly as the Minister comments on the cultural benefits of *Kreol Morisien* in schools: “*Nou bizin montre zanfan ki zot ena zot kiltir me osi ki ena lezot kiltir otour zot. Se la kiltir ki bizin konn partaze*”<sup>3</sup>(Le Mauricien, 2012). After all, they couldn’t be prouder: this language, born out of the violent context of the slave plantation, has finally found its rightful place within the educational system of the young republic. One parent enthusiastically tells a journalist that his daughter enrolled in *Kreol Morisien* classes, not only because it is her mother tongue, but because she is Creole (Week-End Scope, 2012).

Meanwhile, another well-known language rights activist tells the press that this moment signals a first step toward the possible establishment of *Kreol Morisien*, the mother tongue of a wide majority of the population, as the school’s official medium of instruction, in lieu of English. Next to him, a member of the AKM (Mauritian Kreol Academy<sup>4</sup>) suggests that, even if the end-

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<sup>2</sup> Mauritian Kreol or *Kreol Morisien* is the official designation of the Creole language spoken in the main island of the Republic of Mauritius. In this document I am using the endonym *Kreol Morisien* to refer to the language.

<sup>3</sup> “We need to teach children that they possess their own culture but that they are also surrounded by other cultures. It is culture that we need to know how to share” (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> The *Akademi Kreol Morisien* (Mauritian Kreol Academy) was created in 2010 to oversee the processes and structures related to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools. It consisted of members from the Ministry of Education, the UoM, the MIE, the Catholic Schools Authority (BEC), and other stakeholders who had long been involved with the promotion of *Kreol Morisien*.

goal of this newly-introduced subject is not to improve students' performance in other academic subjects, it will nevertheless have a positive impact on overall classroom communications (Week-End Scope, 2012). But his views are not shared by the head of the Mauritian Kreol Unit of the MIE<sup>5</sup>, who in another interview asserts that *Kreol Morisien* in schools will benefit students in the learning of other subjects.

As they go back home at the end of the day, all parties seem satisfied. In addition to the twenty children or so at Le Morne, who were making history by becoming the first students to sit in a formal *Kreol Morisien* classroom in a public elementary school, another 3000 pupils across the country were doing same<sup>6</sup>.

*Lerla zot flank mwa enn koutpie, mo tom isi...*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A Mauritian Kreol Unit was set up at the MIE in 2011. Since then, the Unit has been involved in the development of the *Kreol Morisien* Curriculum, the training of all Mauritian Kreol teachers, and the writing of textbooks related to the teaching of this optional subject. I worked as a part-time lecturer for the MKU in 2011 before joining on a full-time basis in 2012. In the summer of 2015, I took a study leave to undertake my Ph.D. in the U.S. before rejoining the MIE in August 2020.

<sup>6</sup> 3113 students enrolled in Mauritian Kreol classes when it was introduced in schools in 2012 (MOEHR, 2013; Statistics Mauritius, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Several Creole folktales end with this phrase which literally translates as: “then they kicked me out, and I fell right here [in front of the audience]”.



## CHAPTER 1: KI SA ZISTWAR-LA SA?<sup>8</sup>

<i>Ler mo ti al lekol</i>	When I go to school
<i>Pou mo anprann Angle-Franse</i>	To learn English-French
<i>Ler mo koz mo Kreol</i>	I speak my Kreol
<i>Profeser trap mwa bate</i>	Teacher spans me
<i>Letan mo al mo lakaz</i>	When I go back home
<i>Ala mo parl mo mama</i>	Here I report to Mama
<i>Mama dir mwa koumsa</i>	Mama tells me
<i>Pa bizin to pran traka...</i>	Don't you worry...

(Serge Lebrasse – *Mwa Mo Enn Ti Kreol*)

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<sup>8</sup> This phrase translates in various ways. The literal translation would be “What’s that story (about)?”. But one could also understand it as “What’s that stuff?” or “What’s all the fuss about?”. The word ‘*zistwar*’ translates into ‘story’ but can also relate to ‘things’ or ‘stuff’.

## INTRODUCTION

To start a dissertation *in medias res*—i.e. with a story, or a *zistwar*—might appear unusual or unconventional to many, but there are several reasons why I choose to do so. Among these, is the necessity to acknowledge orality as a performative practice that has long characterized Creole societies, and many other spaces around the globe that are not defined, nor ‘imagined’ by the so-called modern technologies of literacy and print capitalism (Anderson, 2006). In those spaces indeed, structures of consciousness have largely relied on the practice of oral traditions (Ong, 2002). After all, this *zistwar* literally constitutes a starting point to this dissertation project, which primarily considers the long-awaited recognition of *Kreol Morisien*, a language recently codified and ‘standardized’, in view of its formal introduction within the national curriculum of the Mauritian republic.

But, more importantly, I start with this *zistwar* as a way to pay tribute to the many unsung heroes—the storytellers and folkmakers; the sega singers, and anonymous *orateurs*; the Papa Lindor, Mama Telesille; the Nelzir Ventre, and Fanfan, the Ti-frer and Menwar—who, have kept our *zistwar* alive, passing them along, from one generation to another. Like with the French word *histoire*, *zistwar* in *Kreol Morisien* means both story (or tale) and history. And the practice of storytelling is indeed what has long guarded our history and transmitted our culture and knowledge, our identity and sense of humanity, centuries before *Kreol Morisien* was even considered a language.

The first comprehensive study of *Kreol Morisien* (known back then as ‘*le patois créole*’) dates back to 1880, and was written by linguist and folklorist Charles Baissac.<sup>9</sup> The study predicted

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Baissac, a Franco Mauritian intellectual of the 19<sup>th</sup> century published two comprehensive studies on Mauritian Kreol: 1) *Étude sur le patois créole mauricien* (1880) and 2) *Le folklore de l’île Maurice* (1888).

that this ‘broken/corrupted French’ was on the verge of extinction. Yet, the opening *zistwar* of this dissertation—just like the long-awaited introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the Mauritian curriculum in 2012—is a clear reminder that the language is “*BIEN VIVAN*”<sup>10</sup>. And while its recent incorporation within the schooling system further demonstrates that the *contours* and unforeseeable *détours* of the language have long challenged colonial fantasies and ‘scientific’ predictions, my use of the opening *zistwar* of this dissertation also suggests that, beyond the rationality of academic descriptions, the unscripted *détours* of Creole expressions may not always be fully captured by the best academic exposés. Rather, these *détours* often require the recourse to “critical fabulation” (Hartman, 2008) and interpretative practices, of ‘speaking back’ to the lack of imagination of so-called scientific narratives.

Storytellers usually set a particular atmosphere that gives the impression to the audience that they really witnessed the events they are narrating. In a way, this is also what I tried to achieve by opting for a fictionalized storyline to introduce my readers to the many tensions and paradoxes that accompanied the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ‘ancestral language’ of the national curriculum. The various statements of the Minister of Education and of the other protagonists of this story are ‘real’. The ‘veracity’ of their arguments can be verified in published newspaper articles. Yet, I was absent at the ceremony, and by pretending that I was there, I make use of a device commonly at work in Creole oral tales, to blur the lines between what ‘truly/really’ happened and how it is remembered and told by the people.

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<sup>10</sup> I am underscoring this term ‘bien vivan’ (which means well alive) in order to distinguish Mauritian Kreol from a particular perception of Creoles as endangered languages. In the U.S. it is very common that people think that my work draws from the scholarship on language revitalization, since many of those perceptions are subsumed within people’s knowledge of Louisiana Creole. As such, it might be useful for the reader to know that Mauritian Kreol is the language that is most widely spoken in Mauritius and is not showing any kind of decline. On the contrary, the latest census revealed that more than 86% of the population spoke only Kreol at home; an increase of nearly 14% from the previous census (Statistics Mauritius 2011).

Like the people present at Le Morne Government School in 2012, I also consider the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools as an enormous achievement and a major milestone in the history of the nation. Without downplaying the significance of this event, as it connects with issues of social justice, historical reparation, and basic human rights, I yet contend that the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language of the curriculum generates a host of tensions and questions, which I hope to unpack in the various chapters of this dissertation. But before getting to these questions, allow me now, to set the scene for a different account of that same *zistwar*...

## **MAURITIUS: A CREOLE ISLAND, A MULTICULTURAL NATION**

The 1989 publication in Paris of *Éloge de la créolité* [*In Praise of Creoleness*] (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, & Confiant, 1989, 1990)—the famous ‘Creole manifesto’ written by Jean Bernabé, Parick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant—marked the heyday of the transnational *Créolité* movement, geared toward the promotion of a Creole consciousness across the Antilles in particular, and across the islands of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean in general. In an attempt to think through the dynamics of Antillean identity—beyond the limits of Césaire’s nostalgic defense of *négritude* (Césaire, 1939/2013), Glissant’s idea of *antillanité* [Caribbeanness] (Glissant, 1981/1997), and the assimilationist project of the French republic<sup>11</sup>—the manifesto indeed engaged with the syncretic cultural and linguistic dynamics of Creole societies as the core principles of a planetary network reaching far beyond racial, regional, diasporic, and nationalist

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<sup>11</sup> A former French colony, Martinique acquired the status of Overseas Department of France following the adoption of the *loi de départementalisation* by the French republic in 1946. This law was unanimously adopted following a proposition by Aimé Césaire who was then the youngest deputy of French Overseas Territory.

borders. In the romanticized vision of the three Martinican writers, Creole islands had long served as forges of a “new humanity” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant, 1990, p. 89), i.e. of the man of the so-called ‘New World’ whose embodied experience of *métissage*, biological mixing, and cultural hybridity breaks away from colonial taxonomies of racial, cultural, and linguistic purity: “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles” (p. 886). Yet, paradoxically, the manifesto also posited the idea of a new cultural essence; one that founds “a Creole solidarity with all African, Mascarin, Asian, and Polynesian peoples who share the **same** anthropological **affinities** as we do—our Creoleness” (p. 32-33, my emphasis).

Largely criticized for its defense of Creole exceptionalism, its “ideological dogma” (Dash, 1995, p. 23), “nostalgic essentialism” (Burton, 1993), and “retrospective” rhetoric (Gallagher, 2007)<sup>12</sup>, the manifesto generated much scholarly debates as regards the diversity (instead of the affinities) of Creole peoples, languages, and cultures in a variety of historical and political circumstances (Price, 2017). Given the obvious differences between the ‘New World’ of the American hemispheres and the lesser ‘known’ Creole societies of the Indian Ocean, Asia, and Polynesia, for instance, the text indeed incites the following questions: What is it exactly that qualifies a culture, a language, and a people as Creole? Is it the idea of *métissage* and cultural re-engineering; the experience of orality; the common history of slavery? Is it the emergence of new linguistic and cultural systems? While these various elements are certainly common to all Creole societies, they are far from being exclusive to Creole experiences or from accounting for any form of exceptionalism (DeGraff, 2005). How useful or relevant then is the *élogistes*’ discussion of Creoleness for understanding the more particular/local cultural and linguistic

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Gallagher writes, about *créolité*, that although it “is inherently programmatic and future-oriented, the aesthetic outlined in the main body of the manifesto is strikingly retrospective”; she mentions the manifesto’s “desire to freeze-frame ‘creoleness’, leaving time out of the reckoning” (Gallagher, 2007, pp. 228-229).

dynamics of ‘distanced’ spaces like Mauritius, the Seychelles, or La Réunion, which are also commonly labeled as Creole?

The philosophical approach of Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant to the concept of creolization (Glissant, 1990, 2010)—which I shall discuss at length in the next chapter of this dissertation—allows us to shift our attention from exclusive and bounded definitions of so-called Creole **objects** (or entities) in order to focus on the **process** of encounter, mixing, and reciprocal transformation at work in Creole societies, that also compare with other contexts of diversity. Infused with both *opacité* [opacity] and *imprévisibilité* [unpredictability], Glissant’s conceptualization of creolization indeed refers to a more abstract process that involves the “fluid, unstable, and open-ended practice of adaptation [...] generat[ing] unpredictable syncretisms” (Lionnet, 2015a). This being said, many have also used the concept of creolization in works that reference firm historical roots and particular regional dynamics (Palmié, 2006; Vergès & Marimoutou, 2005). Since the 1960s, for instance, linguists and anthropologists have applied the term to describe “the unusual processes of rapid cultural change that first took place in the violent colonial cauldron of the early New World” (Price, 2017, p. 214). Many have referenced it in their study of the linguistic and cultural dynamics that gave lieu to the emergence of Creole languages and cultures in very different contact zones and slave plantation societies around the world between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries (Bickerton, 1981; Chaudenson, 2001; DeGraff, 2005; Hannerz, 1987; Mufwene, 2015). This is to say that the varied and unpredictable syncretisms or *résultantes* of creolization (Glissant, 1990, 2010), observable in a diversity of contexts, continue to challenge homogenous, universal, and exoticized views of Creole languages and cultures that tend to reduce them to a particular ‘kind’ of experience (Hacking, 2006), largely indebted to colonial taxonomies of racial and linguistic differences.

These *résultantes* help to remain attentive to the variety of ways of being Creole in diverse historical, cultural, regional, and political contexts.

Unlike in the Antilles, for instance, the island of Mauritius<sup>13</sup> had no indigenous population, although archival research attests of transient human presence in the Mascarene Archipelago since the late Medieval period (Toorawa, 2007). Located in the Southwest region of the Indian Ocean, about 500 miles east of Madagascar, Mauritius itself was successively colonized by France (1715-1810) and Britain (1810-1968) starting in the eighteenth century. Some scholars even presume that runaway slaves, left behind by early Portuguese and Dutch settlers, were the actual first “permanent occupants” of the area since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Lionnet, 2012a, p. 225). Defeated at war by Britain, the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte ultimately surrendered Mauritius and the Seychelles to the British empire. But despite the establishment of the British colonial administration on the island, and the subsequent imposition of English as its official language, the 1810 Capitulation decree and the 1814 Treaty of Paris legally authorized the French-speaking population of the island to retain their customs and languages (Carpooran, 2003).

Under the British administration indeed, so-called ‘minority’ languages, religions, and cultural practices were tolerated, although enslaved communities were still being Christianized, renamed, and forced into abandoning their native languages. Instead, they spoke a local vernacular—known today as *Kreol Morisien*—which emerged from the interaction between the slaves, free people of color, and White settlers, and which many long considered but a French

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<sup>13</sup> Today, the Republic of Mauritius actually comprises a collectivity of islands that include the main island Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, the Cargados Carajos shoals (Saint-Brandon), and the Chagos Archipelago (disputed with the UK but recognized by the UN as Mauritian territory). In the context of this dissertation, I shall however focus on the main island of Mauritius.

*patois*, not a language proper (Mufwene, 2015)<sup>14</sup>. Following the abolition of slavery in 1835, contractual workers, known as indentured servants, were brought in from British colonies in South Asia, to replace the slaves in the sugarcane fields; most of them were allowed to retain their religions, languages, and cultural practices (Carpooran, 2003). Because of the heavy demand of plantation owners for new economic migrants, by the middle of the nineteenth century, South Asians had already outnumbered former slaves and their (mixed) descendants—by then locally designated as Creoles or Black Creoles, depending on the shade of their skin color (Boswell, 2006; Teelock, 1999; Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b). But while the offspring of indentured servants and other economic migrants were authorized by the British administration to maintain a strong attachment to their respective ancestral homelands, cultures, and languages (Eisenlohr, 2006), by the middle of the twentieth century, most of them began using *Kreol Morisien* in their daily interaction, making it the main *lingua franca* of the country (Hookoomsing, 2007).

By the time of its independence in 1968, the cultural fabric of the ‘Creole island’ (Vaughan, 2005) was thus already marked by a rich ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, that yet did not necessarily break away from colonial taxonomies of ethnic, racial, or cultural difference. Rather, by extending these classifications to the postcolonial nation, local politicians strategized with state-endorsed categories of ethnicity, promoting an ethnonationalist vision of the country that has since crystallized in the image of the ‘Rainbow nation’ (Carter, 1998; Peghini, 2016). While this compartmentalized approach to the local diversity stands in strong contrast with the later Antillean claim for Creole consciousness, as a celebration of *métissage*

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<sup>14</sup> While I am not so much interested here in the so-called ‘origins’ of Creole languages per se, a number of scholars such as Mufwene (2015) and Chaudenson (2001) date back what they call the ‘emergence’ of Creole languages to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and argue that it evolved from the interaction between settlers, slaves, indigenous populations, and/or other immigrants.



and syncretism (Lionnet, 2012a), it resulted *a contrario* in logics of ethnic separatism, carefully maintained through a number of state institutions, including public education, the electoral system, the civil service, and the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (Carpooran, 2003).

To this day, Mauritius is consistently praised as an ‘exceptionally’ peaceful multicultural republic; a symbol of “economic miracle” (Stiglitz, 2011), ethnic diversity, and social harmony, in contrast with a number of other independent countries of the African continent. In fact, the Mauritian republic consistently sits at number one of the Mo Ibrahim Index of good governance in Africa. However, the so-called success of its multicultural and economic model does not necessarily mean that political recognition is equally achieved by all the ethnic groups of the island; nor does it preclude socioeconomic inequalities or guarantee redistributive justice to those groups that are not fully recognized within the framework of the multicultural nation (Baptiste, 2013; Peghini, 2016). Indeed, in Mauritius, ethnocultural recognition determines the access to state resources; but, in turn, state-endorsed categories of ethnicity directly correlate with the valorization of so-called ancestral cultures and the ability of the various ethnic groups to ensure cultural ‘purity’ through the transmission of ancestral languages, cultural practices, and religions, often reconstructed or re-imagined *a posteriori* (Eisenlohr, 2006).

If the rationale behind the ethnonationalist discourse of postcolonial Mauritius has consistently invoked the desire to avoid long-standing cultural tensions and protect ethnic minorities, the capacity to ensure social justice, religious freedom, and linguistic rights in the country nevertheless requires constant vigilance and the political will to be inclusive vis-à-vis all forms of ethnic, social, and cultural diversity. However, within the compartmentalized logics of the multicultural nation, ethnocultural groups may not be fully recognized by the state and its institutions if associated with ideas of cultural, linguistic, or religious mixing. This is to say that

the perceived harmony and stability of Mauritian multiculturalism is not based on the affirmation of a shared Creoleness, nor does it rely on the kind of Creole consciousness that can be observed in spaces such as La Réunion, Seychelles, Martinique, or Guadeloupe. Rather the ‘success’ of the multicultural nation paradoxically rests on an ideal of ethnic pluralism that subtends the ongoing compartmentalization of ancestral cultures as a way of ensuring ethnic cohesion and cultural purity (Miles, 1999). Since 1968, this state-endorsed promotion of ancestral values has however consistently led to the sociopolitical marginalization and institutional abjection of so-called ‘hybrid’ communities or *perdi-bann*,<sup>15</sup> including those locally identified as Creoles (or Afro-Creoles), i.e. as mixed descendants of enslaved groups, who had long lost their ancestral languages, cultures, and religions (Boswell, 2006). While I thus acknowledge that ancestral politics occupy a particular institution function in the model of the state, I am namely interested here in how its endorsement by the multicultural curriculum will lead to the abjection of Creole language, people, and culture in the education system<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The expression ‘*perdi-bann*’ in *Kreol Morisien* derives from the French ‘*perdre [sa] bande*’ which means to lose one’s group (the French word ‘*bande*’ translating as ‘group’). A ‘*perdi-bann*’ is in fact usually considered as such because of the lack of clear filiation and/or the identification with mixed communities. While ‘*perdi-bann*’ in *Kreol Morisien* might remind one of the Haitian expression ‘*pèdi bann*’—which refers (mockingly) to the loss of masculine virility (the word ‘*bander*’ in French meaning ‘to have an erection’)—the two expressions have different etymologies.

<sup>16</sup> As I argue on page 13, the category of ancestral languages is an artificial one, largely reconstructed *a posteriori* to promote the so-called ‘purity’ of ethno-diasporic groups. While largely naturalized in the state’s discourse, the expression ‘ancestral language’ thus does not necessarily refer to a historically verified category or an anthropologically accurate one. Yet, because it is predominantly used to promote ethnocultural ‘purity’, this construction *a posteriori* remains problematic, in particular for those groups that cannot/may not identify with narratives and discourses of ethnic purity. The purpose and significance of ancestral languages in the multicultural state discourse will be discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5.

## **KREOL MORISIEN: A LONG-ABJECTED LANGUAGE OF THE LOCAL EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Nowadays, the vast majority of the Mauritian population speaks *Kreol Morisien* (Statistics Mauritius, 2011); and as a result of the sustained presence of multiple languages in the local education system, most Mauritians are in fact multilingual, albeit to varying degrees.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, following the independence of the country, English and French remained the two compulsory languages of formal education, while several Asian languages (Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, Telegu, Mandarin, and Urdu) and Arabic gradually made their way as optional languages into the national curriculum for primary education. Although seldom used in the daily life of the population, these optional languages—commonly labeled as ‘ancestral’ by the national curriculum—continue to bear a strong ethnocultural significance for descendants of (South-)Asian immigrants, who are still defined in the demographics of the Mauritian state as Hindus, Muslims, and Sino-Mauritians.

But while the education system of Mauritius often prides itself of its long-standing multilingual tradition, it is fair to say that, in contradistinction, the place of *Kreol Morisien* within the school curriculum has always been a controversial subject. As a matter of fact, because of its unifying function as the main *lingua franca* of the island, numerous intellectuals, scholars, politicians, and associations have advocated for the nationalization of *Kreol Morisien*, and for its official recognition within a number of state institutions—including the parliament, the civil service, the judiciary, and the education system—since the 1970s (Carpooran, 2003). But despite the undeniable importance of *Kreol Morisien* in the daily life of the population (it is

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<sup>17</sup> This is to say that, while most Mauritians are exposed to French and English via the education system, the media, and the tourism industry, all Mauritians do not necessarily speak French and English (in addition to *Kreol Morisien*) in their daily interaction; nor do they necessarily have complete fluency in these two languages.

today the only home language of a vast majority of Mauritians), the fact that it was the last language subject to be added to the *National Curriculum Framework* (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015b; Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012) raises a number of critical questions about the correlation between ethnocultural politics and ancestral claims on the one hand, and the systemic exclusion of Creole referents from the educational project of the multicultural nation, on the other (Harmon, 2017). More specifically, as I would argue in this dissertation, the recent introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an optional ancestral language—rather than as a national language—in primary schools in 2012, renders visible some of the insidious dynamics of the multicultural curriculum that has long contributed to the abjection of Creole/creolized expressions, cultures, and identities, as they relate to questions of *métissage*, miscegenation, and hybridity, instead of ethnic purity.

In the next section of this introduction, I shall discuss how the concept of a national curriculum in postcolonial countries amounts to a teleological project that conveys the idea of a model and legitimate citizenship, on the basis of a dominant political ideology. In particular, I shall reflect on the main questions raised by the long-awaited introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum in 2012, on matters of social justice, ethnopolitical recognition, and historical reparation, namely as they relate to the acknowledgment of the local Creole people and culture of Mauritius, whose ‘original’ links to Africa are yet always paradoxically invoked. Indeed, if the presence of *Kreol Morisien* in primary schools marks an important step for the recognition of the language and its speakers, it also raises critical questions about the purpose and effects of its ‘essentialization’ as the ancestral language of a specific community of mixed slaves’ descendants in the curriculum. Unlike French and English, *Kreol Morisien* is indeed not (yet) a compulsory language in Mauritian schools; it is thus not offered to all since it is mutually exclusive with the

other ancestral languages of the curriculum. Yet, it is fair to ask: under what terms and to what extent can *Kreol Morisien* be considered the ancestral language of a particular ethnic group—at par with the other ancestral languages of the curriculum (Harmon, 2017; Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012)—when it in fact bears no direct reference to a unique ancestral homeland or culture outside of the island? Moreover, *Kreol Morisien* was not ‘created’ by a single racial or ethnic group on the island; rather it was born from the (violent) contact between multiple groups and is today the main *lingua franca* of the country *par excellence*.

In the multilingual curriculum of Mauritius, the hierarchical stratification of languages within the national curriculum results from the implementation of official linguistic policies that reify colonial classifications such as ‘European languages’ (today labeled as ‘International’), ‘Oriental languages’ (also commonly labeled as ‘ancestral’), and ‘local languages’. But until 2012, the only two ‘local’ languages of the country—i.e. *Kreol Morisien* and Bhojpuri (a local Indian Creole), that are both considered indigenous to the island—were the only ones that were completely barred from the education system, if not for merely informal communication purposes. According to Jean-François and Korlapu-Bungaree, two main issues previously hindered the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools:

The first one is the limited social status of Mauritian Kreol next to the more prestigious French and English languages in the diglossic situation characterizing the social distribution of languages in the country. The second issue is the cultural and ethnic dimension associated with Mauritian Kreol in the country following a multicultural model: although the latter [*Kreol Morisien*] has, since long, moved from being a vernacular language of the Creole community to become the mother tongue of nearly all Mauritians, it is still closely identified with the Creole community.

(Jean-François & Korlapu-Bungaree, 2012, p. 19)

There is indeed a general consensus in Mauritius about the fact that *Kreol Morisien* is the ‘real’ vernacular of the country. But ‘paradoxically’ (Baggioni & de Robillard, 1990), in addition to being perceived as an inferior language—if a language at all—when compared to English and French; within the ethnonationalist discourse of the Mauritian state, *Kreol Morisien* is hardly ever presented as the language of ‘all’ Mauritians. Rather because of its direct association with slave plantations, it is often casted as “another merely ‘ethnic’ idiom belonging primarily to the black Creole citizens”, i.e. descendants of African slaves (Lionnet, 2012, p. 228). This complex ethnolinguistic situation has generated much tensions and controversies around the status which *Kreol Morisien* could or would occupy in the country’s curriculum, since a national curriculum is indeed meant to reflect the vision of the state on issues of culture, identity, and language, and their critical role in shaping a sense of nationhood and citizenship.

### ***KREOL MORISIEN AS A LANGUAGE MATTER OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM***

In his 2011 monograph *Curriculum: From Theory to Practice*, Wesley Null argues that “any curriculum must address *why* subject matter should be taught” (Null, 2011, p. 2). Commenting on the critical importance for any curriculum to account for the purpose and “ultimate goals” of each subject matter, he further argues that “[b]ecause of its history and etymology, curriculum is inevitably a teleological term” (p. 2, author’s emphasis). Drawing from the work of Paolo Freire, Null’s discussion of the teleological dimension of the curriculum insists on the necessity to move beyond abstract curricular prescriptions that are restricted to questions of *what* subject matters should be taught in schools and *how*. As such, he emphasizes the idea of a “liberating curriculum” that is not limited to the mere organization of school subjects, but that ultimately

“connects students with [...] the foundational knowledge necessary for understanding social and political life” (p. 8).

While this idea of the curriculum as a teleological project of liberation does not reference the experience of colonized spaces *per se*, it offers an interesting perspective for examining the stakes of the national curriculum in Mauritius, following its independence in 1968. Indeed, with the access to political sovereignty, the newly independent nation had to be imagined (Anderson, 1983/2006); and political leaders saw in the ‘Mauritianization’ of the education system a way to convey renewed conceptualizations of nationhood and citizenship (Baptiste, 2013). As such, even if the decolonization of Mauritius was achieved through ‘peaceful’ negotiations, the first independent government of the country insisted on the critical importance of a rupture from colonial education. The subsequent ‘Mauritianization’ of the curriculum—which first entailed the localizing (or recontextualizing) of school subject matters—was thus envisioned as a means to liberate former colonial subjects of the British Empire, and turn them into ‘legitimate’ citizens of the new Mauritian nation.

Finding the basis for what constitutes this ‘legitimate’ citizenship and a shared sense of nationhood however proved quite challenging in the multiethnic and multilingual state. Indeed, the various constituents of the Mauritian population had historically been organized (and recognized) along ethnic and religious lines, namely via the institutionalization of ‘ancestral languages’, introduced in public schools by the British administration since the 1950s (Eisenlohr, 2006). And because ancestral languages serve a vital function in maintaining ethnic identifications—in opposition to English and French, that were long naturalized by the colonial regime as ‘universal’ languages of science, reason, and progress<sup>18</sup>—curricular debates following

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<sup>18</sup> There is indeed a notable power differential in Mauritius when it comes to the place occupied by former colonial languages (English and French) as they compare with so-called ancestral languages, which are largely reduced to

independence were not entirely “liberated” from colonial taxonomies of linguistic and cultural difference.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw numerous political attempts to radically transform the Mauritian society and its education system in view of abolishing ethnic divisions and economic stratification, and promoting the idea of a unified nation and people. In this context, the elevation of *Kreol Morisien* to the rank of national language and official medium of instruction was presented as a means to rally the diverse population, democratize the education system, and empower the Mauritian people. Proponents of this political agenda indeed argued that a higher literacy rate would entail the full “liberation” of the people; and the use of the mother tongue (i.e. *Kreol Morisien*) in the curriculum would help breed a generation of citizens who would fully participate in the construction of the ‘modern’ nation. However, this attempt was met with strong resistance from those groups that were already benefiting from the existing system of ethnic patronage. Ultimately, the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* was left at the margins of public education, while ancestral politics gradually gained greater institutional value.

The importance of ancestral languages in the local education system was further legitimized with the publication of a first national curriculum framework in the mid-2000s. A “critical component of a ‘curriculum system’ which comprises subject area content descriptors (syllabuses), learning materials (including textbooks) and assessment processes and practices” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 24), the national curriculum framework sought to ensure the implementation of educational policies and practices by specifying students’ learning outcomes. Among these

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their symbolic functions. As mentioned on page 17, this also partly explains that, “when compared to English and French; within the ethnonationalist discourse of the Mauritian state, *Kreol Morisien* is hardly ever presented as the language of ‘all’ Mauritians. Rather because of its direct association with slave plantations, it is often casted as ‘another merely ‘ethnic’ idiom belonging primarily to the black Creole citizens’, i.e. descendants of African slaves (Lionnet, 2012, p. 228)”.



outcomes, the Mauritian child was expected to develop an awareness and appreciation of the nation's diversity; and the "reinforcement" of ancestral languages was defined as of way to "allow multilingualism and pluriculturalism to flourish" (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2007, p. 66). Hence, the national curriculum framework endorsed a vision of the multicultural nation as the mere juxtaposition of ethnic communities that had all emigrated from an 'elsewhere', and that had managed to preserve their cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions while cohabiting peacefully. In this context, one's right to an ancestral language also ensured one's right to be 'clearly' represented in the curriculum, and in society in general.

Yet, because of its 'normalizing' effects, the curriculum framework also reduced the diversity of the Mauritian society to clearly delineated and impermeable ethnic categories. And in trying to represent all of these categories as 'separate' and 'equal', the NCF reified colonial logics of racial segregation and ethnic purity which naturalized *a priori* constructions of identities, previously weaponized for the hierarchical ordering of peoples, cultures, belief systems, and epistemologies. Moreover, because it represented cultures as discrete and stable, the curriculum further dismissed processes of cultural mixing and *métissage* that had turned Mauritius into a Creole island since its early colonial period (Vaughan, 2005). As a matter of fact, the first NCF of the nation made no mention of the local Creole people, culture, and language, 'abjecting' them entirely from the so-called 'liberatory telos' of the curriculum.

With the emergence of an (Afro-)Creole consciousness in the 1990s and the gradual recentering of the legacy of slavery as a key constituent of Creole identity, culture, and language in Mauritius, several (Afro)Creole movements, associations, and activists however began to lay claim on *Kreol Morisien* as the 'symbolic' ancestral language of mixed slaves' descendants. In an attempt to force the recognition of the Mauritian state and of its institutions in their favor, a

growing number of Creoles even began to strategize with the ‘African’ component of their ancestry, and with the critical role it played in the emergence of *Kreol Morisien*, as a way of compensating for the absence of clear and/or ‘pure’ ethnic filiation vis-à-vis the multicultural framework of the nation, that had historically relied on the performance of ancestral belonging for granting political recognition to the various ethnocultural constituents of the country (Eisenlohr, 2018; Harmon, 2017). While the Afro-centricity of this ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1985/1998) necessarily entailed the downplaying of discourses of *métissage*, miscegenation, and cultural hybridity, it gradually allowed (Afro-)Creole leaders to gain political leverage in the 2000s.<sup>19</sup> But as Creoles began to talk about Africa as an ancestral homeland, Creoleness became increasingly conflated with Africanness, and claims for the political recognition and officialization of *Kreol Morisien* shifted the focus from national language to ancestral language. While the initial goal of the national curriculum was thus to ensure political ‘liberation’ from colonial taxonomies of representations through the establishment of a shared citizenship, the long-standing struggle of (Afro-)Creoles for state recognition paradoxically led to the formal introduction of the nation’s main *lingua franca*—its only Creole language—as yet another ancestral element within the multicultural curriculum.

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<sup>19</sup> While this dissertation mainly considers the link between Afro-centricity and ‘strategic essentialism’ in its discussion of the reclaiming of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles, one could further reflect on the strategic recourse to forms of ethnocultural essentialisms within the other communities of Mauritius, such as Indo-Mauritians and Sino-Mauritians.

## **FROM A CREOLE/*KREOL* CURRICULUM TO THE CREOLIZING OF THE CURRICULUM**

Investigating the complex relationship between conceptions of nation, culture, language, and ethnic identity, as they impact on curriculum design in postcolonial nation-states, the present dissertation takes as a point of departure this historic introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as a subject matter and an ancestral language within the national curriculum framework of Mauritius. But more importantly, the questions raised in this research project originate as much from an intellectual and a professional interest, as from a deeply personal desire to understand how the struggle of a people for the recognition, empowerment, and officialization of a language long considered inferior, deficient, and shameful, can allow one to better comprehend past struggles, present challenges, and possible futures of creolized societies.

As a multilingual Mauritian and a racialized Creole man, I have long wrested with the multiple dimensions of my own identity. As a child, I first spoke French, and then *Kreol Morisien* and consider both of them as my mother tongues; I learned English at school—from the age of five—only to realize, years later, that my practice of these three languages was fraught, and forever entangled; just like my identity. I viewed my own self as a crossroad of multiple cultural influences that were obviously intertwined, but that were still in constant and paradoxical negotiation. I grew up Catholic on a multi-religious island, just like a majority of Creoles, only to understand that I am a non-believer, at least not in the traditional sense. My parents—who had lived through the independence of the country—instilled in me the love of my nation, to the point that I long thought that I could only be fully Mauritian if I refused to identify as a Creole. After all, the country was creolized, but it was still divided.

My father taught me how to read and write in *Kreol Morisien*, decades before it was even introduced in schools. But how strange was it for me to realize that, in schools precisely, like in the rest of the Mauritian society, those who primarily spoke *Kreol* and lived in *Kreol*, were considered illiterate, uneducated, and vulgar; whereas those who learned *Angle-Franse* [‘English-French’] were praised for it. With my male friends, I still spoke *Kreol*; with my girlfriends, I used French; and yet all of my exams, I wrote them in English. I never knew how to say certain words in one of my two mother tongues, i.e. *Kreol Morisien*. I still don’t. I simply never learned them at school, or anywhere else. As an undergraduate student, I did a Bachelor in French studies, only to write my Honors thesis on immigrant workers and ‘expatriates’ trying to learn *Kreol Morisien*. I then moved to France for an M.A. in Philosophy, and never got rid of my strong Creole accent, unlike my other Mauritian friends. Today, I am writing a dissertation about the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* in someone else’s English, where I use ‘z’ instead of ‘s’; and in a country where I have at times felt racialized and dehumanized in the strangest and most painful ways... I sometimes wonder whether to be Creole is to actually embody the sum of so many multiplicities, incompatibilities, and paradoxes. But I also know that my experience probably resonates with so many others, who don’t call themselves that way.

A few months prior to the implementation of *Kreol Morisien* in primary schools, I was hired as a lecturer in the newly-minted *Younit Kreol Morisien* [Mauritian Kreol Unit] of the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE)—the only parastatal institution of the country responsible for curriculum development, teacher education, and educational research. Set up in 1973, a few years only after the independence of the country, the MIE had already played a central role in the initial ‘Mauritianization’ of the local education system. Following a parliamentary decision to introduce *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum, that same institution was then tasked, almost forty

years later, with writing an *Addendum to the National Curriculum Framework* (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012) that would officialize the status of the language in the education system. It was also responsible for the training of primary school teachers of *Kreol Morisien*, and for the publication of school textbooks in that same language. As a teacher educator and a textbook designer at the MIE, I was rapidly expected to contribute to these multiple initiatives, and I realized, from my former experience as a pupil, and later as a primary school teacher in a private French school, that this long-awaited opportunity of teaching, learning, reading, and writing in one's mother tongue and in the *de facto* national language constituted a historic moment in so many ways.

Yet the modalities of the institutionalization of *Kreol Morisien*—not as a mother tongue, nor as a national *lingua franca*, but as an ancestral language of the multicultural curriculum—brought me back to the complex and paradoxical relationship between national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identifications as they informed the status, significance, and pedagogical promises of the local vernacular, long associated with the history of colonialism and slavery, in the education system of the Creole country. Leaving aside the celebratory rhetoric of *métissage*, hybridity, and cultural fluidity, the essentialization of (Afro-)Creoles and the subsequent 'ethnicization' of *Kreol Morisien* indeed stood in strong contrast with the kind of rupture from colonial taxonomies which the Martinican *élogistes* Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant had described. In fact, it was this very essentialization of Creole language, culture, and identity, that finally led to the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* by the education system. But could there be more to it?

The avalanche of critical, professional, and yet intimate questions which this paradoxical trajectory of the language generated in me—as a Creole, a Mauritian, a *métis* from diverse

origins, a teacher educator, a curriculum developer, and a researcher—are those I wish I could explore, investigate, and address in this dissertation. But because these interrogations are far too numerous, complex, and multidimensional, I shall limit myself to three main questions which I will use as a guiding thread through the subsequent chapters of this research project:

1. How does the multicultural discourse of the Mauritian nation bear on the definition, representation, and (in)visibility of the local Creole people, culture, and language within the national curriculum of Mauritius?
2. What are the particular historical circumstances, ethnocultural practices, and political strategies that have led to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, and how do these relate to notions of representation, identity, and recognition of (Afro)Creoles in Mauritius?
3. Finally, to what extent does the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools unsettle the (neo)colonial technology of a Multicultural/Mauritianized version of the Curriculum?

As I reflect on the modalities and significance of the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum framework, I propose to examine the historical, cultural, and ethno-political specificities of the Mauritian context, that have led to the strategic reconfiguration of this local vernacular as one of the ‘ancestral languages’ of the education system. In chapter 4, for instance, I start with a discussion of two competing models of the Mauritian nation—the ethnonationalist model and the Mauritianist model—and their contrasting approach to questions of diversity, ethnicity, national identity, and ancestry. After arguing that these models have both participated, albeit in different ways, in the erasure, marginalization, and/or abjection of the local Creole people, language, and culture, I focus on the reinforcement of the ethnonationalist

model of the 1980s, to investigate how its emphasis on ancestral politics has shaped the ways in which the multicultural nation was ‘imagined’. In particular, I consider how the ‘Mauritianization’ of various institutions has had an important impact on the education system. As I focus on the ‘Mauritianization’ of the curriculum, I namely examine how its multicultural ‘telos’ has historically impacted the representation of Creole people, language, and culture, and the space they occupy in postcolonial education.

Taking into account the legacy of the island’s colonial past, and the particularities of its much-admired multiculturalism today, this project also proposes to consider the historical implications of the country’s ancestral politics, not only for those who have long been abjected from the discourse of the Rainbow nation—the métis, (Afro-)Creoles, and mixed slaves’ descendants—but also for the postcolonial state, and its capacity to project itself as both one and many. As such, in chapter 5, I examine how the national curriculum framework of Mauritius reifies the divisive principles of colonial taxonomies, that have produced a compartmentalized and hierarchical approach to ethnicity, diasporic histories, and ancestral homelands, based on the idea of ethnocultural identities as stable and discrete categories, rather than as fluid and dynamics formations. In response to the long-standing marginalization of slaves’ descendants in the country, I consider in particular how (Afro-)Creoles leaders have mobilized the ancestral politics at work in the education system, and endorsed essentialist narratives linking Creole people, language, and culture to Africa and former African slaves, in order to force state recognition in their favor. From there, I discuss how the introduction and teaching of *Kreol Morisien*, and its instrumentalization as the ancestral language of (Afro)Creoles (rather than the mother-tongue or national language of a majority of Mauritians) in schools, connect with broader issues of cultural empowerment, historical reparation, and epistemic justice.

This being said, because I am as much interested in past struggles and present challenges, as I am in possible (albeit unforeseeable) futures, my main goal in the final chapter of this dissertation project, is to shift the discussion from the historical dynamics and ethno-political calculus that have led to the establishment of a Creole/*Kreol* curriculum, to the more paradoxical, subversive, and at times unscripted processes of epistemological and methodological entanglements, which the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools slowly generates, and which I call the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’. Indeed, by reinvesting Glissant’s concept of creolization, I consider how, beyond its essentialization and categorization as ancestral language, the introduction of the local vernacular—that encompasses much broader dimensions and tensions within the Mauritian society—still enables the gradual incorporation, in school textbooks, of creolized imaginaries, histories, methodologies, and ways of knowing that ultimately trouble the normalizing technologies of cultural representations, racial hierarchies, and epistemological values inherited from the colonial regime.

Ultimately, as it examines the ramifications of the formal integration of *Kreol Morisien* to the education system of Mauritius, this dissertation adopts a two-fold approach which relates to the inherent paradox I described in my discussion of ‘Creole’ and ‘Creolization’. On the one hand, it examines how the local *lingua franca* was introduced in the Mauritian curriculum, on the basis of its ethnocultural relevance to a multicultural project of nationhood and citizenship, that has largely inherited from colonial values and representations. On the other hand, it also considers the extent to which this introduction—although used in an educational technology that ‘normalizes’ colonial and multicultural taxonomies of identity, language, and culture—paradoxically paves the way for more unscripted and unpredictable forms of relation, that still participate in the gradual transformation of the curriculum.



## **CHAPTER 2: KREOLIZASION—KI FER POU KIFER?<sup>20</sup>**

*A CREOLIZING APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CURRICULUM*

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<sup>20</sup> “Creolization: Why? For What Purpose?”

*“Rien n’est Vrai, tout est vivant”* [Nothing is True, all is living]  
Epitaph on Edouard Glissant’s grave

## **INTRODUCTION: CREOLE AND CREOLIZATION AS PARADOX**

Just like with the general introduction to this dissertation, I start this chapter on my main conceptual framework with a piece of ‘creative’ writing, a riddle from late Martinican poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), which reads as follows: “Nothing is True, all is living”. Inscribed on the epitaph of Glissant’s grave, located in a small maritime cemetery on the southwestern coast of Martinique, the riddle, which takes the form of an enigmatic saying, also previously served as the title to his last public conference on April 8, 2010. But what does this riddle mean? Glissant specialists Valérie Loichot and Michael Wiedorn explain that it “denies the existence of an absolute truth, and even the very possibility of truth” (Loichot, 2020, p. 45); but more importantly, if what the riddle says is true, i.e. “if it is the case that nothing is true, then what are we to make of that proposition itself, or for that matter of the one that immediately follows it? Are they true, or false, or both, or rather something else entirely?” (Wiedorn, 2018, p. xiii). Indeed, if “nothing is True”, should that statement be even considered to be true? And what about the second part of the riddle, which is likewise a bold affirmation (“all is living”); should we take it to be true, or is it also not true? And should the entire riddle itself be considered to be true, or not? Or does it indirectly suggest that the very idea that everything is true (i.e. that several ‘truths’ can actually co-exist and overlap) ultimately entails that nothing is, in the end (absolutely or really) ‘True’? In other words, by saying that “nothing is True”, is the riddle indirectly implying that everything simply “is” (in the sense that “all is living”), and that the idea of Truth has nothing to do with what actually “is”?

While attempting to answer this philosophical question is far beyond the scope (or interest) of this dissertation project, I use Glissant's riddle as the epigraph to my own conceptual chapter because it stands out as an example of a classic 'liar paradox' in philosophy. And the idea of paradox itself is often associated with the terms 'Creole' and 'creolization', which are at the heart of this dissertation's conceptual framework. More importantly, as I shall argue in the following pages of this chapter, the concepts of 'Creole' and 'creolization'—although regularly used in tandem—also share a paradoxical relationship in as much as the former is often used to designate the outcome of the latter when in effect, in Glissant's philosophy, this latter is an unending and unstable process that always produces unpredictable *résultantes* or syncretisms, rather than mere results or homogeneity (Glissant, 1990). In other words, if indeed creolization is an unending process that does not produce stable or homogenous outcomes, how then can these outcomes—which presumably would not be possible without creolization—be ever described, let alone labeled, as 'Creole'? This is to say that to label categories of objects such as identity, language, and culture as 'Creole' is to presuppose the completion of a creolizing process which in turn, Glissant argues, is unending.

Yet, from its very title, this dissertation project—just like numerous other scholarly works dedicated to so-called Creole spaces—brings together, in non-mutually exclusive terms, notions of 'Creole' and 'creolization'. And it does so by resolutely discussing how issues related to Creole identity, Creole culture, and Creole language impact curriculum design in Mauritius; while still assuming the paradoxical possibility of an ongoing creolizing process also at work in that same curriculum. Or to put it differently: for my dissertation to argue that it is possible to talk about 'a creolizing of the curriculum', generated by the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in that same curriculum, it has to first assume that it is also possible to identify the 'specific'

contours of a Creole language, culture, and identity. And while the ‘logic’ behind the combination of these two ideas may appear paradoxical—or ‘illogical’, for that matter—it also brings me back to this idea that a paradox simply “is”; and to the idea that a rationalizable ‘truth’—as much as it sits uneasily with paradoxes—has no business in that. But, in contradistinction, my interest in Glissant’s approach to creolization—which I shall further discuss later in this chapter—does; since the long-term objective of his often-considered paradoxical discussion of Creole identities and cultures is precisely “to reformulate some of the fundamental categories of Western thought” (Wiedorn, 2018, p. xv).

Commenting on the critical importance of paradox in Glissant’s work, and quoting the etymology of the term, Michael Wiedorn writes the following:

*As the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology explains, paradox, derived from the Greek παράδοξος, has in modern English come to refer to a “statement or tenet contrary to received opinion; [a] proposition on the face of it . . . [that is] self-contradictory.” That bipartite definition communicates two different things, both of which are entirely pertinent to Glissant’s thought: a paradox will first and foremost break with preconceived and widely shared ideas, and it may also contradict itself.*

(Wiedorn, 2018, p. xvi)

Wiedorn’s discussion of ‘paradox’ clearly references the co-existence of opposite, dissonant, or incompatible discourses, ideas, and representations within a singular statement, approach, image, or entity. This said, I would argue that, in turn, notions of opposites and incompatibles are contingent upon taxonomies of difference and segregation that sometimes overlook or dismiss realities of contact, mixing, and relation.

A case in point is the practice of Caribbean *tim-tim* or Mauritian *sirandann*—both local forms of ‘Creole’ riddles—in which paradoxes are commonly expressed through rhetorical figures, used to describe non-binary objects, identities, or directions that overlap with so-called ‘opposite’ categories. In *Kreol Morisien*, for instance, one can find such figures in words like *zom-fam* [a ‘man-woman’, to designate a queer person, that is neither man, nor woman; or both], or *mor-vivan* [‘dead-living’ to designate an entity that is neither dead, nor living; or both]. And while such terms, that indicate a “third space”, are certainly not exclusive to Creole languages, they indeed put to question the fixity, stability, and validity of so-called rational or descriptive categories that are often presented as opposite and mutually exclusive. Moreover, if a word like ‘*mor-vivan*’ does not necessarily designate a ‘dead who lives’ or a ‘living who is dead’, but a third experience which is neither one of the two others, the very possibility of articulating the word ‘*mor-vivan*’ necessarily relies on the existence of the former two categories. In other words, what makes ‘*mor-vivan*’ a paradoxical notion, is not so much the experience/reality of the ‘*mor-vivan*’, but the binary vocabulary that precedes the creation of the term ‘*mor-vivan*’ and that consequently exceptionalizes the possible reality of the ‘*mor-vivan*’.

In the previous chapter, I already discussed how my interest in the concept of creolization relates to my personal experience growing up as a Creole in Mauritius, and trying to make sense of the many paradoxes which my experience of ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ entail, namely when compared with the diversity of Creole cultures and languages at different historical moments and in different geographies. As such, I ask myself the following questions: How can the term ‘Creole’ in Mauritius reference both a fluid, creolized, and unstable identity, **and** a specific ethnic identity? How can a language like *Kreol Morisien* in Mauritius be represented as both an ancestral language and a national language? How can one define or describe the ‘properties’ or

‘characteristics’ that ‘define’ creolization as a particular process if the ‘outcomes’ of this process cannot be named?

As argued by Charles Stewart, the use of the terms ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ “did not depend on the writings of academics in order to travel” (Stewart, 2007, p. 5). Yet to make things even more complicated, one only needs to make a quick search on the Internet to realize that, even across academic disciplines, the two terms often have different, if not diverging and paradoxical meanings. In fact, according to Lionnet, these terms “are increasingly used in a range of academic disciplines (linguistics, history, ethnography, ethnomusicology, sociology, political theory, and literary studies) and area or ocean studies (Asia-Pacific, Atlantic, or Indian Ocean)” to the point that many scholars (Palmié, 2006; Price, 2017; Vergès & Marimoutou, 2005) “have cautioned against the dilution and easy universalization of a concept [or creolization] that has precise historical origins” (Lionnet, 2015a, p. 1). In this chapter, therefore, my goal is to foreground my use of the terms ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ as they relate to this idea of paradox, and to discuss how I see their relationship playing out in the specific context of the 2012 introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum of Mauritius.

On the one hand, because my study is grounded in the ‘local’ realities of the island, I may not avoid using the term ‘Creole’—as a noun and an adjective—when referring to some of the ‘specific’ historical, cultural, anthropological, and linguistic experiences of the island. To do so would be to deny the existence of a vocabulary used by the people of the country to talk about their own embodied experience, regardless of how much this experience differs or not from others’ (including academics’) conceptions of identity, culture, and language. This being said, my treatment of these ‘objects’ is not meant to be totalizing, essentializing, or absolute; which is why, in chapters 4 and 5, I discuss the ‘making’ (Hacking, 2006) of the local people, culture,

and identity as ‘Creole’, using a historicizing method, as well as works from disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and political science.

On the other hand, however, by thinking with Glissant’s philosophical concept of creolization, I also envision the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as a means to move away from the idea of ‘curriculum as design’, which tends to view the national curriculum as a technology that normalizes *a priori* definitions of nation, identity, culture, and language, as well as categories of values and representations that naturalizes these terms (Popkewitz, 2006). As such, by thinking in creolizing terms alongside scripted categories of identity, my goal in chapter 6 is to also be attentive to the more subversive and unscripted ways in which the curriculum embraces differences and opacities, ultimately producing ambivalent discourses and ambiguous representations as the manifestations of a paradoxical process that may not be fully fixed, codified, or anticipated. By doing so, I extend previous discussions initiated by Pinar (1998), as he attempted to define a broader understanding of the curriculum in a more critical, phenomenological, hermeneutical, or epistemological sense by pressing into service critical thinkers from the humanities to bring about a renewed methodology to the study of the field of curriculum studies that had been largely dominated by the social sciences.

### **CREOLE’S DÉTOURS**

The term ‘Creole’ may not be reduced to a monolithic definition, since the word itself has ‘creolized’ over time (Stewart, 2007), thus escaping a rationalizing discourse of Western Modernity. In this section, I shall therefore provide an overview of the origin of this term and of

its ‘evolution(s)’<sup>21</sup> over time, to discuss its relationship to concepts such as identity, culture, and language. Subsequently, I shall consider the specificities associated with the term ‘Creole’ in the ‘multilingual’ and ‘multicultural’ context of Mauritius, where the use of the term ‘Creole’ is inevitably caught up in the overlapping semantics of English, French and *Kreol Morisien*,<sup>22</sup> and where notions of Creole culture and Creole identity have not have also evolved in ways that tend to center African ancestry and that have strong class connotations (Boswell, 2006).

When the word ‘Creole’ was first coined in the late sixteenth century, it did not reference racial or cultural mixture as such. Rather, the term derived from the Spanish word ‘criollo’—that initially referred to Spaniards born in the Americas—and was extended to the offspring of early White settlers in the ‘New World’, in opposition to the ‘civilized’ Europeans of the ‘Old World’ (Eriksen, 2007; Palmié, 2007). Subsequently, ‘Creole’ was used to designate “any [...] plant, or animal born in the New World but of Old World progenitors” (Stewart, 2007, p. 7). From the very beginning, therefore, the word ‘Creole’ referenced ideas of cultural and regional difference, that involved forms of colonial othering and exoticizing; but that difference was not necessarily racial, but geographical, since the term was attributed to White, Black, and racially-mixed communities of the ‘New World’ alike.

Very quickly, however, the word “traveled” beyond the regions of the Americas, to Africa, the West Indies, and the East Indies; where it evolved quite differently over time. With the invention of the ‘scientific’ concept of ‘race’ namely, as well as with its uneven application across the various European empires, in the late eighteenth century, the term ‘Creole’ will be

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<sup>21</sup> My use of the term ‘evolution’ is not meant to designate a developmental process which would suggest the advancement of ‘Creole’ from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’. Hereby, ‘evolutions’ rather relate to patterns of movements or maneuvers which directly relate to the creolization of Creole.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the word ‘Creole’ or ‘Kreol’ is used in all three languages (French, English, and *Kreol Morisien*) and while one could argue that the word has different semantics and connotations in different languages, the fact that all of these three languages are used in Mauritius, it is hard to actually separate these nuances and semantic differences locally.



linked to emerging racial categories, but in both ambiguous and asymmetrical ways. As a result, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, ‘Creole’ referred in different parts of the world to different groups of people: the White people of Louisiana; the free Black people of Haiti, who had expelled White colonizers; the light-skin mestizo elites of Latin America, who were leading independence wars against Spain (Anderson, 1983/2006; Palmié, 2007); and the mixed-raced subjects of the French empire in the Mascarene Islands.

It is worth noting, in this sense, that a term which initially designated purity of descent and European parentage (like in the case of the first Spaniards born in the Americas) has itself gradually ‘creolized’, in the sense that it will later come to refer to a diversity of groups—whether ‘pure’ or mixed, White or colored—that were put in close contact and that were subsequently racialized in the crucible of colonization. This is to say that the racialization of Creole peoples and their respective cultures across different geographies and at different times was, to a large extent, a process carried out *a posteriori*, since the term ‘Creole’ actually preceded the idea of fixed racial categories as we know them today (Palmié, 2007). Indeed, according to Lionnet the meaning of ‘Creole’ “gradually shifted toward differentiated racial connotations tied to specific regional dynamics and histories of coerced or spontaneous contact”; which is why “in contemporary Mauritius and Trinidad, the term remains restricted to those of African ancestry [... while] in the francophone Caribbean and in Réunion, it applies to descendants of the first settlers and to servile populations (both white and black)” (Lionnet, 2015a, p. 1).

With the ‘re-ordering’ of the world that accompanied the universalization of ideas from the Enlightenment, so-called Creole geographies were also gradually associated with theories of environmental determinism and degeneracy (Lionnet, 2015a; Stewart, 2007). Mired in exotic

clichés, Creole peoples and cultures were thus represented as inferior, namely because of the proximity with the indigenous communities of the ‘New World’, and what was perceived as their ‘inevitable regression’ to forms of cultural primitiveness. As such, the term ‘Creole’ will gradually be conceived in opposition to ideas of Modernity, progress, and civilization. In the case of island colonies in particular, the realities of the tropical environment and the mythologies of cultural deficiencies associated with insularity, slavery, imposed immobility, and the practice of orality will result in the representation of *métissage* and miscegenation as particularly conducive to both physical and moral degenerescence.

According to Lionnet, if the term ‘Creole’ has come today to refer to “a well-defined if not exactly static cultural and linguistic identity” (2012a, p. 65) in several parts of the world, this Creole identity itself is broadly conceived as “a mode of belonging that connects one to a history of coerced contact that produced unpredictable formations and linguistic variations” (2012a, p. 16). But as such, and for reasons related to the colonial taxonomies I have explained above, Creole cultures have also historically been described as primitive and inferior, just like Creole languages were also erroneously labeled as dialects, patois, or pidgins. MIT linguist Michel DeGraff has argued against what he calls “the fallacy of Creole exceptionalism”, denouncing how the prejudices of scientists and scholars themselves have maintained a “dualist assumption that separate creolistics from the rest of linguistics” (DeGraff, 2005, p. 537).

Indeed, until the end of the twentieth century, both the term ‘Creole’ and the process of creolization, at first and by large, carried negative connotations that equated so-called Creole cultural and linguistic formations to a lack of sophistication and complexity. On the one hand, Creole cultures were seen as illegitimate; and, on the other hand, Creole languages such as *Kreyòl Ayisyen*, Jamaican Creole, Cape Verdean *Crioulo*, *Kreyol Reinyoné*, and *Kreol Morisien*,

were described as deficient, improper, and unfit for written/schooling purposes. And although very different from one another, Creole peoples, cultures, and languages across the Americas, the Indian Ocean, Asia, and Polynesia, are in fact still considered as part of a broader ‘Creole’ category which evokes the global colonial context of their emergence, but does not say much about the complex specificities that allow us to consider them as individual peoples, cultures, and languages in their own right.

However, in a more recent history, ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ have been presented in a more positive light. Indeed, according to Stewart (2007), “during the run to independence [...], societies in the Americas appropriated and recast creolization as a more fortunate process productive of cultures and individual abilities distinct from, and possibly superior to, those found in the Old World. New World societies embraced their local identity, thereby revalorizing the process of creolization” (2007, pp. 1–2). The publication of Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant’s *In Praise of Creoleness* (1989, 1990) speaks to this process of reclaiming and proud transregional celebration of Creole cultures, while local reappropriations of concepts of terms such as *créolité* and *créolie* in various Creole spaces testify to the desire of local communities to emphasize their respective understandings and specific relationships to Creole identity. In Mauritius, however, the collective revalorization and political recognition of the local Creole people and culture only happened at the turn of the new millennium, following claims from the local Afro-Creole community, that denounced the long-standing marginalization of the Creole community—a marginalization which I shall further discuss in the next sub-section.

## CREOLE IDENTITY AND (AFRO-)CREOLE ESSENTIALISM IN MAURITIUS

In contrast with several other Creole spaces, the term ‘Creole’, according to anthropologist Thomas H. Eriksen, has a “fairly unambiguous meaning in Mauritius” since it “refers to those Mauritians who [...] have African, Malagasy or mixed origins and/or are seen by others and see themselves as Creoles” (2007, pp. 173–174). Referring to Reverend Patrick Beaton’s *Creoles and Coolies* (1859), Eriksen traces back this specificity of Creole identity in Mauritius to the middle of the nineteenth century, at which point the British administration was already using the term to refer to the (mixed) population of African and Malagasy ancestry<sup>23</sup>, in contrast with Indian indentured servants (then known as Coolies). Indeed, in his manuscript, Beaton describes the “first specimens of the Creole race” (1859, p. 5) he encountered on the island in the following terms: “Their complexion was a rich olive-brown, their eyes dark and intelligent, their features well-formed and regular, their faces long rather than oval, and their hair dark and curly—a sure proof of the presence of African blood” (p. 5).

As he tries to relate the Creoles of Mauritius to other Creoles in several parts of the world, Eriksen however adds that “Mauritian Creoles have a history of uprootedness, and connection with their places of origin was severed on arrival in the colony” (Eriksen, 2007, p. 157). As such, what qualifies them as Creoles and not as Africans in Eriksen’s eyes is the “urgent necessity” which they experienced of “crafting new cultural and social forms under conditions of extreme hardship” (p. 157)—something which Creoles in Mauritius definitely share with other Creoles from a number of former slave plantation societies in the Caribbean. For

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<sup>23</sup> Although not all, a majority of this African and Malagasy community in Mauritius came as enslaved people under the French regime, prior to the abolition of slavery under British rule in 1835 (Allen, 2003).

that reason, Eriksen argues, “Creoledom” in Mauritius also “means impurity, openness, and individualism” (p. 163).

By speaking to this tension at work in the local Creole identity—which he describes as both “unambiguous” and “open”—Eriksen’s discussion however introduces a paradox with lies in his subsequent assertion that there are no fixed criteria that actually define membership to the Creole ethnic group, which relates to African and Malagasy ancestry and yet remains open to those Mauritians that do not fit the other clearly-delineated ethnic categories of the Mauritian society. Indeed, in the local and contemporary cultural repertoire of the island, the term ‘Creole’ is simultaneously applied to designate several (overlapping) ‘categories’ of people that are constitutive of the country’s ethnocultural landscape. This particular use of the term renders the concept of Creole identity especially slippery since, depending on the context, ‘Creole’ may refer to any of the following three categories:

1. Mauritians of African and Malagasy descent (i.e mainly slaves’ descendants), also referred to as ‘Afro-Creoles’ (Chan Low, 2003);
2. Mauritian *métis* of diverse and heterogeneous origins (Boswell, 2006);
3. All the inhabitants of the Creole island (Eriksen, 2002, 2007).

Because of this paradoxical usage of the word ‘Creole’—as simultaneously exclusive, inclusive, and all-encompassing—and because of the fraught relationship of the local population with the historical stigma associated with slavery and its aftermaths, (self-)identification with the term ‘Creole’ in Mauritius remains a problematic process (Chan Low, 2003). In fact, following the country’s access to independence in 1968, the political repertoire of the multicultural nation itself long denied the official recognition of Creoles, by not including them as an official ethnic category in its initial Constitution, that nevertheless recognized Hindus, Muslims, and Sino-

Mauritians as the other official ethnic constituents of the nation (Republic of Mauritius, 1968). Instead, (Afro-)Creoles, were paradoxically subsumed within a broader residual category, labeled as ‘General Population’, which referred altogether to descendants of White settlers, Black slaves, free people of color, as well as to the ‘*perdi bann*’ i.e. those individuals who could not fit any of the other three official categories (Boudet & Peghini, 2008; Peghini, 2016).

The historical, political, and cultural marginalization of (Afro-)Creoles in Mauritius, as a result of the local anti-African racism (Romaine, Ng Tat Chung, & Fanchin, 2010), has been described and theorized by many as the ‘*malaise créole*’ [Creole malaise] (Boswell, 2006; Eriksen, 2007; Miles, 1999; Peghini, 2016). In reaction to this marginalization, and as a way to combat socio-economic ostracism (Boswell, 2002) and force state recognition in their favor, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, (Afro-)Creoles have however engaged in an essentialist reconfiguration of their ethnic identity that somehow excludes Creoles that do not identify with an African or Malagasy heritage (Palmyre-Florigny, 2003), or with the history of slavery for that matter (Boswell, 2006; Harmon, 2017). And, while Beaton’s *Creoles and Coolies*—like many other archival sources from the nineteenth century—attest of the long-standing association of Creole identity with African and Malagasy ancestry, this recent move, advocating for a more exclusive and essentialist approach to Creole identity, obviously generates tensions about who can ‘rightfully’ claim to be Creole in Mauritius; and what ultimately accounts for Creole identity in the local multicultural landscape of what has been called the ‘Rainbow nation’ (Ravi, 2007; Teelock, 1999). As argued by Stewart, the Mauritian government “attempt[s] to fit creole communities into the framework of multiculturalism, but the result is friction and inconsistency. You can’t have a rainbow of discrete colours/communities and creolize it too” (Stewart, 2007, p. 17).

The strategic essentialism (Danius, Jonnson, & Spivak, 1993) of (Afro-)Creoles in Mauritius is historically linked to their long-standing claims for reparation, equity, and social justice (Jean-François & Korlapu-Bungaree, 2012). In fact, as I shall discuss in chapter 5, in addition to the long-awaited introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum of the country, it has recently led to a number of political initiatives that acknowledge the contribution of Black slaves and (Afro-)Creoles to the development of the country (Bunwaree, 2004; Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b). This said, as I further argue in chapter 4, the tension generated by this recent essentialization complicates any attempt to talk about questions of ethnic identity, culture, and creolization as they relate to the multicultural framework of the postcolonial nation. Indeed, on the one hand, slave descendants should not be denied the specificity of their history—which includes uprooting, trauma, forced displacement and reconstruction (Lionnet, 2012b)—but, on the other, I would contend that the ambiguity and ambivalence long associated with local Creoles incites renewed conceptualizations of identity and culture in Mauritius that may not be formulated in mere essentialist terms.

In other words, this process of strategic essentialism demonstrates that as Creoles try to navigate a society dominated by ‘rooted’ identities (Eisenlohr, 2006; Eriksen, 2007), they are also structurally compelled to re-imagine their connections with an idealized precolonial African past—something which *négritude* thinkers like Césaire had already attempted in the Caribbean (Césaire, 1939/2013)—and subscribe to an essentialized vision of culture, history, and ethnicity that has precisely been criticized by thinkers of creolization (Bernabé et al., 1989; Confiant, 2006; Glissant, 1990, 1981/1997). As such, while still acknowledging the legitimacy of Creoles to assert their identity and claims for historical, social, and ethno-political justice (chapter 5), I would argue that engaging with the concept of creolization—which I discuss in the next section—provides

alternative ways of envisioning cultural, ethnic, and linguistic encounters, beyond the colonial taxonomies and ethnocultural divisions that are reified in the multicultural curriculum of Mauritius (Baptiste, 2013).<sup>24</sup>

## **CREOLIZATION(S)**

Social anthropologist Charles Stewart writes about the concept of creolization that it is “at once fascinating, fertile and potentially confusing” to the extent that “those who approach it from one or another [...] disciplinary approach [...] or with the normative meaning from a particular historical period in mind, are in for some surprises should they encounter it outside their own familiar territory” (2007, p. 3). This is certainly because—as I have mentioned earlier—the concept of creolization is used today across a variety of academic disciplines, including anthropology, linguistics, history, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, visual studies, architecture, museum studies, and literary studies. And while most scholars from these various disciplinary formations foreground their respective use of the concept—by referencing the historical, cultural, and geographical context that account for their engagement with the term ‘creolization’—the latter is also at times used in metaphorical terms or as a substitute for words like ‘mixing’, ‘hybridization’ or ‘adaptation’, that are highly polysemic. In fact, it is probably fair to say that, if the term ‘creolization’ was long negatively connoted (just like the word ‘Creole’ itself), it is now presented in a more positive light because of its regular association with ideas of hybridity,

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<sup>24</sup> As I discuss in chapters 5 and 6, because the idea of creolization does not abide to the ethnocultural taxonomies imposed under the colonial regime and later reified by the multicultural model of Mauritius, it does not have much currency when it comes to providing the sort of symbolic and political capital required in Mauritius to be officially recognized by the state. However, it is also in the sense that the idea of creolization allows one to think beyond these artificial ethnocultural taxonomies and categories long established in Mauritius, that remain dismissive of dynamics and realities of encounter, mixing and/or relation.



syncretism, *métissage*, or cultural mixture, that undermine violent forms of essentialism or discourses of cultural, racial, and ethnic purity. However, due to its colonial origin, its link with the history of slavery, and with taxonomies of cultural difference, its application within such a broad range of disciplines remains controversial. Moreover, because they are largely inseparable from the legacy of colonialism, the concepts of ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ are largely used to refer to processes, realities, and experiences that are said to circumvent the colonial calculus. But, as such, they also paradoxically confirm the very possibility of such colonial taxonomies of purity which they are meant to critique and to which they are systematically opposed.

Lionnet writes about the term ‘creolization’ that it is “a fluid, unstable, and open-ended practice that generates unpredictable syncretisms rather than mere homogeneity” (2015a, p. 1). However, words like “fluid”, “unstable” or “unpredictable” do not always inspire trust in scientific research, namely in those disciplines where systematicity, stability, and predictability define the very purpose of science, and its so-called ability to produce ‘reliable’ knowledge that translates in categories, taxonomies, rules, and predictions. Indeed, how does one describe or theorize a practice, an object, or a process that is “fluid”, “unstable”, and “unpredictable” without running the risk of generating contradictions and paradoxes? Yet, as I have explained earlier, my initial interest in the concept of creolization derives from the fact that, at the outset, it raises the following questions which I borrow from Stewart: “How did Creoles **become** Creoles? [...] What **transformations** did Creoles undergo, and how did they differ from their Old World relatives?” (Stewart, 2007, p. 1 my emphasis). While I may not attempt to provide an exhaustive answer to this question, I remain conscious of the ambiguities of the term ‘creolization’. This said, I am also aware that the question of “becoming” and “transformation” incites different answers in different contexts. As such, I do not subscribe to the idea of a universal Creole culture, nor to

that of an exceptional one. Rather, I am interested in those processes of “becoming” at work in so-called Creole contexts. For that reason, I am less concerned with the questions ‘what is Creole?’ and ‘who is Creole?’, than in understanding ‘how’ one becomes Creole. With this in mind, my goal in this section is to briefly retrace the ‘academic’ trajectory of ‘creolization’, before specifying how I use Glissant’s particular approach to the term in my subsequent discussion of what I call the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’.

Caribbeanist ethnographer Richard Price traces back to 1928 the first use of the term ‘creolization’ in English to refer to cultural processes of mixing, as opposed to biological ones. It was in fact, during the course of the twentieth century, that “the term moved from the field of natural history” to other disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, history, and cultural studies (2017, p. 213). As such, while the ‘idea’ of creolization predates the adoption of the term by scholars<sup>25</sup>, only during the second half of the century will anthropologists and linguists apply the term to describe the specific processes of rapid cultural transformations and linguistic innovations that led to the emergence of Creole cultures and languages in the violent context of colonization in the early ‘New World’. Price specifies that, as of that moment:

many anthropologists and historians of the Americas [...] came to depend on the term *creolization* as the marker for the process by which enslaved and self-liberated Africans, against all odds, **created** new institutions (languages, religions, legal systems, and more)—for the ways that these people, coming from a diversity of Old World societies, drew on their knowledge of homeland institutions to **create** new ones that they could call their own and pass on to their children who elaborated them further.

(Price, 2017, p. 14, my emphasis)

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<sup>25</sup> In 1938, for instance, Melville Herskovits had already written his *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact* (Herskovits, 1938).

Indeed, the works of scholars such as Mintz (1971), Brathwaite (1971), Trouillot (1998), Chaudenson (2001), Vaughan (2005), and Vergès (2007)—which all gained critical attention in the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century—are certainly indicative of this moment where historians, linguists, anthropologists, writers, and political scientists used ‘creolization’ as a framework for understanding the particular conditions of plantation slavery, that have engendered the emergence of Creole languages and Creoles cultures in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. During that period, the concept will namely underscore the resilience, inventiveness, cultural creativity, and agency of enslaved Africans—what Stuart Hall describes as a “crucial element” of creolization (2015, p. 17).

By the end of the twentieth century, however, at least two other academic trends will complicate the empirical and theoretical applications of ‘creolization’ by separating the term from its geographical and historical contexts of origin. On the one hand, ‘global’ cultural studies scholars such as James Clifford (1988) and Ulf Hannerz (1987, 1996) will use it as a metaphor for describing cultural encounters and exchanges in the broader context of globalization. As early as 1987, indeed, Hannerz extrapolates Drummon’s study of the “cultural continuum” in Guyana to argue that the world itself, “this world of movement and mixture is a world in creolisation” (1987, p. 551); while Clifford writes, about global cities, in his 1988 *Predicament of Culture*, that: “We are all Caribbeans now, in our urban archipelagoes” (p. 173)<sup>26</sup>. On the other hand, Africanist historians Paul Lovejoy (1997) and John Thornton (1992) will argue that processes (of acculturation) of African slaves in Africa long predated the trans-Atlantic slave trade, suggesting

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<sup>26</sup> More recently, scholars like H. Adlai Murdoch (2012), have also extended the use of the concept to talk about the “creolization of the metropole” as a process of cultural adaptation and transformation generated by the presence of Caribbean immigrants in European capitals such as Paris and London.

that theories of cultural creativity attributed to the enslaved Africans of the ‘New World’ in particular were misleading (Price, 2017).

In reaction to these conceptual and theoretical rearticulations of creolization, several scholars of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean have cautioned against the universal application of the concept (Khan, 2001, 2004; Mintz, 2010; Palmié, 2006; Price, 2008; Trouillot, 1998; Vergès, 2007), insisting instead on the importance of historical, geographical, and cultural specificities of Creole spaces, and on the extraordinary circumstances of colonial violence and of the slave trade, that could not be easily compared to slavery in precolonial Africa or to the dynamics of encounter and cultural exchange in the modern world. But in the meantime, the particular intervention of Creole intellectuals from the French Caribbean had further complicated theorizations of the concept, namely since the 1981 publication of Glissant’s *Le discours antillais* [Caribbean Discourse, 1989], where the Martinican philosopher “generalized the Caribbean experience of creolization as a globally occurring process” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3), thus anticipating—at least to some degree—the globalizing approach of Clifford and Hannerz.

In fact, in their subsequent discussion of Creoleness, the *élogistes* Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant draw from Glissant’s planetary vision by writing that “the world is evolving into a state of Creoleness” (1990, p. 902). Indeed, Glissant has argued numerous times that creolization reaches beyond the frontiers of the Caribbean. But as argued by Price, for the *élogistes*, Creoleness is “a state of being, an essence, not, like the historical creolization, a process” (Price, 2017, p. 218). As such, while one could think that the *élogistes* were in agreement with Glissant, their insistence on Creoleness “has turned creolization from a process into a static quality” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). This, in fact, is what accounts for Glissant’s own critique of Creoleness as yet another essentialist discourse, whose “principles regress toward negritudes, ideas of

Frenchness, of Latinness, all generalizing concepts—more or less innocently” (Glissant, 2010, p. 89).

As such, Creoleness and creolization both relate to a process whereby the “formation of new identities and inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures” (Cohen, 2007, p.1). However, the big distinction between these two concepts is that Creoleness focuses on the so-called ‘result’ of that process at a given point—i.e. on a fixed state that can be described and codified just as a new category (“Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles”); whereas creolization foregrounds the ongoing and unending process of transformation that cannot be fully captured, and that “does not produce direct synthesis, but *résultantes*, [...] something else, another way” (Glissant, 2008, p. 83). For Glissant, therefore, creolization—even in Creole societies—is still ongoing.

## **GLISSANT’S APPROACH TO CREOLIZATION**

At the beginning of his *Poetics of Relation* (Glissant, 1990, 2010), in a section titled the “open boat”, Glissant imagines how Africans from various parts of the continent lie next to each other, in the closest of quarters, inside the belly of a slave ship. As he meditates on the violence of the transatlantic passage, he describes their subsequent encounter with peoples from Europe and the Americas as a key moment that engenders a radical transformation—somehow, still at work today—of social, cultural, and linguistic communities on a global scale. Though the world was already in relation, for Glissant, colonialism and the transatlantic trade thus accelerated a process of encounter, whereby the survival of cultural groups—enslaved, indigenous, and subjugated communities, in particular—directly depended on their ability to be “open” to Relation, i.e. to develop resilience and deploy strategies of linguistic inventiveness, social and cultural adaptation

(imitation, mixing, bricolage, camouflage, etc.) in the face of oppression and violence. And while this specific moment initially relates to the geographically-bounded spaces of the ‘New World’ of the Americas, it points for Glissant to the subsequent necessity, for all cultures of the modern world today, to find ways of coexisting<sup>27</sup>.

Glissant’s idea of Relation is broadly universal, in the sense that it foregrounds the capacity of all cultural groups to be ‘open’ to relation; yet his theorization of creolization originates and draws from the experience of Afro-diasporic groups in the Americas, and gradually expands to the rest of the world. For Glissant, indeed, “le monde entier [...] se créolise” [the entire world is creolizing] (Glissant, 1997b, p. 194) and, as a result of what he calls “*mondialité*” (Glissant, 2002), this process is ongoing, and unending. However, his approach to creolization, via the framework of relation, has often been described as paradoxical, namely because it foregrounds both the idea of specificity and openness:

la relation, c'est la mise en relation de tous les lieux du monde, **sans exception** : tous les lieux. Et par conséquent, tout lieu du monde a le droit d'avoir la politique de son lieu dans cette relation globale. [...] Mais dans la poétique de la relation, **tous les lieux ont leur spécificité, qui est une spécificité ouverte.**

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth mentioning that Relation, for Glissant, has no “moral” (Glissant, 2002). Which is to say that it is neither positive, nor negative; it just is. As such, his vision of creolization does not necessarily correspond to a romanticized “celebration” of colonial encounters; rather it underscores the work of resilience, adaptation, and transformation, as modes of relation that have allowed subjugated groups to survive. As argued by Stuart Hall, Glissant’s approach to creolization “does not mean that in Creole societies cultural elements combine on the basis of equality. Creolization always entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of power, as well as issues of entanglement, are always at stake. It is essential to keep these contradictory tendencies together, rather than singling out their celebratory aspects” (Hall, 2015, p. 16).

[relation, is the commingling of all the places of the world, **without exception**: all the places. Consequently, any place of the world has the right to its local politics within this relation, which is global. [...] But in the poetics of relation, **all places have their specificity, which is an open specificity.**]

(Glissant, 2002, p. 83, my emphasis)

Following my earlier recapitulation of the controversies around contextualized and decontextualized uses of ‘creolization’ in various academic disciplines, it is worth noting here that, on the one hand, Glissant’s discussion of relation does not ‘exceptionalize’ the so-called Creole experience. It indeed relates creolization to the “politics of one’s place”; but does not preclude comparable politics in other places. On the other hand, however, Glissant does not generalize Creole experience either, since he has, himself, regularly insisted on the specificities of the Caribbean context. What the Martinican philosopher generalizes instead, are the principles of relation, i.e. the ‘latent’ capacity of all cultures to be open to each other, as well as the dynamics at work in the process of creolization that precisely derive from relational principles. As such, while Glissant does not necessarily oppose the description of a so-called Creole culture at a given point in time, his approach to creolization is less interested in ‘what’ makes a Creole culture Creole (which is what the *élogistes* have attempted to describe) than in the very principles of relation that account for the constant adaptation and reciprocal transformation of cultures, in contexts of encounter.

As argued by Celia Britton, because Glissant’s idea of creolization is underpinned by Relation, it “does not imply a defense of cultures that jealously guard their uniqueness by shutting out the rest of the world”; rather; it considers “particularity [as] valuable only as long as it is outward-looking and related to other cultures and values” (Britton, 1999, p. 11). Indeed,

Glissant's approach to creolization rejects universalisms and colonial binaries by highlighting the value of particularisms and singularities in nonhierarchical and nonreductive ways. As such, it exposes colonial fictions of racial or ethnic purity; and challenges definitions of cultural, social, and linguistic identities as stable, bounded, and homogenous. In other words, because there is no cultural expression today that exists outside of the dynamics of relation, for Glissant, no cultural group can actually assert or proclaim 'purity' of origins as a pretext for domination (Glissant, 1999, p. 140). Rather, whilst cultures are traditionally defined by vertical logics of transmission—what Glissant (1990) describes as 'filiation'—they are in effect necessarily caught within horizontal and rhizomatic dynamics of relation.

Glissant's approach to both Creole identity and creolization are of particular interest to my research project for a number of reasons. First, it allows me to consider the historical, ethnocultural, political, and linguistic specificities of Mauritius as a Creole island, and to discuss how these specificities play out in the 'becoming' of Creoles locally, without exceptionalizing their experience. Secondly, because it does not seek to neutralize paradoxes, but illustrates instead how these paradoxes are the visible manifestations of an ongoing and unstable practice of relation, Glissant's perspectives on creolization also subtend my use of the term 'Creole'—both as noun and adjective—in ways that are at once descriptive and dynamic. In other words, while I do consider the particular expressions of Creole identifications at specific historical moments in Mauritius, I also view the evolution, transformation, and rearticulations of the term 'Creole' as the expression of relational dynamics locally.

In chapter 4, for instance, I underscore how representations of Creole people, culture, and identity, have evolved in Mauritius as a result of a history of close contact with other ethnocultural groups, both under the colonial regime and after the country's access to



independence. In other words, I argue that, unlike the other ethnic groups of the multicultural nation—that have always been ‘defined’ along ancestral lines—Creoles in Mauritius have been subject to multiple definitions. As such, in chapter 5 in particular, I further examine how more contemporary rearticulations of Creole culture and *Kreol Morisien* foreground the link to Africa and slavery in ways that directly respond to the ethnocultural politics of the Rainbow nation. In both chapters, I ultimately discuss the tensions generated by the historical shifts in the (self-)identification of Creoles and their recent strategic essentialization as an ethnic group. I also analyze how this essentialization in particular has affected their representation within the school curriculum in ways that are quite paradoxical and that culminate in the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as the ‘ancestral language’ of Creoles within the national curriculum framework.

## **FROM PRINCIPLES OF CREOLIZATION TO A CREOLIZING CURRICULUM**

In an interview where he discusses a critical distinction between creolization and other forms of mixing such as *métissage*, Glissant specifies some of the key principles associated with the concept:

*la créolisation, c'est le métissage dont on ne peut pas prévoir les résultats. Et ceci est d'autant plus vrai quand il s'agit du métissage des cultures : on ne peut pas prévoir les résultantes d'un métissage des cultures. [...] Et la créolisation est intéressante parce qu'en quelque sorte on peut dire qu'on pourrait décider d'arrêter un processus de métissage, mais on ne peut pas arrêter un processus de créolisation. [...] La créolisation fait qu'on ne peut pas s'arrêter à un produit créolisé pour dire : « ça, c'est la perfection, ça c'est bon, le reste c'est mauvais. » Et par conséquent, la créolisation est une sorte de garantie contre les enfermements racistes et élitistes.*

[creolization is a form of *métissage* whose results one may not predict. This is all the more true when it comes to the mixing of cultures: one cannot predict the *résultantes* of cultural mixing. [...]  
And creolization is interesting because in a way one can say that it would be possible to decide to stop a process of *métissage*/mixing, but one cannot stop a process of creolization. [...]  
Creolization means that we cannot stop at a creolized product and say: “this is it, this is perfection, this is good, the rest is bad”. Consequently, creolization is a kind of guarantee against racist and elitist confinements.]

(Glissant, 2002, p. 82)

In this discussion, Glissant underscores at least three critical aspects of creolization which I shall use as a basis for my subsequent discussion of the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’—an expression which I coin to consider how the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum destabilizes fixed representations of Creole people, culture, and identity. First, Glissant insists on the fact that creolization does not produce fixed or predictable outcomes; rather, it generates what he describes as *résultantes*. By using the present participle of the French verb “*résulter*” (to result) as a noun (*résultantes* can be loosely translated in English as ‘resultings’), Glissant signals that the ‘outcomes’ or *résultantes* of creolization are always in becoming. In other words, the *résultantes* of creolization—rather than its results—can never be predicted, nor fully captured, because they are always in the process of ‘being creolized’.

This leads us to a second principle which Glissant emphasizes in his discussion, which is that the process of creolization is at once ongoing and unstoppable. As such, while it is possible to describe a “creolized” object at a given point in time, no description of a Creole/creolized object can ever serve as the basis for standardizing *résultantes* of creolization. In other words,

according to Glissant, any attempt to capture Creole identity (or any identity, for that matter) and to present it in absolute terms is antithetical to the very process of creolization—which confirms the philosopher’s riddle that “nothing is True, all is living”.

Ultimately, by arguing that creolization resists “racist and elitist confinements”, Glissant insists on the fact that it exposes the pitfalls of racial taxonomies and challenges colonial principles of classification that tend to view *métissage* as a “mechanical combination of components, characterized by value percentages” (Glissant, 2008, p. 83). By “undermin[ing] modern epistemologies of racial classification and the essentialism of genealogical [...] impulses” (Lionnet, 2015a, p. 1), creolization thus challenges the established hierarchies that derive from ideas of filiation, lineage, and purity.

By drawing from Glissant’s relational approach to the concept of creolization, and by extending the various principles which he associates with the concept, I offer in chapter 6 to discuss the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as a conceptual framework for approaching how the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum framework of Mauritius engages with notions of Creole culture and Creole identity. More specifically, by using Glissant’s definition of creolization as an ongoing and unpredictable process, that does not view cultural transformations as mechanical, but rather through the lens of *résultantes*, I contend that thinking with creolization in relation to the field of curriculum studies offers new ways of thinking about Creole culture, identity, and language, beyond the limits of the curriculum as a technology of representation that normalizes or essentializes particular depictions of cultural identity within the context of the multicultural nation.

Indeed, in addition to considering, in chapters 4 and 5, how Creoles become Creoles and how *Kreol Morisien* becomes an ancestral language in Mauritius, I apply the concept of

creolization to the curriculum to investigate further how this process of becoming also expresses itself through epistemological and methodological linkages or *mises en relation* that ‘open up’ genealogical or ‘ancestral’ definitions of Creole culture to principles of relation. As such, while I acknowledge that the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language of the curriculum, speaks to a particular historical moment and ethnocultural claim that translates in a particular codification, standardization, and representation of Creole identity, culture, and language, I still contend that the rather ‘essentialist’ terms of this introduction does not constitute an end point in itself. Rather, I see it as an entry point that gives access to a broader process of becoming that both precedes the introduction of the language, and follows it.

As I conclude this chapter, I remain conscious however that to talk about the creolizing of the curriculum may sound as a paradox or quite literally as an oxymoron. Indeed, on the one hand, the term ‘creolizing’, as I use it, refers to a fluid, open-ended, and ongoing process that destabilizes fixed representations of racial and ethnocultural identities while, on the other hand, any curriculum is ultimately bound to the notion of ‘design’ i.e. a “technology of the self”, which not only allows for human agency but also “orders and normalizes the rules and standards by which teachers, children and researchers are able to intervene in the order of things and transform that order in the name of progress” (Popkewitz, 2006, p. 4). Yet, as I have argued at the beginning of this chapter, the idea of paradox itself as the juxtaposition of incompatibles or irreconcilables, references categories of thought that reify absolute notions of opposition and difference.

As I also mentioned in my introduction to this chapter, I realize that the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ itself presupposes the existence of *a priori* conceptions of identity, culture, ethnicity, knowledge, etc., that have been largely “imagined” (Anderson, 1983/2006) by the colonial

apparatus, or in reaction to it (Chatterjee, 1993). Indeed, to think of ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ is to think from “a ‘dead-end’ situation” (Glissant, 1999, p. 1) since ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’ are themselves the unexpected *résultantes* of colonization. But while I rely on the identification and description of so-called Creole or creolized objects to investigate the ways in which the creolizing of the curriculum unfolds, my goal is not to systematize this process or to codify it, but rather to consider and problematize its manifestations in order to better appreciate creolized expressions of culture and identity that escape the ancestral politics of the Mauritian multicultural curriculum.

As such, my examination of the creolizing practices at work in the curriculum mainly hypothesizes some of the transformative possibilities which the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* offers to Mauritian children, as it represents ways of being, knowing, and doing that circumvent the ethnocultural and political calculus of the ancestral language framework. Indeed while ‘educational systems’ tend to approach cultural identities and their relations as something that should be traced in advance, I use the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as an interpretive framework for thinking through the more syncretic, relational, and rhizomatic ways in which the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* addresses the creolized knowledge, experience, and history of the local Creole people.

By coining the expression ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ to investigate the limits of the national curriculum framework as an institutional technology of the state that attempts to codify and standardize dominant representations of Creole people, culture, and identity, my research relates to various critical and theoretical endeavors that seek to reconceptualize the field of curriculum studies. Indeed, as I shall further elaborate in the next chapter, thanks to the intervention of several scholars—who have reconceptualized and pluralized Curriculum Studies

by drawing from domains such as feminism, postcolonialism, Critical Race Theory, indigenous, queer and trans studies—the field has become a creative space, where conversations across disciplines and research terrains continue to enable new perspectives and scholarships to emerge. These scholarships largely decenter our approach to educational technologies by foregrounding non-Western spaces, experiences, practices, and vocabularies as sites that can indeed produce theory. Through its investigation of the Mauritian context, and its theorization of ‘creolizing of the curriculum’, this dissertation aims to contribute to this endeavor. On the one hand, it proposes to do so by engaging with the stakes of the curriculum in a so-called ‘minor’ or distant context—one that is hardly ever cited in educational research in the United States, but that still raises critical questions about issues such as multiculturalism, multilingualism, historical reparation, and epistemic justice that have all become very urgent globally. On the other hand, through its engagement with concepts such as ‘Creole’, ‘creolized’, and ‘creolization’—which are used so differently across a wide range of disciplines, and sometimes within the same disciplines—this dissertation also contributes to the kind of transdisciplinary conversations that have become so critical to the decentering and decolonizing of the field. This also accounts for some of the methodological choices adopted, as well as the variety of objects analyzed, as I shall further explain in the subsequent chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: KOUMA?<sup>28</sup>**

*OR MAIN METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES*

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<sup>28</sup> Kreol equivalent for “how?”

## **INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS, DECOLONIAL METHODOLOGIES**

In the past decades, several scholars (Battiste, 2013; L. T. Smith, 2008) have argued that the field of educational research is dominated by Western and positivist approaches as well as by methodological postures that are rooted in the quest for truth, objectivity, generalizability, and normativity. And much of the methodological principles, measures, and practices that are observed, valued, and recognized in educational research derive from these postures. As a result, they act as gatekeepers to a prescriptive, abstract, linear, and a-historical vision of the curriculum and of curriculum design, that naturalizes or universalizes dominant representations, categorizations, and hierarchizations of knowledge systems. They also define what counts as knowledge; or rather, they determine whose ‘ways of knowing’ count as knowledge; and consequently dismiss or marginalize the embodied experiences, and ways of knowing, doing, and being of minority and/or non-conforming groups, by representing them as deviant.

This aporia of mainstream educational research has led numerous scholars using varying frameworks derived from domains such as poststructuralism (Masny, 2016; Peters & Burbules, 2004), postmodernism (R. Smith, 2010), feminism (Lather, 2009), postcolonialism (Andreotti, 2011; Asher, Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 2009), critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), queer and trans studies (Rodriguez, Martino, Ingrey, & Brockenbrough, 2016), indigenous studies (L. T. Smith, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and disability studies (Annama, 2016; Annama, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Charlton, 1998), to question the ways in which methodologies normalize certain phenomena, while becoming complicit of the marginalization of others. Much of these frameworks thus offer new ways of approaching or problematizing contexts of inquiry, curriculum frameworks, technological infrastructures,



pedagogical practices, or simply classroom activities, as they relate to questions of power, progress, discipline, and schooling (Ball, 2013) on the one hand; and subjectivity, embodied experience, epistemic justice, and freedom on the other. Attempts to decolonize educational research, for instance, express the need to break away from the methodological traditions and procedures that have historically excluded the experiences of non-Western, indigenous, and/or (formerly) colonized populations from ways of thinking about education, educational policies, and especially curriculum design. On this question of curriculum, in particular, Popkewitz (2006) insists on the necessity to be mindful of the idea of ‘design’ as it “*rigorously* order(s) and stabilize(s) contexts and individuality so as to enable their ‘re-engineering’” (p. 8) via reforms and innovations that aim to govern ways of being, thinking, and knowing.

As a result of the transformation and/or reconfiguration of various academic disciplines in the second half of the twentieth century—and in response to Joseph Schwab’s famous critique of the curriculum field as “moribund” (Schwab, 1970)—numerous attempts at revitalizing and reconceptualizing curriculum studies resulted in the articulation of new frameworks that began to show interest in subaltern, marginal(ized), or invisible forms of knowledges and experiences (Apple, 2018; Jackson, 1980). The works of scholars like William Pinar (1975, 1978, 2004), in particular, proved instrumental for reconfiguring curriculum theory. Indeed, Pinar’s method of *currere* (1975) moved the field beyond its former focus on organizational issues (largely dominated by the rationale of Tyler’s objective model) and insisted on the primacy of subjective experience. “Extend[ing] understandings of society and subjectivity” (Carson, 2017, p. 34), his contribution to the field incited multiplicities of readings from a variety of disciplines, epistemological traditions, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches.

Among those attempts to reconceptualize and pluralize curriculum theory, I want to signal those that foreground the multiplicity of cultural, linguistic, and epistemological experiences around the world. More specifically, I am interested in the kind of decolonial approaches and vocabularies developed by scholars such as Smith (2010) and Battiste (2013), whose groundbreaking research in the field of education focuses on the experiences of indigenous peoples in New Zealand and Northern America respectively. Both Smith and Battiste have in fact worked at “provincializing” and interrogating conceptions of Eurocentric modernity (Chakrabarty, 2000; Mignolo, 1995, 2009, 2011b) and their correlated vision of education and universal knowledge. They have done so by shedding new light on the ‘ways of knowing’ of non-Western indigenous peoples long subdued by colonialism, and by developing methodological frameworks and conceptual vocabularies that recenter the importance of such knowledges for these communities. By challenging the language of imperialism, their critical efforts at “decolonizing methodologies” (Smith) and “decolonizing education” (Battiste) indeed expose and circumvent the colonial “systems of classification and representation” (Smith, 2008, p. 47) that have long deprived indigenous peoples from their subjectivity, and relegated their vision of the world to the margins of universal knowledge—an enterprise that had enduring material consequences on their livelihood.

This being said, I understand that the experiences and epistemological traditions of the indigenous communities of New Zealand and Northern America do not necessarily compare to those of (Afro-)Creoles in Mauritius. In fact, they certainly differ from (and contrast with) each other in the sense that, unlike indigenous groups, Creole communities around the world are not typically defined in terms of their ‘pre-colonial’ relationship to their native land, or even in contrast with settler colonialism; rather, as I have discussed in chapter 2, the emergence of

Creole cultures and languages are predominantly presented as the direct result of the brutal uprooting and massive deportation of Africans from their continent of origin, and their subsequent encounter with White European settlers, indigenous peoples, and/or other racial/ethnic communities. In other words, “the challenge of ‘being Indigenous’, in a psychic and cultural sense”, as described by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (Taiaiake & Corntassel, 2005, p. 597), differs quite significantly from the discussion about the ‘becoming of Creoles’ which I described earlier.

As such, my goal in this dissertation is not to merely apply the methodological approach of scholars like Smith and Battiste to the study of curriculum design or educational issues, as they relate to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in Mauritian schools. Indeed, as I have discussed earlier, I contend that the validity and relevance of certain methods should not be systematically generalized, in order to remain attentive to the historical, cultural, political, and linguistic specificities of different contexts of inquiry. This said, I agree with the basis of Smith and Battiste’s argument that the decolonizing of educational research necessarily entails the intentional development of methodological practices, interpretive frameworks, and epistemological vocabularies that both expose the normalizing effects of colonial taxonomies and Western frameworks, and that does not view racial, cultural, and linguistic identities as stable, absolute, and a-historical. In the next section of this chapter, I thus provide an overview of the methodological principles and practices I use in my study, while highlighting how they relate with decolonial perspectives and vocabularies. Then, I discuss my choice of drawing from transdisciplinary methods as a way of underscoring the necessity to think both critically and relationally about the various sources which constitute the basis of this study. Ultimately, I also

discuss some additional dimensions of the research terrain that are not addressed in this dissertation.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

Because of its past as a slave plantation colony, and because of its successive occupation by the French and the British colonial administrations, education in Mauritius has long been rooted in the project of colonialism (Alladin, 1990). And while the country has obtained its independence more than fifty years ago, the absence of an indigenous people, history, and culture on the island, makes it an interesting terrain for thinking today about the legacy and pervasive role of Eurocentrism and colonial taxonomies in education; and about the latter's hegemonic relationship with other forms of knowledges, cultural practices, and epistemologies, that have either been imported from elsewhere by colonial/colonized 'subjects' of the French and British empires, or that have emerged locally through the process of creolization, sometimes in the most unpredictable or subversive ways.

As such, it is impossible to consider the stakes of the 2012 introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum of the country, without stressing the fact that this local vernacular is the only (language) subject of the curriculum that speaks so directly to the emergence of creolized identities, expressions, epistemologies, and practices, that was not a part of the colonial calculus. In other words, even if the multicultural curriculum of the country derives its roots from a colonial vision; and even if it remains an educational technology that fixes, stabilizes, and normalizes the place occupied by various school contents; the recent adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as a subject matter and a pedagogical tool in Mauritian schools still raises important questions

about the incorporation of long subjugated ways of knowing, being, and doing within the curriculum.

This being said, because educational guiding frameworks such as “the curriculum and its underlying theory of knowledge” (Smith, 2008, p. 33) largely impacts the definition and representation of peoples and their cultural experiences in the world, I tend to agree with scholars like Smith who emphasize the necessity of methodological approaches to the curriculum that are both decentering and pluralizing. Indeed, as argued by Mary Doll, “[c]urriculum studies is not just about subjects, but about subjectivity. In studying books, we study ourselves, meeting the others within, whom our culture tells us we would regulate. *Currere* (the root of curriculum) becomes a project of forward thinking disrupting those educational ‘deforms’ like standardization that stifle social change” (Doll, 2017, p. ix). For that reason, part of my goal in this project is to develop a methodological approach to the study of national curriculum frameworks, education reports, and school textbooks that will help to do two things: 1) challenge the fixity of those categories of representations of Creole people, identity, and culture in Mauritius, that derive from colonial taxonomies and that are being normalized by the curriculum; 2) appreciate the more subtle representations of Creole practices and expressions—either as paradoxical or profoundly relational (in opposition to fixed)—that circumvent these very taxonomies, or at least unsettle their validity.

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, educational research tends to rely on methodological postures that view curriculum design as a largely prescriptive, abstract, linear, and a-historical object. And these methodological postures strive for answers that can be generalized, normalized and presented as truths. What this implicitly means in relation to my research project, however, is that in order to consider the creolizing dynamics of the

curriculum—whose *résultantes* are unscripted, paradoxical, and ungeneralizable, because ‘open’ to relation—it is crucial that educational theorists rethink methodological postures and adopt decolonial vocabularies—i.e. vocabularies that do not recenter Western theoretical and interpretive frameworks. In this regard Smith writes, in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, that “[t]heory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. [...] Theory can also protect us because it contains within it a way of putting reality into perspective” (L. T. Smith, 2008, p. 38). But, how does that translate into my methodological approach here?

In my introduction to this dissertation, I already mentioned how I use the *Zistwar* of chapter 0 both as an exemplar of the many tensions at stake in the teaching of *Kreol Morisien*, and as a direct critique of the empiricism of social scientific research. By avoiding traditional representations of ‘data’, my goal is indeed to point to the limits of those methodological approaches that strive to see things ‘as they are’ by implicitly assuming that the ‘objective’ researcher is better able to give an account of Truth via observational practices (Baker, 1999). As such, in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I choose not to rely on methods and frameworks that are traditionally used to ensure and account for the trustworthiness and robustness of a study in both quantitative and qualitative research projects. Rather, my intention is to trouble the very fixity, reliability, and neutrality of my so-called ‘objects’ in order to think of research as *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), and to approach the creolizing of the curriculum by building rhizomatic links between ‘objects’ and ‘methods’ that are not necessarily associated in conventional disciplinary fields, but that I choose nonetheless to put in conversation here as a way of “deal[ing] with contradictions and uncertainties”. As I shall discuss in the next section of this chapter, this practice of “troubling method” (Munro Hendry, Mitchell, & Eaton,

2018) further derives from my own intellectual trajectory as someone who was trained in a diversity of disciplines, both in the humanities and the social sciences.

My critical approach to conventional qualitative inquiry has led me to define a series of methodological principles—rather than mere parameters—that serve as overarching guidelines to my original methodological approach. While I only list them here, I will further elaborate on their implementation in the subsequent sections of this chapter:

- a) Denaturalizing methodological procedures by opting for more than one methodological approach. I do so namely by drawing from transdisciplinary frameworks as a way of approaching sources relationally.
- b) Troubling the fixity and reliability of research ‘objects’. I do so by not presuming that the ‘objects’ of this study are stable and absolute. Rather, I study the very conditions that made them possible in the first place (also known as *historicizing*); and I consider the more ‘creative’ sites in which they are conceived as ambiguous or relational.
- c) Developing a decolonial approach and vocabulary that decenters and pluralizes analytical frameworks. I do so by recentering the local experiences and vocabularies used in the Mauritian context instead of simply applying frameworks and vocabularies that borrow from Western experience and Western academia. To do so is to point to cultural nuances and local epistemologies that precisely invalidate the universalizing tendencies of Western frameworks.

## **WORKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES, THINKING RELATIONALLY**

While academe is increasingly faced today with the challenges of relationality, transdisciplinarity has become more and more important for nurturing productive scholarly conversations across disciplinary formations that have traditionally been separated. However, it goes without saying that the work of transdisciplinarity requires the development of border-crossing methods that challenge ingrained institutional habitus in order to reconfigure the ways in which even we, as scholars, consider our disciplinary identities and carry out ‘valid’, ‘legitimate’, or ‘recognizable’ research projects. Given my focus on questions of creolization which—as I explained earlier—is of interest to a number of disciplines, one of the key principles of my methodological approach in this dissertation, is to turn (if only partially) to methodological frameworks that will allow me to think transversally and relationally about my so-called research ‘objects’, using a variety of sources and frameworks. As argued by Mignolo (2011a), this is indeed a critical component of “decolonial thinking” which “means engaging in knowledge making and transformation at the edge, in and of, the disciplines” (p. 42).

The type of research methodology I am thus proposing seeks to circumvent positivist and quantitative approaches in order to engage instead with creative and heterogeneous qualitative and border-crossing approaches. And I insist here on the term ‘creative’ because conventional qualitative approaches—in trying to respond more ‘efficiently’ to the hegemony of positivism and to fit within the frame of rigorous systematic scientific research—have ironically also been structured, formalized, and normalized through the same rigid rules they critique. Indeed, as argued by St. Pierre (St. Pierre, 2013), conventional qualitative research is itself rooted in a positivist ontology that needs to be constantly interrogated. For instance, many of the genres such as ethnography carry the weight of the disciplinary formations responsible for their



conceptualization; and these disciplines have been historically complicit of the colonial project that created taxonomies that generated the ‘Others’ whose experiences are systematically measured and defined in relation to a baseline that is Western and White.

As I consider the creolized dynamics at work in Mauritius, I would indeed argue that they do not readily fit such colonial taxonomies, which is why the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language of the multicultural curriculum raises a number of challenging questions in relation to its position vis-à-vis the legacy of colonialism that permeates the school curriculum. Indeed, according to Lionnet, “the polyglot and multiethnic world of Mauritius [...] throughout its colonial and postcolonial history” may be considered as a heterotopia in Michel Foucault’s sense (Lionnet, 2015b, p. 301), i.e. an exemplar of the overlapping “in a single real place of several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 25). As she elaborates on her reference to Foucault’s concept, however, Lionnet also specifies that the so-called “incompatibility” of multiple languages and multiple ethnic identities entangled in one single space, itself derives from “colonial taxonomies of racial and cultural segregation, which do not correspond to the realities of human contact” long experienced in Creole islands (Lionnet, 2015b, p. 301). As such, she argues, “[h]eterotopias are also an appropriate way of defining those interdisciplinary spaces that do not readily fit into the modern rational categories of order and understanding that typically govern academic arrangements” (2015b, pp. 301–302). My experience studying and living in Mauritius, France, and the United States has taught me, indeed, that spaces like Mauritius do not easily fit into the “area studies” model of scholarship—a distinctive feature of the Cold War Western academia, that has divided the world into manageable (geographical) regions considered as cultural, political, and linguistic case studies to which Western methods are still applied. Rather, they challenge us to think

relationally and across disciplinary boundaries, because they are not easily reduced to one disciplinary area.

For that reason, I would argue that places like Mauritius—that are located at the intersection of multiple geographical, cultural, and linguistic research terrains—require that we move beyond those theoretical, methodological, and analytical frameworks which are rooted in one disciplinary formation, and which implicitly reference modern rationality (Jean-François, 2018). More specifically, this methodological proposition is about letting methods in sociology, anthropology, history, and linguistics, influence our thinking and our ways of approaching the curriculum as a multidimensional object, and not merely as a schooling technology (chapters 4 and 5); it is also about using the interpretive or literary techniques I developed as a former literature student, in order to carry out close readings of children stories in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, to better understand the broader issues that the social sciences attempt to capture (chapter 6). As a matter of fact, I use the works of several literature critics in this study—including Lionnet and Jean-François—whose scholarship is also informed by cultural studies; and my use of the term ‘creolization’ itself is derived from its conceptualization by Glissant, a writer, philosopher and literary critic.

## **THE ‘MAKING’ OF NARRATIVES: HISTORICIZING OBJECTS, ANALYZING STORIES**

In chapter 0 of this dissertation, I make use of a creative device (or *zistwar*) and engage with the performative practice of storytelling as a method for speaking about the many tensions and paradoxes that have accompanied the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ‘ancestral language’ within the national curriculum of Mauritius. By doing so, I underscore how literary approaches

can contribute—beyond what historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists already offer—to our understanding of cultural identity. Of course, stories provide subjective accounts of history by often referencing racial, ethnic, linguistic and national experiences in metaphorical terms. But as a former literature student, and someone who is interested in the ‘making’ of narratives, I am sensitive to the fact that stories also pull us into the concrete lives of peoples; they provide us with the significant details that make up the texture of daily human interactions. Ultimately, they invite us to stop and meditate, to pause and reconsider, as they recount, from an often unfamiliar perspective, some of the most familiar experiences.

While this dissertation is not about fiction or creative writing *per se*, I have underscored multiple times that it is not about Truth either. And by saying that it is not about Truth, I am specifically referring to the positivist conception of truth as absolute, constant and completely rationalizable. Rather, this dissertation is more interested in the tensions and paradoxes that emerge from the complex overlapping of multiple discourses, representations, meanings, and identities; about the ways in which the national curriculum, as a prescriptive technology of schooling, seeks to neutralize these tensions by objectifying state discourses and taxonomies, and by abjecting subjective or non-conforming experiences; and about the kind of paradoxical, relational, and creolizing dynamics that still trouble the organizational logics of the curriculum.

In Mauritius, more specifically, there is an obvious tension between the avowed multicultural model of the nation, which privileges the cultivation of ancestral ties (Eisenlohr, 2006), and the more porous and transversal creolized experience of social life whereby (essentialized) notions of ethnicity and culture no longer act as straitjackets that confine individuals to their particular communities<sup>29</sup> (Eriksen, 2010). This tension further points to some

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<sup>29</sup> Hereby the term ‘community’ is also used in relation to a structure of strong ethnic allegiance known as ‘communalism’ in the Mauritius context.

of the challenges one may face in trying to approach notions of belonging, especially as it relates to categories of nation, ethnicity, culture, and language. Rather than describing, measuring, and proposing actionable insights on these categories, my dissertation thus proposes an alternative methodology that raises critical questions about the very conditions that made these categories intelligible and about how they are represented in ethnopolitical discourses, educational frameworks, curriculum design, and school textbooks. As mentioned already, one of the key principles of my methodological approach is to trouble the fixity and reliability of the ‘objects’ I study, by not presuming their stability. As such, in my analytical chapters, I strive to not take these ‘objects’ for granted; rather, I am interested in understanding how they are made into ‘objects’ in the first place, and in what contexts they are represented either in fixed terms, or in more ambiguous, ambivalent, and relational ways. To this end, I make use of two principal methodological approaches that both allow me to consider the ‘making’ of these objects, either through the ‘historical’ or the ‘fictional’ narratives that shape their meanings.

In chapter 4, for instance, I use a historicizing approach to discuss the ‘making’ of the local Creole people, language, culture, and identity as abjected categories of the multicultural nation and of the national curriculum framework. In chapter 5, I use that same method to examine the ‘making’ of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language of the multicultural curriculum. In both cases, my goal is to think of the creation of national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural categories—as well as their effects on the meaning of ‘Creole’—as a process that can be traced historically and that still generates tensions and paradoxes. More specifically, this historicizing method allows me to reflect on the discourses, dynamics, and practices that have gradually shaped local definitions of Creole people, culture, and identity, and that speak to the ways in which they are represented in the curriculum. This being said, by using historicizing as a

method, I not only consider the conditions that account for and naturalize such definitions; I also challenge the very status of origin and telos of these definitions (Kirchgasler, 2017). Indeed, unlike conventional qualitative research techniques that tend to assume the stability of notions of voice and experience, this historicizing approach deconstructs the ‘object’ under scrutiny, and thus exposes, for instance, the role of colonial taxonomies and national discourses in the making of the local Creole people, culture, and identity. Ultimately, I use it to problematize the place of *Kreol Morisien* within the education system of the country as it is today.

As I mentioned earlier, historicizing is however not the only method I use in this dissertation. And because I am likewise interested in the ways in which ‘fictional’ narratives and creative practices also participate in a making of Creoles—although, in less scripted ways than state-endorsed policies—in chapter 6, I use interpretive methods and literary analysis in order to consider the epistemological dimensions of stories included in the first series of *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, titled *Ki pase la?* (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2012-2017). More specifically, as I discuss the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’, I focus on the elaboration of narrative constituents—such as characterization, spatiality, and intertextuality—in order to examine how textbook representations of so-called Creole protagonists, environments, geographies, and cultural heritage, compares with the more scripted definition of ‘Creole’ as prescribed by official curriculum guidelines.

Questions of representations are indeed not strictly limited to official discourses and technological design. And for that reason, my goal in the final chapter of this dissertation is to use methods borrowed from literary analysis in order to appreciate how the ‘creative’ or ‘fictional’ practice of storytelling complicates possible attempts to capture the meaning of ‘Creole’ in fixed terms. Indeed, because the practice of Creole stories, like my opening *zistwar*,

references local epistemologies that relate differently to ideas of cultural tensions and paradoxes as does the ‘rational’ discourse of the curriculum, I view the ambiguous, ambivalent, and relational representations of Creole culture and identity within those stories as the manifestation of the creolizing of the curriculum. More specifically, in chapter 6, I consider how the use of local vocabularies, as well as the inscription of well-known elements of the local Creole folklore and cultural heritage (orality, sega music, storytelling) within textbook narratives, foreground rhizomatic links and fluid representations that trouble linear or fixed representations of Creole identity.

Ultimately, by showing that the questions raised by the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ do not remain tethered to a single or unique methodological genre, I offer a counterpoint (or rather a humanistic complement) to the perspectives developed by scholars in the social sciences, who according to Pinar, “have colonized much of the field of education” (Pinar, 2004, p. 2). And by poking holes at the seemingly stable categories and objects that I examine and deconstruct in this study, I hope to open up “alternatives to existing frameworks for change and agency” (Popkewitz, 2006, p. 13).

## **CORPUS SELECTED**

In addition to considering published studies from a variety of academic fields (educational research, history, sociolinguistics, anthropology, political science, and literary studies), my study rests on the analysis of a heteroclite archive that comprises a series of interviews, carried out between 2017 and 2019, with Mauritian scholars and local activists; and a wide-array of written sources, that include policy documents, educational reports, and school textbooks. In this section, I present the salient features of these various sources.

## *Interviews*

For this study, I conducted three sets of interviews in Mauritius during the summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019. But because of my professional role in the educational sector in Mauritius, I need to specify that the purpose of these interviews with local scholars, colleagues, and activists, was not merely about data extraction. Rather, I used them to engage with people with whom I share both this research and professional terrain. Indeed, unlike a ‘neutral’ ethnographer, I do not see myself as ‘standing outside’ of the context I am studying. This means that, in the course of the interviews, I did not view the various participants as mere objects of knowledge, whose experiences and narratives had to be collected for the sake of testing or verifying predetermined hypotheses. Rather, I saw them as “provocateurs” (St. Pierre, 2013), i.e. as participants whose inclusion in the research project was meant to produce (or act as) powerful impulses for generating new questions and thinking directions. This means that, even when the contents of some interviews were not included and ‘analyzed’ as such in the study, they still had a critical role in shaping some of its key directions. My interest in carrying interviews with several participants was to explore their respective discourses about the Mauritian education system and the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum. More specifically, I considered how they perceive, assemble, and/or re-imagine the relationship between specific historical and cultural events and the field of curriculum locally.

The first set of interviews (summer 2017) took the form of a focus group discussion with four Mauritian scholars and/or curriculum developers. The main purpose of the discussion was to understand their views of the role played by the Mauritius Institute Education (MIE) in the ‘Mauritianization’ of a curriculum, in the decade that followed the country’s access to independence in 1968. The participants were faculty members of the MIE and the University of

Mauritius, whose intervention in the field of education also recently engaged with curriculum development, educational research, and teacher training, foregrounding the significance of *Kreol Morisien* for the education system.

While the content of this focus group interview was rapidly transcribed and analyzed, I do not use it as a corpus, nor do I reference or discuss it in the analytical chapters of this dissertation. However, it informed my study in significant ways, insofar as:

1. The participants pointed to a number of reports and textbooks (published in the 1970s-1980s) that directly relate to this so-called ‘Mauritianization’ of the national curriculum. I discuss several of these reports and textbooks in chapter 4.
2. When prompted to give their views about particular ‘objects’, ‘events’, ‘phenomena’ or ‘concepts’, the participants took different—at times conflicting—approaches and foregrounded various perspectives. This variety of perspectives is something I have tried to incorporate as a feature of my analytical chapters as well.
3. The contrast between the arguments of the participants, as well as the inherent tension they displayed, is what led me to question the very ‘nature’ of categories such as nation, language, ethnicity, and culture, that play a significant role in this dissertation and that are yet often taken for granted.
4. One of the participant’s argument that the ‘Mauritianization’ of the curriculum is not a “consistent” project that is bounded historically, but an “evolving” process that means something very different today, played a significant role in helping me frame my discussion of ‘Mauritianization’. This argument is also what eventually motivated my examination of contemporary History & Geography textbooks in chapter 4.



5. This discussion ultimately helped me formulate my first two research questions as they relate to notions of context, identity, and representation. As I began addressing these two questions in chapters 4 and 5, elements from the focus group interview also pointed to the relevance of the historicizing method I use.

The second set of interviews (summer 2018)—to which I refer more explicitly in chapters 5 and 6—took the form of individual conversations with four local scholars. During these interviews, questions focused primarily on local understandings of Creole identity and their possible links to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ‘ancestral language’ within the curriculum. From this second interview series, my discussion with one of the participants proved quite illuminating, in regard to questions of Creole (self-)identification. Indeed, while this participant would not be identified as ‘Creole’ in Mauritius—at least if one abides to the general local ethnic categorization—she still claimed a “creolized” identity (in opposition to a ‘Creole’ identity), which did not correspond to her ‘ancestral’ culture. This participant’s provoking remarks led me to reflect more broadly on the potential difference between ‘Creole’ and ‘creolized’, two terms that obviously overlap, but that do not necessarily mean the exact same thing, since one refers to an ethnic category in Mauritius, while the other one references a process.

Finally, in summer 2019, I conducted two separate interviews that involved two participants each time. The first one included two educators, who have been teaching *Kreol Morisien* in primary schools since its introduction in 2012; the second one, two local artist-activists, who are well known for their pioneering work in the collection, preservation, and transmission of Creole/creolized intangible heritage. Like my first set of interviews, this final series is not featured or analyzed as such in any of the analytical chapters. However, they

provided critical insights about *Kreol Morisien* textbooks and their use and reception in classrooms. More specifically, one of the interviews focused on the representation of intangible heritage and Creole/creolized practices, and their symbolic and pedagogical relevance in the teaching of *Kreol Morisien*. While I consider such practices extensively in chapter 6, my conversation with these educators and artists-activists also informed my approach to the relational dimensions of Creole intangible heritage, which I discuss in my analysis of “the creolizing of the curriculum”.

### ***The written corpus***

The written corpus I analyze in this dissertation comprises a variety of sources that include policy documents, educational reports, school textbooks, national censuses, etc. More specifically, in all of my analytical chapters (chapters 4-6), I refer to specific educational reports, curriculum frameworks, and textbooks. Some of them were issued by the local Ministry of Education (or the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture) in the 1970s (a period that foregrounded the necessity to ‘Mauritianize’ the education system); while others were produced by the MIE, and under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, in the years 2000s, i.e. a few years before and after the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum. Below is a list of these documents, which I reference and discuss in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

#### In the 1970s

- *Lectures mauriciennes: livre de français à l’usage des élèves de 4e année des écoles primaires*, a 1971 local French textbook by A. Caraguel, R. C. Lamusse, and C Curé, published by Fernand Nathan, in France;

- *Rémie et Marie. Petits écoliers mauriciens: 1e Livret.* a 1974 local French textbook by N. Cangy, R. Desforges, R. Lamusse, and P. Madeleine, published by Fernand Nathan, in France;
- *Moisson du Monde: textes français d'île Maurice et d'ailleurs, 2e année,* a 1978 French textbook by J. Perrottet, J.-G. Prosper, and A. Foondun, published by ÉDICEF, in France Paris;
- *The Glover Commission on Post-primary and Secondary Education: The Road Ahead,* in 1978 report issued by the Ministry of Education of Mauritius;
- Ministry of Education Arts and Culture. (1979). *The Richards Report: Laying the Foundations. Report on Pre-Primary and Primary Education in Mauritius,* a 1979 report issued by the Ministry of Education Arts and Culture of Mauritius.

#### Between 2005 and 2018

- The *National Curriculum Frameworks Grades 1 to 6 - Republic of Mauritius,* issued by the MIE in 2007 and 2015;
- The *Addendum to National Curriculum Framework Kreol Morisien Standards 1-6* (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012). This is the first curriculum framework conceptualized in the context of the historical introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools.
- The *National Curriculum Framework: Nine Year Continuous Basic Education - Republic of Mauritius,* issued by the MIE in 2015;
- The *National Curriculum Framework: Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education: Syllabus Grades 7, 8 & 9,* issued by the MIE in 2016;

- The *Kreol Morisien* textbooks for Grades 4 to 6, issued by the MIE between 2012 and 2017;
- The *History and Geography* textbook for Grade 6, issued by the MIE in 2018;
- The *Social & Modern Studies* textbook for Grade 7, issued by the MIE in 2018.

In the analytical chapters of this dissertation, I treat these various written sources as an archive that allows me to trace the evolution of ‘Creole’ in education, not strictly as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a complex process whereby both the language and its speakers are granted differentiated statuses in political realms, at different points in time, and under specific circumstances. This being said, I want to specify that even my approach to the concept of ‘archive’ does not view the latter as a neutral, objective, and fixed recipient of historical truth. On the contrary, by making a subjective selection of written sources, and by acknowledging that archival documents are subject to “principles that sort, classify, order, and divide” (Kirchgasler, 2017, p. 50), I remain cautious to approach this archive “along the archival grain” (Stoler, 2009), i.e. I think of it, not as an ‘object’ but as a process. In other words, my goal is not to be exhaustive in my approach but rather to be sensitive to the fact that archives can be viewed as ethnographic data that illuminates the aspirations, dissensions, and “epistemic anxieties” (Stoler, 2009) of both the colonial and the postcolonial states.

A case in point, an important part of my discussion in chapter 4 is based on the examination of school textbooks that have been removed permanently from the archival repository of the MIE and the Ministry of Education, and that can now only be found in private libraries/collections. Indeed, as I mentioned, if it had not been for the focus group interview I carried out in 2017, I would probably not have known about the existence of these textbooks,

when they actually generated an important discussion about the abjection of the local Creole people, culture, and identity by the national curriculum in the 1970s and 1980s.

A second example is the 2012 *Addendum to the National Curriculum Framework: Kreol Morisien* (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012)—the first policy document to actually clarify the position of the state on the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools—which I discuss in chapter 5. Replaced, soon after, by a new *National Curriculum Framework* (NCF) (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), this rare document was only made available on the website of the Ministry of Education for a few years; and because it was never printed, the document is now almost unavailable to the public. By including this *Addendum* in my discussion, I thus underscore how the ‘making’ of curricular guidelines is a process that speaks to an organization, classification, fabrication, and/or erasure of historical archive, that is often performed *a posteriori*, and that ultimately illustrates Stoler’s notion of the epistemic anxieties of the state (2009).

## **ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS NOT ADDRESSED IN THE STUDY**

As I conclude this chapter on the main principles of my methodological approach, I wish to signal two principal dimensions which are not addressed in this study, and which might have impacted or nuanced several aspects of my analytical chapters, had I had a chance to consider them more directly or more consistently in my research and analyses. These two dimensions are as follows:

### *The definition of the context*

I mention, in the introduction to this dissertation, that the Republic of Mauritius is actually comprised of the main island, Mauritius—which is located some 500 miles east of Madagascar—Rodrigues, and several outlying islands and archipelagos that include Agaléga, the Chagos Archipelago, Tromelin Island, and the Cargados Carajos shoals (also known as Saint-Brandon). According to Mauritian scholar Kumari Issur, while the main island of Mauritius itself “covers an area of 2040 km<sup>2</sup>, with its claimed EEZ [Exclusive Economic Zone], its territory extends to an impressive 2.3 million km<sup>2</sup> (including 400,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the continental shelf jointly managed by the Seychelles)” (Issur, 2020, pp. 117–118). With additional claims being made near Rodrigues, and the Chagos Archipelago, “Mauritius is no longer a small island state, it becomes instead the 19<sup>th</sup> (or 20<sup>th</sup>) largest country in the world” (p. 118). In fact, the majority of the population of the republic itself is located on the main island, which counts about 1.3 million inhabitants, while Rodrigues counts almost 42,000 inhabitants, Agaléga 300 inhabitants, and Tromelin and Saint-Brandon are not inhabited. As for the Chagos Archipelago, the farthest dependency of Mauritius, which is made up of 55 islands, it was dismembered from Mauritius in 1965 to form the British Indian Ocean territory (BIOT), in violation of the UN resolution that prohibited the dismemberment of colonial territories before independence. In this context, the entire population of the Chagos, more than 2000 strong, was forcibly removed from their islands between 1965 and 1972; some were sent to the Seychelles and most to Mauritius.

While the Creole peoples, cultures, and linguistic formations from Rodrigues, Agaléga, and the Chagos Islands present notable differences with the local Creole experience of ‘mainland’ Mauritius, my study is focused on the ethnopolitical, cultural, and linguistic context of the main island. Had I extended my subsequent discussions of the complexities and

paradoxical definitions of Creole culture and identity to the broader context of the multicultural republic—and include spaces like Rodrigues, Agaléga, and the Chagos—my analysis of ‘Mauritian’ specificities and paradoxes would have been more complex. My attempt to question categories of nation, ethnicity, culture, and language would also most likely have been nuanced. This is especially due to the fact that the actual population of Rodrigues and Agaléga—as well as the former population of the Chagos Archipelago—is considered less ‘multicultural’ than in mainland Mauritius, since it comprises a wide majority of Creoles, and less Hindus, Muslims, and Sino-Mauritians. At this point, however, the content of my three analytical chapters—and my subsequent examination of the complex relationship between national identity, ethnic belonging, and ancestral politics, as they relate to the teaching of the local Creole language—is mainly based on the Mauritian experience. Because it would be incorrect to generalize this experience to the other islands of the republic, my discussion of the ethnopolitical, cultural, and linguistic complexities of Mauritius should thus be read as limited to the main island.

### ***Engaging with super-diversity in Mauritius***

As I investigate the ethnocultural repertoire of Mauritius and the ways in which Creole people, culture, language are defined or imagined within the broader framework of the multicultural nation that frames the official discourse of the national curriculum framework, my analytical chapters mainly engage with definitions of diversity that relate to ethnic, ancestral, and linguistic categories. As argued however by Jean-François (2014), conceptions of diversity in Mauritius should not be limited to these traditional categories. In an attempt to ‘open up’ discussions of the local diversity to other forms of experiences, he instead proposes to re-invest sociologist Steven Vertovec’s concept of ‘super-diversity’ as a way to engage with “the complex situation of diversity that has been flattened by the multiculturalist discourse”. Indeed, according to

Vertovec, 'super-diversity' allows one to "take more sufficient account of the conjunction of ethnicity with a range of other variables when considering the nature of various 'communities', their composition, trajectories, interactions and public needs" (2007, p. 1025).

As I reflect on Vertovec and Jean-François' respective invitations to 'diversify' conceptual approaches to diversity in order to think of identities as multilayered, I realize that my own examination of the complexities and specificities of the Mauritian terrain focuses mainly on an approach to diversity that foregrounds ideas of nation, ethnicity, language, and social class. In my analytical chapters, indeed, I do not consider other expressions of diversity such as gender, religion, or professional identities. Neither do I analyze how recent patterns of migration, the globalization of economy, the circulation of cultural goods, the use of information and communication technologies by digital natives, or the environmental challenges of climate change also affect the ways in which the people of Mauritius define their identity. Had I had the opportunity to engage in a broader approach to the question of diversity, I suspect that my discussion of the representations that are standardized by the curriculum would have been more nuanced.



## CHAPTER 4: ISI KOT NOU ETE<sup>30</sup>

*THE 'MAURITIANIZATION' OF THE CURRICULUM AND THE (UN)MAKING OF CREOLIZED IDENTITIES  
WITHIN A MULTICULTURAL FRAMEWORK*

<i>Nou'a pe viv dan enn ti zil</i>	We're living in a small island
<i>Swadizan li larepiblik</i>	Which is supposedly a republic
<i>Me tizil-la li miltirasial</i>	But that small island is multiracial
<i>Boukou problem ki pe deroule isi</i>	Lots of issues are happening here

**(Ras Ti Lang – Lapovrete)**

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<sup>30</sup> Taken from the title of a popular song by Mauritian sega group Cassiya, “*Isi kot nou ete*” can be roughly translated as “Here where we are/stand”.

“[t]here is no moment in the human history of Mauritius that is prior to creolization, or ‘pre-creole’”

(Vaughan, 2005, p. 22)

## INTRODUCTION

In his seminal text *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983/2006) argues that national entities are defined “by the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6). According to Haitian-born anthropologist Espelencia Baptiste (2002), post-colonial Mauritius epitomizes this idea of the “imagined community” namely because, unlike several islands in the Atlantic, it has no indigenous population and thus no native community to claim it as its land of origin. In fact, the actual population of the multi-island Republic of Mauritius is the result of successive waves of migration linked to its colonial history: the French settlement (1715-1810) brought a land-owning gentry, poor Whites, and East African and Malagasy slaves to the main island; then, under the British rule (1810-1968) came indentured laborers from India, traders from China, priests and schoolteacher nuns from Ireland. Over time, the close contact between these various groups generated varied forms of intercultural practices and creolized expressions that until today overlap with the transmission of ancestral and diasporic cultures in ways that are quite particular to the Mauritian society. Consequently, at the time of the country’s independence in 1968, “the idea of the Mauritian nation had to be created” (Baptiste, 2002, p. 7), but in terms that were significantly different from the Westphalian system of culturally exclusive, compound, and territorially-bounded states, that were quite alien to the creolized societies of the Indian Ocean (Sheriff, 2014, p. 3).

Long before 1968, the colonial administration had already divided the local population into specific ethnic categorizations, strategizing with the country’s diversity, and reconfiguring

the racial, ancestral, and linguistic identities of the various groups of the island. Far from reflecting the real history and trajectory of these groups, these ethnic categorizations partook in the establishment of a legal, political, and cultural discourse which served the agenda of silent surrender to the inherent inequalities at the root of the colonial state itself. As they subscribed to the institutional constructs of the colonial regime, these categories also proved instrumental to its attempt to subsume expressions of *métissage* and creolization that were literally seen as a transgression of the colonial order and a threat to its stability. Like in a number of former colonial spaces, the imposition of these ethnic categories—which institutionalized racialized taxonomies of difference—became a powerful tool for controlling how the various groups in Mauritius defined themselves and others. It also maintained the social and politico-economic hierarchies in place on the island.

With the creation of the new Mauritian state in 1968, these ethnic categories were however not dismantled or decolonized, even as the country underwent a nationalization process whose objective was to cultivate a sense of sovereignty, autonomy, democracy, and citizenship among the local population. Rather, the British administration insisted, during the negotiations leading up to the independence of the country, that the various ethnic groups of the island be represented as such at the level of the Mauritian Parliament (Peghini, 2016). While the justification behind this political arrangement was supposedly to protect the country's cultural minorities, the ethnonationalist discourse that marked the access to independence generated such feelings of anxiety and mistrust among the various groups of the population that it ultimately short-circuited the emergence of a shared national consciousness (Boudet, 2003). As a result of the colonial legacy—that had confined local cultures, languages, and ethnic identities to fixed and mutually exclusive definitions—the Mauritian nation was thus imagined not as a creolized

and composite society of the New World, but rather as a collection of discrete ethnocultural and diasporic groups now occupying a common territory. While this chapter's opening epigraph by historian Megan Vaughan argues that "there is no moment in the human history of Mauritius that is prior to creolization, or 'pre-creole'" (Vaughan, 2005, p. 22), the institutionalization of ethnic categories in the country's local politics is in part what established multiculturalism, rather than creolization, as the founding principle of the Mauritian nation.

Following the country's access to independence, this idea of the multicultural nation—divided along ethnocultural lines—will be the subject of much political, sociological, and anthropological debates. In the 1970s, in particular, the ethnonationalist discourses of the country's initial government will be firmly put to test with the emergence of *mauricianisme*—a leftist political concept, that prioritized the idea of a shared nationhood over class, ethnicity, or religious identity. From a 'Mauritianist' point of view, all Mauritians were citizens on equal terms, irrespective of their ancestral origin, cultural practices or socioeconomic background. The groupuscules and political parties that subscribed to the Mauritianist discourse came up with a new language for talking about Mauritius, and insisted on the necessity for the country to stand as "one people, one nation", rather than as a mere collection of separate groups. From this moment on, multiculturalism and *mauricianisme* will come to embody the two opposite/competing versions of the Mauritian nation, polarizing debates about what constitutes a proper Mauritianization process.

As I make use of a historicizing approach to retrace the complexities, contours, and detours of this Mauritianization process—and its inherent tensions as a diverse society—over the past fifty years, my goal in this chapter is to address three main questions. First, how do these two competing conceptions of Mauritian nationhood relate to expressions of *métissage* and

creolization, that contrast with discourses of ethnic separatism and ancestral identification, as founding principles of the country's multicultural discourse? Second: in the context of former plantation colonies—where the creolized descendants of enslaved peoples may not retrieve a clear ancestral legacy or a unique cultural filiation—how do these two national discourses acknowledge the existence a local Creole people, culture, and language, as well as their contribution in shaping the idea of a Mauritian identity, when the term 'Creole' itself points to historical and anthropological phenomena of deterritorialization, transformation, and cultural reconfiguration? Finally, because the education system constitutes a privileged site for testing and implementing nationalistic projects, I ask: how have representations of Creole people, culture, and language evolved in the national curriculum of Mauritius?

As I attempt to answer these questions, my discussion of the curriculum's fraught engagement with questions of *métissage* and creolization will likewise focus on three historical segments, which I identify as key moments in the local political debates pertaining to ideas of multiculturalism and *mauricianisme*. In the first section of this chapter, I consider how, despite local expressions of *métissage* and creolization, the establishment of the multicultural model at the time of independence has led to a Mauritianization of the education system that directly participated in the promotion of ancestral politics as the basis for ethnocultural divisions. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how the Mauritianist discourse of the 1970-80s has, in contradistinction, instrumentalized *Kreol Morisien*—the shared lingua franca of the island, which also emerged in the context of slave plantations—to convey a different approach to Mauritian nationhood, irrespective of class and ethnic identity. With the return to the ethnonationalist model, and the consolidation of ancestral politics as the Mauritianist discourse ran out of steam in the 1980s, I ultimately discuss, in the final section of this chapter, how the multiculturalizing

of the education system in subsequent decades will directly impact the representation of the local Creole people, culture, and language within the national curriculum of the postcolonial country.

### **A CREOLIZED SOCIETY, A MULTI-ETHNIC NATION**

The ‘making’ of the Mauritian nation, following its independence from the British Empire in 1968, proved to be a highly complex process given the divisions established and maintained by the colonial regime and ideology over extended historical periods. Indeed, because the identities of the various ethnic, racial, and cultural groups were long linked to their respective homelands and ancestral cultures, there was an obvious tension between the country’s multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, and its cultural *métissage* and creolized dynamics, as distinctive features of “Mauritian identity”. In a speech delivered on the admission of Mauritius to the United Nations in April 1968, the first Prime Minister of the country, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, underscored that “Mauritius has drawn its cultural inspiration from Africa, Asia and Europe; yet it has succeeded to a remarkable degree in evolving a distinct Mauritian way of life. [...] it has been the privilege of my small country that its citizens have inherited the influence of the best traditions of the East and the West” (Ramgoolam, 1968). While he acknowledges the cultural “evolution” towards “a distinct Mauritian way of life”, it is notable that Ramgoolam does not use the words “Creole”, “creolized”, or “creolization” to refer to the outcomes of this intermingling of peoples, cultures, and languages from various origins, and to the sense of a shared identity among the local people. Rather, this discourse interweaves ideas of diversity and commonality, of ancestry and shared citizenship, in ways that subtly avoid direct engagement with questions of *métissage*, hybridity, and syncretism. While he provides no definition of this “Mauritian way of life”, Ramgoolam indeed describes its constituents in terms of “cultural inspiration”, “inherit[ance]”,

“influence” and “traditions” from both “the East and the West”. At the very time of the country’s independence, his choice of words thus already raises the following question: politically speaking, is Mauritius imagined as a Creole/creolized nation or a multicultural one?

Anthropologists like Eisenlohr (2006) and Baptiste (2002, 2013) tend to disagree with the idea that Mauritius is a Creole nation because, unlike the actual Creoles of the island, Asian immigrants and their descendants in particular never severed their ties to their ancestral homelands. Drawing from Munasinghe’s study of Indo-Trinidadians (2002), Eisenlohr (2006) namely suggests that the official state discourse in Mauritius tends to downplay the role of cultural hybridity and mixing in the cultural fabric of the country. For Baptiste, more specifically, the state’s emphasis on the promotion of ancestral and/or diasporic cultures, as key components of a distributive national imaginary, does not align with common definitions of a Creole society:

Mauritius also differs from other post-plantation societies. On the one hand, its lack of an indigenous population makes it difficult to compare Mauritius to other plural societies such as Indonesia and Malaysia, while on the other hand, the value given to ancestral languages and cultures by the Mauritian state separates Mauritius from societies like Trinidad and Guyana where the state fosters the ideology of a Creole society and does not support distinctions among the ancestral languages and cultures of its different ethnic groups.

(Baptiste, 2002, p. 7)

Despite the strong presence of a local Creole people, culture, and language, Baptiste’s comments bring into strong contrast the ancestral politics in effect in the national imaginary of the independent republic with discourses of creolization and *métissage* as generally conceived in

the Greater Caribbean. Yet, several other scholars still label and describe the island as “Creole”. Anthropologists such as Jean Benoist and Jean-Luc Bonniol, for instance, have long considered Mauritius as part of a broader “*aire créole*” [Creole sphere] (Bonniol, 1985), that includes islands like Martinique, Guadeloupe, and La Réunion, amongst others. Invoking the cultural and historical commonalities among these regions, Benoist (1985) even suggests that so-called Creole islands share a comparable history and a common destiny (p. 54). As for Vaughan’s argument in this chapter’s opening epigraph (2005), it emphasizes the idea that the creolization of peoples, languages, histories, and natural entities is what has defined the Mauritian experience from its very emergence. To this effect, for Eriksen (2002), there is not a single ethnic, racial, or cultural group that is not (being) creolized to a certain extent; hence the title of one of his famous article, “*Tu dimunn pu vinn Kreol*” [everyone will become Creole] (in Mauritius).

For the most part, scholarly discussions about the applicability of the term ‘Creole’ to the entire country tend to foreground a particular telos in their approach to processes of creolization: indeed, they generally relate the pertinence of ‘imagining’ Mauritius as a ‘Creole’ island to the idea of a “common destiny”, whereby all the peoples, cultures, and experiences of the country will ultimately become Creole. But while such teleological approaches to situations of encounter tend to view creolization as a mere melting pot phenomenon—that ultimately neutralizes cultural differences, tensions, and anxieties—I would argue that shifting the discussion from talking about ‘Creole’ as the inevitable outcome of creolization, to focus instead on the dynamics of the process itself, can produce a different appreciation of the inherent tensions and paradoxes which creolization entails.

Indeed, Glissant’s theory of creolization does not preclude inequalities, disparities, and other forms of violence, to favor the idea of an ultimate harmonious and homogenous society.



Rather, it acknowledges how situations of encounter—albeit fraught with power differentials—generate unpredictable and infinite *résultantes* that do not necessarily subscribe to *a priori* discourses of morality (Glissant, 2002), but that instead unsettle pre-determined categories of identity, language, culture, and nation. For this reason, as I examine the tensions at work between competing discourses of the ‘multicultural’ society and the ‘creolized’ society as it pertains to the Mauritian nation and as it affects representations of Creole identity and *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum since the country’s access to independence, my goal is not to dissociate terms such as ‘multicultural’, ‘Creole’, ‘nation’ or ‘Mauritian’ from questions of power and difference. Rather, I approach them with the understanding that they precisely point to such dynamics of power and difference as the visible or invisible manifestations of conflicting political ‘imaginings’<sup>31</sup>. Hence, in my subsequent examination of the Mauritian curriculum or of the Mauritianization of the curriculum—and of how it has historically endorsed the idea of the multicultural nation to the detriment of Creole people, culture, and language—I will also incorporate similar discussions of the historical tensions and cultural paradoxes at work in such contrasting representations of the Mauritian nation.

### ***Mauritian Ethnonationalism and its (un)recognized constituents***

With the decolonization movement of the second half of the twentieth century, just like a number of other former colonies across the globe, Mauritius engaged in a process of auto determination that led to its independence in 1968. But while the country was successful in negotiating a

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<sup>31</sup> I use the ‘imagination’ here as an extension of Anderson famous argument, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that political communities and national entities are defined “by the style in which they are **imagined**” (2006, p. 6, my emphasis).

‘peaceful’<sup>32</sup> transition to sovereignty from the British Empire, the multiethnic population of the island was at the time extremely divided. Indeed, cross-cultural solidarities had developed in the 1930s and 1940s between Indo-Mauritian sugar cane cutters and Creole workers (Chilin, 2017; Miles, 1999), but access to independence and universal suffrage led to growing inter-ethnic tensions as the diverse communities of the country began to position themselves on the political scene. In 1965, a first clash between Hindus and Creoles typified the ‘communal’<sup>33</sup> bad blood and ethnicization of political discourses. The run for independence was marred by the ‘Hindu peril’ campaign, an infamous fear-mongering propaganda fueled by the Franco-Mauritian sugar oligarchy (Chilin, 2017) against a perceived ‘Indianization’ of Mauritius. The ethnic campaign involved slogans such as “*langouti nou pa oule*”<sup>34</sup> (Baptiste, 2013; Boudet, 2012, 2013). In a 1967 referendum, 44% of the population voted against independence, among which a majority of Creoles. Several of those considered as Creole elites (Baptiste, 2002) ultimately emigrated to Australia, Europe, and South Africa<sup>35</sup>.

A few weeks only before the actual independence of the country, a second ‘ethnic riot’—this time involving Creoles and Muslims—exploded in the capital city of Port-Louis. To defuse the situation, the British military had to intervene; but the violence of the clash transformed interethnic relationships in the island profoundly, such that communities who used to live

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<sup>32</sup> The terms of negotiation involved that Mauritius would remain a member of the Commonwealth and still had a Mauritian governor appointed by the Queen until 1992 when the country became a republic. However, the greatest compromise, which for a long time was kept secret, was the excision of the Chagos archipelago from the Mauritian territory. The local population of more than 2000 people who had been working and living in the Chagos archipelago for several generations was removed from the islands between 1967 and 1973 so that the UK could lease the main atoll of the archipelago, Diego Garcia, to the U.S. and allow them build one of its most important military facilities. For more details regarding the history of the Chagos see Vine (2009).

<sup>33</sup> I am using the term communal here as an adjective of ‘communalism’ i.e. a form of culturally defined sectarianism which generates inter-group conflict (Nave, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> “We don’t want *langoutis*”. The *langouti* is a loincloth typically worn by some men in India and was instrumentalized to create a stereotypical image of Indians as being backwards.

<sup>35</sup> According to Baptiste (2002, 2013), a number of light-skinned Creoles with European names were able to emigrate to South Africa and Australia by benefiting from the racist immigration policies that were being enforced in those two countries.

peacefully next to each other in the capital city had to be geographically secluded<sup>36</sup> (Chilin, 2017; Jauze, 2004). This did not bode well for a society defined as “plural” (Benedict, 1965, 1966), and in which ethnicity directly determined the organization and representation of social order (Boudet, 2003), especially on the eve of independence.

On March 12, 1968, the ceremony of independence was met with great enthusiasm as the country rallied behind the Labour Party’s slogan “*L’unité dans la diversité*” [Unity in diversity] and presented itself to the world as a unique multicultural nation. In addition to the national anthem and the long-awaited four-color flag, the celebrations and festivities proudly showcased the different cultures of the island as people from various ethnic groups dressed in traditional clothes performed ancestral songs, music, and dance. This very ceremony is since reenacted once every year in schools, as children celebrate Independence Day. Because of their long-history of uprooting and *métissage*, Creoles (i.e. **mixed** descendants of African and Malagasy slaves) did not fit well—already back then—within such a strictly siloed representation of the multicultural nation. As such, their absence at the ceremony of independence was duly noted by the press (Chilin, 2017); but the political discourse of the Labour Party’s multicultural campaign had long erased the Creole community, by failing to acknowledge their place, history, and contribution within the multicultural nation.

Historians and anthropologists (Boudet & Peghini, 2008; Chilin, 2017) seem to agree that following independence, Creoles in Mauritius were reduced to about a quarter of the population. This, of course, is a relatively high percentage for a group that is often labelled as minority; yet, the enduring marginalization of the Creole community in the post-independence era lies in its

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<sup>36</sup> As a consequence of the 1968 ethnic riots, the capital city of Port-Louis was literally divided in quarters that, until today, house different ethnic groups. For instance, the quarter of Plaine Verte is almost exclusively inhabited by Muslims, whereas the population of Saint-Croix is predominantly Creole.

political invisibility and social alienation within the discourse of the multicultural nation that paradoxically “only granted real [and, I would add, effective] political recognition to groups of Asian ancestry: Hindus, Muslims, and Sino-Mauritians” (Jean-François, 2014, p. 13). A case in point is the initial Constitution of the country that recognizes (only) four communities within the population: Hindus (approx.: 51.8%), General Population (approx. 28.7%), Muslims (approx. 16.6%), and Sino-Mauritians (approx. 2.9%)<sup>37</sup>.

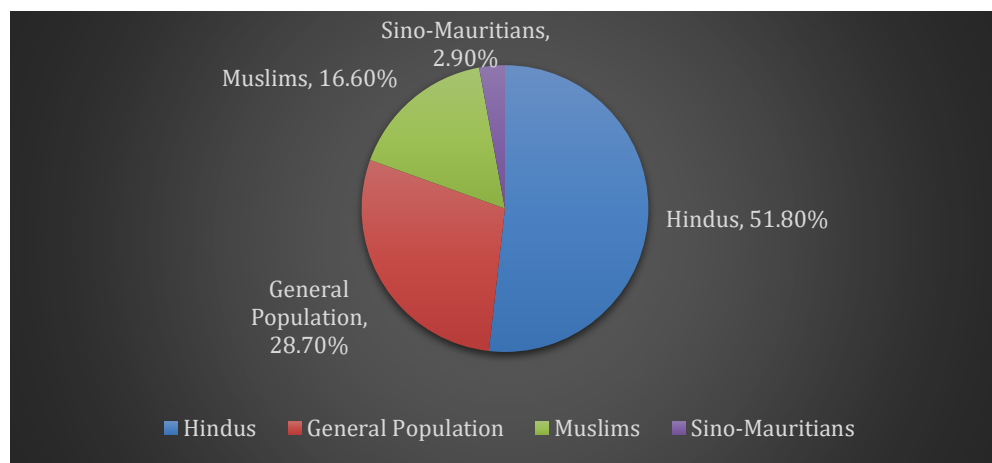


Figure 1: The ethnic division of the Mauritian population (estimated from the census of 1972)

These four categories raise a number of critical questions as to what actually constitutes ethnic identity and ethnic imagination in Mauritius<sup>38</sup>. In particular, the inconsistency and lack of coherence among the four ethnic ‘labels’ aforementioned point to the arbitrary nature of these categories and to the fact that they are largely imagined on the basis of perceptions, prejudices, myths of origins, and propaganda, as they correlate with fantasies of lineage and cultural purity.

<sup>37</sup> This division, taken out of the Constitution in 1968, is still strongly maintained through the Best Loser system (Boudet & Peghini, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> This, I believe also applies to ancestral identity and ancestral imagination. See Anderson (2006) and footnote 2 of this chapter regarding the notion of ‘imagination’.

The terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’, for instance, obviously index religious affiliation as a core element of ethnic identification (when, actually, both Hindus and Muslims in Mauritius originate from South Asia, and are thus Indo-Mauritians); yet, in comparison, the ‘Sino-Mauritian’ category clearly references the ancestral homeland (i.e. China) as an essential component of ethnic identity.

With regard to the political recognition of Creoles in Mauritius, the fourth category—labeled as ‘General population’—is however what interests me the most here. A residual and incongruous classification that refers altogether to the White Franco-Mauritians, Creoles, and *métis* of the country, the ‘General population’—as its name indicates—stands out as a rather vague appellation that foregrounds an impossibility to belong. Unlike the other categories, ‘General population’ is not defined by religion, ancestral identity, or any other definite criteria. Rather, it results from the inability to fit any of the other three segments of the population.

Section 3(4) of the First Schedule of the Constitution (1968) states that:

the population of Mauritius shall be regarded as including a Hindu community, a Muslim community and a Sino-Mauritian community; and every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or another of those three communities shall be regarded as belonging to the General Population, which shall itself be regarded as a fourth Community.

(Republic of Mauritius, 1968 - Section 3(4) of First Schedule of the Constitution)

Within the official discourse of the multicultural nation, the Creoles and *métis* of the country were thus not only marginalized; they were literally not named and consequently made invisible and denied political recognition and representivity by the state apparatus. Because of their incapacity to claim a specific ‘ethnic identity’, the history, memory, and becoming of

Creoles, who simultaneously belonged everywhere and nowhere, were diluted within the ‘General population’ labeling.

Vis-à-vis Afro-Creoles in particular, the incongruity of the General Population category further lies in its approach to Creole identity as a continuum ranging from ‘Black’ to ‘White’ and including all the possible cases of *métissage* in between. Hence, within the initial taxonomy of the multicultural nation, descendants of colonial masters and enslaved peoples were ironically featured into the same category, despite the obvious differences in their socioeconomic status and political agencies. Yet, the respective contributions of Whites and Afro-Creoles to the history and development of the country are always acknowledged in different terms. Because most White Franco-Mauritians tend to enjoy economic privileges and higher social status, their contribution to the development of a modern nation is rarely put into question. In fact, one could even argue that there is an overrepresentation of the contribution of White Europeans and their descendants to the development of the country in the school curriculum. In a variety of social domains that include the civil service, politics, and the local economy, Creoles, and more particularly Afro-Creoles, on the other hand, are often represented as lazy, thriftless and incapable of contributing in any significant way to the cultural development of the country<sup>39</sup> (Baptiste, 2013; Boswell, 2006; Romaine et al., 2010)—except for their folkloric *sega* music, dance and playful *sirandann*. This ethno-political marginalization of Creoles as a group that does not fully participate in the nation-building process is something that also finds resonance in their abjection from the national curriculum, as I shall further explain in the next section.

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<sup>39</sup> This general perception of Creoles as being unproductive citizens of the country is in fact illustrated by the publication of articles such as the infamous piece written in 2012 by editorialist Darlmah Naeck titled “*Pourquoi les creoles posent problème*” [Why are Creoles a problem]. The publication of the article generated strong controversy and heated reaction from the part of several Afro-Creole activists, political parties as well as representatives of the Catholic church.

*The ‘multiculturalizing’ of the national curriculum and the abjection of Creole people and culture*

The history of state institutions always correlates with socioeconomic and political priorities. Consequently, in line with the multicultural discourse of the postcolonial nation, various institutions were established, and initiatives implemented by the Mauritian state in the 1970s to ensure the Mauritianization (i.e. the nationalization) of the country. Some of these initiatives include the “1975-1980: Five-Year Plan” (Government of Mauritius, 1975) which recommended the democratization of the education sector as a means of achieving economic success. The Five-Year plan aimed, among other things, to establish a school curriculum that would break away from its colonial vestiges to better address the economic and social realities of the country. However, with the creation of a Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs that was particularly attached to the transmission of ethnic and ancestral values as a foregrounding principle of the multicultural nation, the process leading to the setting up of a national curriculum was further instrumentalized to ethnonationalist ends. In other words, the Mauritianization of the curriculum itself integrated education and culture in ways that insisted on the promotion of ethnocultural and ancestral traditions as the cornerstone of contemporary Mauritian culture.

Set up in 1973 by an Act of Parliament, the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) played a central role in this process. While the Institute’s core engagements included educational research, curriculum development, and teacher education, it was also responsible for designing educational and pedagogical policies that subscribed to the political vision of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs. In 1975, most notably, a nationwide student protest underscored the necessity of “mov[ing] towards [the] nationalization and Mauritianization” (Beesoondial, 2016, p. 47) of a number of sectors including education. Subsequently, the MIE was called upon

to take on significant responsibilities in disseminating a sense of Mauritian identity and citizenship that would continue to promote ethnic diversity and ancestral cultures as a constitutive part of the sovereign nation.

A case in point, the recommendations of a 1978 Commission of Enquiry on Post-Primary and Secondary Education in Mauritius included several propositions for the Mauritianization of the local curriculum. In response to the place already occupied by Western and European cultures in the curriculum, the report namely recommended a more direct engagement with the diversity of Mauritian culture, but in ways that systematically linked local cultural practices, traditions, and artistic expressions to so-called ancestral homelands, whether in India, China, or Africa. A particular section of the report reads as follows:

Much more should be done in our view, to bring the whole of our cultural heritage home to the minds of our pupils. There can be no doubt that we must try to instill some knowledge of the philosophy, culture, traditions and artistic achievements which abound in the very history of the Indian subcontinent, China and Africa into the pupils of our schools.

(Commission of Enquiry on Post-primary and Secondary Sectors of Education, 1978, p. 59)

In an article that discusses the ramifications of multiculturalism and ethnonationalist policies in Mauritian education, Aumeerally argues that “culture, as articulated in policy documents is stabilised only as discrete ethnic folkloric practices, which are, moreover, defined as essential to the cultivation of citizenship in Mauritius” (Aumeerally, 2005, p. 310). But while the slogan of “Unity in Diversity” will most certainly inform the elaboration of school curricula and textbooks in the 1970s, these documents hardly ever engaged in critical understandings of culture, ethnicity, and national belonging as dynamic, plural, relational, and non-exclusive forms of identification. Rather, in official publications, the metaphor of the ‘Rainbow nation’ was



systematically evoked in ways that present Mauritian multiculturalism—this collection of distinctive cultural components from Europe, Africa, and Asia—as the essence of the nation. Among the first textbooks to be issued in the context of this Mauritianization process, the cover image of *Rémi et Marie* (Cangy, Desforges, Lamusse, & Madelaine, 1974)—a schoolbook for learners of French, in the lower grades of the primary cycle—exemplifies this ethnonationalist discourse. Featuring four young children who ‘clearly’ represent four racial groups and their respective ancestral homelands, the image indeed reduces national identity to a mere representation of the country’s multiculturalism, as further underscored by the textbook’s subtitle, “petits écoliers mauriciens” [young Mauritian schoolchildren].

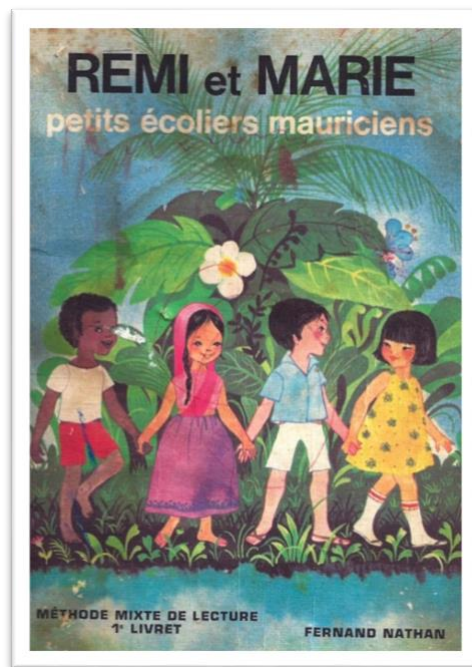


Figure 2: Cover of *Rémi et Marie*, a French language textbook formerly used in Grade 1 (Cangy et al., 1974)

Similarly, the authors of a 1978 textbook titled *Moisson du monde* [Harvest of the World] (Perrottet, Prosper, & Foondun, 1978) insisted in their foreword on the necessity of

‘Mauritianizing’ the teaching of French language and of dynamizing an aging curriculum deemed too Eurocentric. As such, while this Mauritianization was performed in reaction to this Eurocentrism, it also took the form of a direct engagement with the country’s diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. From the onset, for instance, the first chapter of the textbook, titled “*Port-Louis: Une diversité de races*” [Port-Louis: a diversity of races] (Perrottet et al., 1978, p. 9), sets the tone by drawing the attention of young learners to the racial diversity of the island’s capital city. As they learned about national citizenship, and imagined themselves in a public transportation in Port-Louis, schoolchildren back then could indeed read the following:

*chaque bus, c’est l’île Maurice en miniature. On y voit des citoyens aux yeux bridés qui parlent chinois à côté de personnages à peau brune qui conversent en hindi ou en quelque autre langue de l’Inde. Car l’Île Maurice est une mosaïque de races. Mais comme il faut une langue commune aux divers secteurs de la population, on emploie le français tout au moins un parler français qu’on appelle créole.*

[each bus is a scaled-down version of Mauritius. One can see citizens with slanting eyes speaking Chinese next to dark-skinned characters who are conversing in Hindi or another Indian language. Because Mauritius is a mosaic of races. And since a common language is crucial for the various sectors of the population to communicate, we use French or at least a spoken version of French which we call Kreol.]

(Perrottet et al., 1978, p. 9)

With the image of the racial mosaic and its clear references to phenotypic stereotypes, the first part of this passage recalls the clear multicultural discourse at work in *Rémi et Marie* and in the Commission of Enquiry’s report. This being said, I would argue that the second part of the quote—which undermines Kreol language as a language in its own right, by assimilating it to a

spoken French—is, in contradistinction, indicative of the existing racial, cultural, and linguistic prejudices that ultimately challenge the harmonious description of the multicultural nation. This is to say that, while Creoles were often strictly assimilated to Africans in 1970s textbooks as a way of further consolidating clear ethnic markers and distinctions within the multicultural model, references to Creole people, culture, and language as they relate to processes of *métissage*, hybridity, and creolization, frequently included prejudicial comments that evoked illegitimacy and lack of purity. While such comments subtly point to the untold hierarchies and logics of marginalization at work in ethnonationalist ideologies, they are also indicative of the many tensions and power differentials which I mentioned earlier, and which are largely glossed over by the multicultural discourse. The critique of Mauritian multiculturalism as a version of citizenship that fails to acknowledge ethnic conflicts and cultural contradictions is further underscored by Aumeerally:

the concept of Mauritian citizenship, legitimised within the education system, is intertwined with subscription to the idea of multiculturalism as incorporating “multi-ethnic, multi-religious and pluri-cultural” groups. [...] cultural diversity is grounded in a definition of culture as mere aesthetic and anachronistic manifestations that are presumed to co-exist without contradictions or conflict.

(Aumeerally, 2005, p. 310)

As I have discussed already, if multiculturalism in Mauritius is often romanticized and idealized, the apparent peace that is regularly invoked to characterize interethnic relationships in the country does not preclude inequalities, and expressions of racism and communalism among the different ethnic groups of the island. Moreover, like with the initial Constitution of the country, while Mauritian multiculturalism tends to conceal the long-standing ethnic tensions in

the country, its approach to cultural diversity as a set of discrete and fixed constituents also tends to depreciate ancestral connections to Africa and slavery, on the one hand, and to marginalize expressions of *métissage* and creolization, on the other.

When it comes to the representation of (Afro)Creoles, in particular, it stands out, from the 1970s textbooks, that they were portrayed in ways that were less positive than the other ethnic or cultural groups of the island. In addition to being associated with poverty, Creoles were indeed systematically depicted as the most marginalized, the least privileged but also the least productive group of the multiethnic nation. Drawing from award-winning writer Ananda Devi's short-story "*Cité Atlee*", one of *Moisson du monde*'s chapter, for instance, is dedicated to "*Christiane la petite créole*" [Christiane, the little Creole girl], who at the age of 10 ceases to go to school in order to take care of her siblings (Perrottet et al., 1978, pp. 39–43)<sup>40</sup>. The chosen sections of Christiane's story however adopt a fatalistic tone as they describe how the young and intelligent girl from Cité Atlee<sup>41</sup>, with her "*cheveux crépus*" [frizzy hair] and her "*peau presque noire*" [nearly black skin] resigns herself to doing what other Creoles girls of her age do. Indeed, these portions of the short story never interrogate the historical and political conditions that have led to the socioeconomic marginalization of Creoles in Mauritius. Rather, they convey the sad and yet cynically 'stoic' idea that the only realistic and socially responsible outcome for Creole children like Christiane is not to continue attending school, but to acquire enough instruction to go back home in the "*cités*", where they can help their poor parents to run their household by taking care of the younger kids of the large family.

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<sup>40</sup> While "*petite créole*" can be read as "young/little Creole girl", the expression is also a direct translation "*ti Kreol*"; a *Kreol Morisien* term that is commonly used within a local repertoire to designate dark-skinned (Afro) Creoles of lower socioeconomic status (see Boswell, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Cité Atlee is a township in the vicinity of Curepipe, located in the center region of Mauritius. The 'cités' in Mauritius are often associated with lower-class Creoles and negatively connoted as pockets of poverty and criminality. See the Report of the Truth & Justice Commission (2011a) for more detailed discussion of the life in the 'cités'.



Figure 3: The story of Christiane, the “little” Creole girl in *Moisson du monde* (Perrottet et al., 1978, p. 40)

Similarly, the 1971 reading textbook *Lectures mauriciennes* [Mauritian stories] (Caraguel, Lamusse, & Curé, 1971) features the legend of Mangalkhan, a famous maroon or runaway slave, who had escaped the plantation during the colonial period to find refuge in the neighborhood of Curepipe; a major town located in the central region of Mauritius. At the time, Mangalkhan was notorious for attacking settler camps and Franco-Mauritian farmers to scavenge for food, to the extent that his name was later given to one of the Creole *cités* located in the

suburb of Curepipe. By avoiding direct engagement with questions of colonial violence, slavery, and human rights, it is yet notable that the text presents Mangalkan as an absolute villain. Described from the vantage point of White settlers, he is seen as a merciless bloodthirsty ‘bandit’ and gang leader who terrorized the local population. Such a rendition of Mangalkhan’s story inevitably adds to the stigmatization and abjection of former slaves and their descendants. The evil nature of the racialized protagonist is further underscored by the contrast with M. Rivière, a White plantation owner who ultimately endorses the role of the hero and chases Mangalkhan away by merely staring at him. While several maroon<sup>42</sup> figures have been recasted as freedom fighters and symbols of resistance across various formerly colonized spaces, such negative representations of maroons in school textbooks have long deprived mixed slaves’ descendants from positive symbols with which they could identify.

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<sup>42</sup> In a 2007 dossier dedicated to the Profile of the famous maroon leaders”, Sateanund Peerthum and Saryebndra Peerthum explain the following about maroons and maroonage in Mauritius: “During the entire period that maroonage existed in colonial Mauritius, between 1641 and 1839, it was common for maroons or runaway slaves or fugitive slaves to organise themselves into either small or large bands or gangs. These maroon bands lived in the forests, mountains, ravines and near to the rivers of the island. [...] In a mostly harsh and hostile environment and relentlessly pursued by colonial forces which either sought their capture or destruction, the Mauritian maroons organised themselves and chose leaders from within their own ranks as an organized strategy of survival in the wilderness. Their firm objective was to obtain strength in numbers which permitted them to preserve their freedom and to fight the armed colonial detachments or maroon catching units” (Peerthum & Peerthum, 2007).

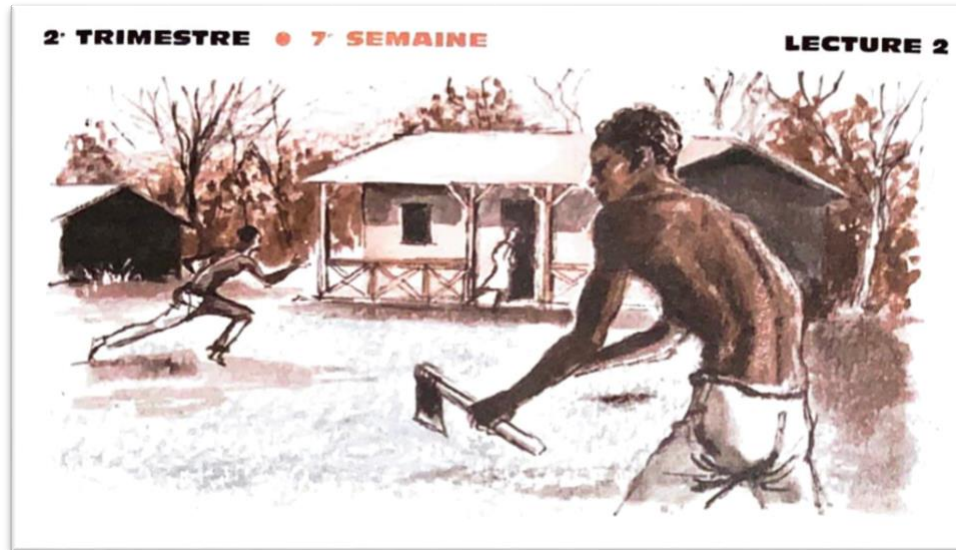


Figure 4: Manghalkhan represented as a bandit terrorizing the local population (Caraguel et al., 1971, p. 86)

Alienated from their own past (Fanon, 1952/2008) because of the shame, deviance, and inferiority long attached to stories of slaves, (Afro-)Creoles in particular were subjected to increasing prejudices within the multicultural framework of the Rainbow nation in the 1970s. Indeed, with such negative depictions of slaves as violent, criminal, and undesirable being produced, relayed, and disseminated via the curriculum and school textbooks, the issues associated with the country's history as a former plantation colony was in the end reported on the derogative representation of Africans and their descendants, rather than on the actual colonizers and plantation owners who engaged in the slave trade. Consequently, African ancestry became as much an object of abjection in curriculum as practices of *métissage*, creolization, and cultural mixing, leaving Creoles with no real possibility to proudly endorse an ancestral narrative in the way the other ethnic groups would.

## **MAURITIANISM: A FAILED ATTEMPT TO NATIONALIZE *KREOL MORISIEN***

While the 1970s marked the first ‘Mauritianization’ and ‘multiculturalization’ of the curriculum, in parallel, many opposed the compartmentalized vision of the multicultural nation, by arguing that post-colonial Mauritius had to get rid of ethnic separatism and think of itself as a creolized country, i.e. as ‘one’ new nation made up of ‘one’ people altogether. Founded by Paul Bérenger and a group of students in 1969, the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* (MMM) namely emerged on the political scene to promote a new vision of the independent country that radically opposed (neo)colonial instrumentalization of ethnic diversity by the state apparatus. Largely inspired by Marxist-Leninist and Third Worldism ideologies, and by the May 1968 events in France<sup>43</sup>, the leaders of this left-wing party introduced the language of class struggle in the political arena—a discourse that denounced ‘communalism’ and ethnic practices as clientelist tools meant to benefit the local bourgeoisie (Boudet, 2003).

Quite evidently, the MMM’s vision of a different Mauritian model required that a ‘new’ set of symbolic and cultural objects be identified and used to convey this sense of a shared nationhood, peoplehood, and belonging, beyond the kind of ethnic particularisms which the Labour Party’s multicultural ideology had been actively disseminating. Following the ideas of linguist and writer Dev Virahsawmy, for instance, the MMM adopted the political motto “*Enn sel lepep enn sel nasion*”<sup>44</sup>—purposefully written in Kreol Morisien, the *lingua franca* of the people—as a panacea against the ethno-religious divides inherited from colonialism (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 58). And because *Kreol Morisien* was seen as the language of the Mauritian people, it only made sense to suggest that it could be recognized as the national language of the country.

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<sup>43</sup> In May 1968, a movement of civil unrest led by university students gained national momentum in France. The protests targeted capitalism, American imperialism, consumerism, and state institutions.

<sup>44</sup> “One (single) people one (single) nation”.



To a certain extent, the MMM's vision of the Mauritian people, language, and culture, as one that transcends ethnic identities, ancestral origins, and diasporic ties, recalls the opening line of Antillean writers Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's *In Praise of Creoleness* (1990) which I discuss in chapter 1: "Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles" (p. 886). This is to say that while the MMM did not proclaim Mauritius 'Creole' as such—most likely because the term was already used locally to designate mixed slaves' descendants—their approach to questions of political independence, national sovereignty, and cultural autonomy, ultimately foregrounded the idea that a shared sense of nationhood could only be achieved through a common culture and language, and not through ancestral, ethnic, and/or religious representation.

This idea of Mauritian nationhood, based on the promotion of transcultural commonalities rather than on diasporic or ancestral heritage, was rapidly labelled locally as *mauricianisme* [Mauritianism]. According to Eisenlohr (2006), this concept of 'Mauritianism' was preferred to that of 'Creole Mauritius', namely because the term 'Creole' was too strongly associated with what Bonniol designates as the "*aire créole*", i.e. an imaginary geography which stretches from the Caribbean to the Indian ocean and which unites those islands that "have known French colonization at a particular moment of their history" (Bonniol, 1985, p. 77). Indeed, as mentioned in chapter 2, local conceptualizations of 'Creole' cultures and experiences have emerged across a number of spaces of the francophone Creole world—*créolité* in the Antilles, and *créolie* in La Réunion—but not in Mauritius.

In contradistinction, the idea of *mauricianisme* was part of an anti-colonial discourse that was careful not to recenter former colonial relations, as means of better foregrounding national sovereignty. Instead of simply presenting 'Mauritian' culture as a Creole culture, it thus turned to

*Kreol Morisien*—the shared language *par excellence* of the Mauritian people—to express national consciousness (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 60)<sup>45</sup>. Insisting on the role and significance which *Kreol Morisien* was meant to play in establishing this new framework of national unity, linguist Vinesh Hookoomsing writes:

following 1968 a new concept has appeared, *mauricianisme*. *Mauricianisme* is conceived as a synthesis and at the same time a superseding of the cultures and traditions of the different ethnic groups constituting the Mauritian society. Of all languages present, precisely the Creole language was in the best position to express the emerging *mauricianisme*, since it lacks any attachment to a particular class or ethnic group. Freed from the old myths and prejudices which are the legacy of colonialism, Creole becomes a weapon of combat and a factor of national unity.

(Hookoomsing, 1980, p. 118 quoted in Eisenlohr, 2006, pp. 58-59)

It is notable that Hookoomsing—just like several other intellectuals at the time—found no historical, cultural, or even social “attachment” of *Kreol Morisien* to “a particular class or ethnic group”<sup>46</sup>; even though it was long attested that the emergence of Creole languages, cultures, and

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<sup>45</sup> The need to establish ‘national’ symbols and ‘national’ traditions in contexts where national bodies were, in the end, created quite artificially and as a means to oppose colonial narratives, finds resonances in a number of anti-colonial and panafricanist discourses which gained in popularity around the same period. This being said, while the idea of *mauricianisme* made use of an anti-colonial rhetoric, it did not foreground the link to Africa or to any other African nations, nor did it point to the necessity of ‘recovering’ from a colonial experience that would have destroyed an original nation. Indeed, because Mauritius has no indigenous population, it had no ‘indigenous nation’ to turn back to. Rather, in the Mauritianist discourse, the nation emerged from the unity of the people which was in part illustrated by the shared use of *Kreol Morisien*.

<sup>46</sup> A former lecturer at the Mauritius Institute of Education, Hookoomsing—just like Virahsawmy—was among those who also advocated for the use of *Kreol Morisien* as a preferred medium of instruction in Mauritian schools. Indeed, in the 1970s—a period that coincided with the access to free education in Mauritius, following the students’ strike of 1975—several intellectuals participated in consultations around the recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as a means for democratizing access to education. While the main argument behind various individual propositions from the MIE’s faculty mainly focused on the pedagogical benefits of using *Kreol Morisien* as a core element of mother-tongue based multilingual education (Mauritius Institute of Education, 1976; Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, 1979), their commitment in favor of the local vernacular indirectly participated in the ongoing push for adopting *Kreol Morisien* as the national language of the country.

peoples is historically inseparable from the experience of former slaves in plantation colonies. This tends to imply that, in the multicultural imaginary of Mauritius, the idea of “attachment” necessarily presupposes an exclusive relationship between a particular group and a language, when in effect, the use of *Kreol Morisien* by all the ethnic groups of the island does not necessarily mean that the relationship between the language and its various speakers is homogenous and identical across the various groups.

Moreover, if *mauricianisme* indeed “emerged” after 1968, *Kreol Morisien* had been around since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, the idea of *mauricianisme* is inherently contingent upon a nationalistic project, whereas *Kreol Morisien* (unexpectedly) appeared during the colonial period, at a time that had not yet seen the naturalization of modern nations in the political imaginary. By suggesting, however, that *mauricianisme* and *Kreol Morisien* partake in a similar national imagination that is completely detachable from ancestral pasts, Hookoomsing’s vision of Mauritian identity and Mauritian language as indisputable symbols of national unity, also tends to rely on a discourse that envisions them as *sui generis*, i.e. as exceptionally positioned to convey a sense of national consciousness that transcends all forms of historical, cultural, or ethnic divides.

Hookoomsing’s reflection on the role and/or the instrumentalization of *Kreol Morisien* as “a weapon of combat and a factor of national unity” is further attested by Virahsawmy’s proposition, back in the early 1970s, to change the name of the language from ‘Kreol’ to ‘*Morisiê/ Morisien*’ (Mauritian), as a way of further advancing the political agenda of the MMM. Indeed, the goal of the party was to turn Mauritius into a “real” modern nation (Eisenlohr, 2006) and this project quickly gained in popularity because it seemed quite relevant to a country that had no indigenous population and therefore no ethnic or cultural group to “claim a primordial

relation to Mauritius as its ‘ancestral’ home” (Baptiste, 2002, p. 6). Rather than trying to balance out the places occupied by the various ethnic groups of the country within the competitive framework of the multicultural nation, the strategy of the MMM was thus to change the rules of the game altogether, and to think of the Mauritian nation as a forward-looking entity, i.e. as one that would invest in the common future and destiny of its people, rather than turn to ancestral ties and narratives as primary forms of cultural identification. To make this possible, it was crucial to consolidate symbols of national unity that would enable the entire population to think of itself as “one people, one nation”.

By simply ignoring the historical and cultural ties of *Kreol Morisien* to Creoles in particular, the MMM however also underestimated the reaction of the local Hindu elites who had no interest in the nationalization of *Kreol Morisien*, precisely because it ran the risk of undermining a system of political patronage which had played in their favor since independence. The complexity of this situation is discussed by Eisenlohr in his book titled *Little India*:

the nationalization of the Creole language offers an alternative vision of Mauritian national identity, one mediated through perceptions of the Creole language as the one cultural element uniting Mauritians. [...] A territorializing nationalist logic prevailed in their vision, asserting the ideological predominance of the shared vernacular Mauritian Creole over differences in religion, ethnicity, and origin. Nevertheless, despite its inclusivist pathos, Creole linguistic nationalism implies a reversal of the hegemonic order among ethnic groups in Mauritius, and was thus successfully checked as a political project by the Hindu state bourgeoisie.

(Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 60)

In 1982, the MMM—in alliance with the PSM (Mauritian Socialist Party)—unanimously won the elections, with a majority of the electorate being seduced by their slogan “*enn sel lepep*,

*enn sel nasion*” [one people, one nation]. However, their political victory was short-lived, and the government imploded soon after the fifteenth anniversary of the celebration of Independence Day in 1983. According to several historians and anthropologists (Eisenlohr, 2006; Houbert, 1983; Oodiah, 1989), the bone of contention was directly related to the MMM’s determination to establish *Kreol Morisien* as the national language. Indeed, to commemorate the independence of the country, the MMM had opted to have the national anthem sung for the first time in *Kreol Morisien* in lieu of English. Consequently, the government-controlled Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) announced the “national anthem in the national language”. The announcement led to strong protests and retaliation on the part of Hindu members of the ruling coalition, causing the MMM to withdraw from the government. The ‘Mauritianist’ party—whose idea of Mauritian postcolonial politics consisted in de-emphasizing ethnic solidarities and diasporic connections (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 59)—ultimately lost the general elections organized later that same year.

While *Kreol Morisien* was at the time already shared by almost all Mauritians, irrespective of class and ethnic origin, the elevation of the main *lingua franca* to the rank of national language ironically brought about the failure of *mauricianisme* as a rallying framework. On the one hand, the idea of a shared national language, which disregards ethnic and religious identifications, did not fit well within the distributive model of the multicultural nation. On the other hand, the historical, cultural, and social ties between the local vernacular and Creoles in Mauritius generated much anxieties among many Hindus who feared that the nationalization of the language would either make the entire population Creole, or at the very least provide stronger political leverage to Creoles, who were so far generally viewed as lacking a ‘legitimate’ ancestral lineage. As argued by Eisenlohr:

Accordingly, it [the issue of *Kreol Morisien* as national language] was interpreted by many Hindus as a threat to their positions in the state apparatus. Even though Mauritian Creole is spoken by virtually all Mauritians and is emphatically portrayed by its supporters as not associated with a particular group, it is associated with Creoles as an ethnic group in a particular way. African and Malagasy slaves and their descendants, the Creoles, are known as the creators of the Creole language [...].<sup>47</sup> A Mauritian Creole linguistic nationalism does in fact place in the center of the national imagination those Mauritians [i.e. Creoles] who are known to lack any attachment to ancestral traditions with origins elsewhere. Accordingly, the Creole community could have emerged as the unmarked, mainstream Mauritians in the new postcolonial Mauritian nation. If the maximal overlap between Creole ethnic traditions and a Mauritian nation conceived through the lens of Mauritian Creole linguistic nationalism were achieved, Indo-Mauritians would find themselves in a peripheral position of ethnic markedness and difference from a hegemonic national culture [...].

(Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 60)

Eisenlohr's argument underscores two important issues which are worth highlighting here. On the one hand, the failure of *mauricianisme* and of its 'Creole linguistic nationalism' points to the systemic logics of the multicultural nation, in which ethnic separatism was already benefiting the Indo-Mauritian majority of the country, who occupied privileged positions within this divisive political model. On the other hand, the refusal of Indo-Mauritians to recognize *Kreol Morisien* as the national language of the country also emphasizes the long-standing marginalization of the local Creole people, language, and culture, not only because of their

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<sup>47</sup> This is a common perception that is however not fully verified historically. As I shall further discuss in chapter 5, while the enslaved peoples of Mauritius in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are generally perceived as the 'creators' or 'inventors' of the *Kreol Morisien*, it is argued that the language could not have been 'invented' without the contact between slaves and White European settlers.

perceived links to slavery, but also because of their association with ideas of hybridity, *métissage*, and miscegenation, that did not fit well with the discourse of ancestral lineage and purity. In the eyes of the multicultural state, indeed, it seemed that ethnic communities and their respective cultures could only be recognized as fully constitutive of the nation, when in a position to define themselves in essentialist terms and to claim an ancestral culture of their own (Boudet, 2013).

Ultimately, the idea of *mauricianisme* and of its egalitarian trope of “one people, one nation” could not overturn the logics of ethnic categories and hierarchies initially imposed and later naturalized under the colonial regime. As such, Baptiste (2013) argues that if, on the one hand, the decolonization and independence of Mauritius helped to foreground ideas of national sovereignty; the process of nation building, on the other hand, largely remained a work in progress, because of the contrasting ways in which the ethnically diverse population envisioned the new nation. This is to say that the so-called taxonomies of ethnic identity and ethnic purity, created under the British rule, still held a significant bearing on the political imagination of the country, even after its independence. In the final section of this chapter, I shall namely discuss how the reaffirmation of such taxonomies, following the failure of the Mauritianist ideology, has resulted in the invisibilization and strong alienation of Creoles and their culture within the political framework of the multicultural nation, and subsequently within the ‘Mauritianization’ of the national curriculum.

## THE REINFORCEMENT OF ETHNONATIONALISM AND THE ONGOING ABJECTION OF CREOLES IN THE CURRICULUM

It is worth mentioning at this point that, in line with standard principles of *mauricianisme*, the MMM had removed the initial ethnic classification from the constitution, following their resounding electoral victory in 1982<sup>48</sup>. As such, no ethnic census was conducted in the country after 1982. Yet, until today, this quadripartite division is still maintained through the Best Loser system of the electoral process (Boudet & Peghini, 2008)—a political device, established by the British administration in 1958, to ensure the representation of ethnic minorities in the Mauritian parliament<sup>49</sup> (Boudet, 2013; Kasenally, 2018). Ironically therefore, while the Constitution of the country directly contributed to the invisibility of Creoles within the Mauritian state discourse, the definitive abolition of ethnic references in national censuses did little to address the marginalization of Creoles. As argued by Mauritian scholar and activist Jimmy Harmon, it has ultimately “deprived the country of disaggregated data and more so, when ethnic politics is practiced by all political parties and remains prevalent in several spheres, including language policies” (Harmon, 2017, p. 6).

Harmon’s reservation about the removal of ethnic references from national censuses suggests that, in the long run, this measure only aggravated the marginalization of Creoles, in the sense that it continued to deprive them from the possibility of being officially recognized as an ethnic community in its own rights. With interethnic marriages and *métissage* being on the upward trend since independence, it also became harder to accurately tell whether the proportion

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<sup>48</sup> The MMM/PSM coalition won all 60 parliamentary seats during the general legislative elections of 1982.

<sup>49</sup> The Best Loser system requires that every candidate at any general election declares his ethnic community. In the long run, this system was turned into a tool for strategizing with the general elections.



of people identifying as Creoles was actually growing or not. As such, with the political failure of the ‘Mauritianist’ ideology, the reinstatement and consolidation of the ethnonationalist model through a number of state and parastatal institutions further alienated Creoles. Because they could not lobby for state resources in the same way as the other ethnic groups of the nation, their political agency and access to socioeconomic opportunities—namely at the time of the economic boom in the 1980s—were further undermined (Madhoo & Nath, 2013).

This ongoing marginalization and discrimination of Creoles is what led a number of public figures, activists, and scholars to speak of a general *malaise créole* [Creole malaise] as from the 1990s<sup>50</sup>. Initially used to designate the marginalization of Creoles by the White-led Catholic church, this idea of *malaise créole* will ultimately come to refer to the broader and long-standing discrimination of Creoles, under the colonial regime and after independence, on the basis of their hybrid identity and subsequent ‘lack’ of ethnic/racial purity. According to Vaughan, many Creoles today continue to resent the pathologizing discourse that has reduced them to a residual category, i.e. not to who they are, but to what they lack (Vaughan, 2005, p. 3).

In the following subsections, I namely discuss how the invisibility of Creoles in the state discourse, the general perception of Creoles as an illegitimate category, and their gradual marginalization from social spaces, will entail their subsequent erasure from the school curriculum in general, and from school textbooks in particular, following the reinforcement of ethnonationalism in the country.

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<sup>50</sup> see chapter 5 for a more thorough discussion of the *malaise créole*.

### *The othering of Creoles as “those-who-are-not”*

With the reinforcement of ethnonationalist discourses from the 1980s onward, the multicultural exceptionalism of the island is what will be systematically invoked as the distinctive feature of the Mauritian nation. Described as a ‘Rainbow nation’ (Carter, 1998), the multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious country will be consistently praised as one of those rare republics where a diversity of communities co-habit peacefully (Columbia Sustainable Peace Project, 2020; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020). Yet, as discussed already, several scholars have argued that this presumed sense of harmony further relayed a “conservative political rhetoric” (Boswell, 2002, p. 16) that promoted the romanticization of ethnic separatism as a means of concealing the systemic levers of ostracism and stigmatization of Creoles. Relating this ethnonationalist model to its colonial roots and to the long-standing prejudices vis-à-vis enslaved peoples and their racially mixed descendants, Boswell argues, more specifically, that:

in Mauritian society the dominant majority view hybridity “as a metaphor for the negative consequences of racial encounters” (Papastergiadis 2000: 169). This view of hybridity, which has its roots in the racist discourse of slavery, is currently refreshed in the contemporary context by the official and public references to Mauritius being a Rainbow Nation (the colors are all there but they are separate) and that Mauritius has “unity in diversity” and is a “fruit salad” (the fruits are all there, they do not mix but are held together by the syrup of nationalism) [...].

(Boswell, 2005, p. 215)

Boswell’s argument about the replication of colonial logics and negative connotations associated with hybridity, and its direct impact on more contemporary depictions (and stigmatization) of Creole people, culture, and language, brings to mind Maldonado-Torres’ idea of “coloniality of Being” (2007). Discussing the implications of the coloniality of power in

different areas of society (knowledge, economy, culture, and authority, among others), Maldonado-Torres indeed argues that colonial relations of power have left profound marks on “the general understanding of being” when it comes to subjugated groups. As such, his concept of coloniality of Being highlights the long-term effects of the colonial project on the way particular groups are still perceived as “others that are-not” and “others that lack being” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 252)<sup>51</sup>.

Extending Boswell’s argument, I would argue that the long-standing exclusion of Creoles—as ‘those who are not’ and who subsequently ‘do not belong’—was further aggravated with the reinforcement of the Rainbow nation ideology within various state institutions and parastatal bodies, including the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation—the only public broadcaster of the island until the official liberalization of airwaves in 2000. Responsible for the Mauritianization of the country after independence, sociocultural and education institutions in particular have since played an instrumental role in consolidating and disseminating a dominant version of the multicultural nation, based on the enhancement of ethnonationalist discourses and practices that privilege diasporic ties and ancestral cultures over creolized, syncretic, and mixed modes of (self-)identification.

By the end of the 1980s, for instance, the main ethnic groups of the islands had helped set up the Ministry of Arts and Culture as a means of promoting ethnic roots and ancestral cultures as the cornerstones of the country’s diversity. Until today, the mission statement of this Ministry, as featured on the Government’s website, is “[t]o foster a balanced and harmonious Mauritian

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<sup>51</sup> Commenting the way in which some Creoles respond to such negative representations, Boswell writes the following: “Creoles, being black and of mixed heritage are aberrations that threaten social and moral order. This stigma is so great that it is encouraging some Creoles to formally reject the fact of their hybridity by emphasizing their origins in a particular homeland” (Boswell, 2005, p. 216). I shall come back to this (strategic) essentialism of Creoles within the framework of the multicultural nation in chapter 5.

society through consolidation of existing pluralism, promotion of creativity and the celebration of cultural values”, in view of “consolidat[ing] national unity” (Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage, 2020). While the Ministry’s rhetoric directly alludes to the ethnonationalist slogan of “unity in diversity”, its role in scripting a fixed version of Mauritian multiculturalism as a collection of clearly delineated ethnic categories has been paramount.

As such, between the 1980s and the 2000s, the Mauritian Ministry of Arts and Culture oversaw the creation and establishment of a number of Cultural Centers and Speaking Unions, tasked with ensuring the preservation of diasporic ties with ancestral homelands, as well as the transmission of ancestral cultures and languages. Such Cultural Centers include the Indira Gandhi Center for Indian Culture (1987), the Chinese Cultural Center (1988), the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture (1989) among others; while Speaking Unions include the Hindi speaking Union (1994), the Tamil speaking Union (2001) and Urdu speaking Union (2002), etc.

Eisenlohr argues that the overemphasis on a “cultural politics”—which is performed through the reenactment of diasporic traditions and allegiances to diverse lands of origin, and to India in particular—has become “a hegemonic basis for cultural citizenship in Mauritius” (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 5). However, in the absence of a clearly identifiable ‘homeland’, Creoles in particular have found it “almost impossible to create or sustain such ties. Slaves were taken from a great variety of communities and cultural groups [...] and it has been almost impossible to trace their roots” (Boswell, 2002, p. 23). Similarly, the Creole Speaking Union will only be established in 2011, i.e. only one year prior to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum. This ultimately indicates that during the last two decades of the twentieth century, Creole people, culture, and language, were hardly endorsed by the “cultural politics” in place.

While the wide circulation of ethnonationalist discourses through the state apparatus has drastically undermined the *mauricianisme* of the 1970s, it has also largely contributed to the implementation of a different Mauritianization process that promoted ethnic separatism performed through ancestral cultures, languages, and expressions. In the next section, I consider more specifically how this new Mauritianization of the education sector has impacted curriculum design in such a way that it has deprived Mauritian children from thinking of Mauritius as a creolized society, and from approaching questions of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity beyond the established framework of the multicultural nation.

### ***The absence of Creole people, culture, and language in the curriculum***

From the 1980s onward, the abjection of a Creole consciousness (and of Creole people and culture in particular) by the state's multicultural discourse, will further pervade the Mauritian education system, to the extent that explicit references to Creole identity will gradually disappear from official school documents. Indeed, the ideology of the 'Rainbow nation' will be emphasized in such blatant ways by the national curriculum that it will ensure the promotion of fixed ethnic identities—and the transmission of ancestral values, practices, and traditions—to the expense of cultural expressions that are either creolized or transethnic. With the celebration of the Mauritian "*vivre-ensemble*"<sup>52</sup>, discourses of *métissage*, miscegenation, and hybridity will be implicitly casted as a threat to the nation's multicultural model.

More specifically, between the 1980s and the years 2000s, a number of educational policies, instructional practices, and pedagogical materials will be used to disseminate and insist on a compartmentalized vision of Mauritian ethnic diversity that is largely incompatible with

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<sup>52</sup> Can be translated as "living together in harmony".

expressions of creolization, and cultural diffraction. Core initiatives of the Ministry of Education will include the reinforcement of ancestral language programs between 1984 and 1997<sup>53</sup>, as well as the publication of policy documents and school textbooks that subscribe to an ethnonationalist ideology. In the next chapter, I shall examine more specifically how the ‘ancestral language’ framework has ultimately played out, first in the marginalization of *Kreol Morisien*, and then in the modalities of its introduction in the Mauritian curriculum in 2012. But, for the remaining pages of the present chapter, I will simply discuss how the reinforcement of the multicultural discourse in the education system in the early 2000s, has ultimately led to the under-representation—or sometimes to the mere erasure—of explicit references to Creole people, culture, and language, from a number of state-endorsed instructional documents.

The first *National Curriculum Framework* (NCF) for primary education in Mauritius was only issued in 2007. It is worth mentioning, however, that almost forty years after the independence of the country, the document still described the overall purpose of Mauritian education by using the same ethnonationalist discourse. By insisting, for example, on the importance of “foster[ing] national unity by promoting in the individual understanding of and respect for our multicultural heritage” (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2007, p. 11), the 2007 NCF indeed foregrounds multiculturalism as a founding principle of national stability. This stance is further emphasized by the generic learning outcomes listed in the document, which

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<sup>53</sup> In his study of the politics of languages in education in Mauritius, Miles (2000) provides ample details on this question and writes that “[t]he issue of oriental languages in CPE ranking had gestated for over a decade. In 1984 [...] a parliamentary select committee was set up to investigate the modalities for inclusion of the languages in ranking students. [...] in 1987 oriental languages were added to the CPE for certification, though not ranking, purposes. In 1991 another select committee was set up to reconsider the previous committee’s conclusions; it issued its report in 1993. [...] this select committee rejected its predecessor’s proposed formula. Instead, it recommended simply that pupils who had studied an oriental language would take tests in five subjects (oriental language, English, French, mathematics, and environmental studies) and that those who had not would take only four. [...] These recommendations were accepted by the Jugnauth cabinet at the end of 1993, forwarded to the minister of education in early 1994, and communicated to the nation’s schools by Mauritius’ examination board in March 1995 for implementation later that same year” (Miles, 2000, pp. 221–222).

specify that “[l]earners should be able to [...] appreciate the diversity of Mauritian culture and interact positively among themselves” (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2007, p. 12). Similar statements run through the entire text, leaving no ambiguity about the compartmentalized approach of the first official curriculum framework to Mauritian citizenship. The section dedicated to the teaching of “Civic Values”, for instance, evokes “a population of many origins, but all united”, and preconizes the development of “[t]olerance and respect of others’ culture, belief, lifestyle” (p. 100) as a core component of civic education.

Taking a slightly different approach, the second and current *National Curriculum Framework*, released in 2015, also references multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in Mauritius while introducing this time notions of intercultural education as a basis for the “sustainable” development of “appropriate knowledge, attitudes and values for responsible and active citizenship” (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015b, p. 13). In line with this slight addition, the Mauritius Institute of Education issued a number of pedagogical resources between 2016 and 2020 for the development of intercultural competencies as a set of cross-curricular objectives for primary school learners. It is worth noting, however, that the new *NCF*’s stance on intercultural education hardly ever challenges references to ethnic differentiation and separatism as a founding principle of the Mauritian nation. On the contrary, one of the main goals of this so-called intercultural component, as outlined in the document, reads as follows: “Intercultural Education in the Primary Curriculum seeks to ensure that the young learner [...] [d]evelops an awareness of her/his own culture and that of others” (p. 15). But by insisting on the fact that “the Republic of Mauritius constitutes a population with different cultural origins [that] remains united” (p. 15), the new *NCF* reproduces the same rhetoric as the former one. In other words, by underscoring the necessity for learners to “develo[p] respect for life-styles different from [their]

own so that [they] understand and appreciate others” (p. 15), the document never foregrounds the relevance or importance of intercultural education as it relates to questions of exchange, *métissage*, hybridity or becoming.

In fact, even the words ‘Creole’ or ‘creolization’ as they relate to people and culture are not featured in the text; which is to say that the only times the term ‘Creole’ or ‘Kreol’ is used pertain to direct references to the local language, i.e. *Kreol Morisien*. As such, in the new *NCF*, interculturalism is reduced to its mere function as an educational tool for enhancing a harmonious and peaceful living among the various traditional ethnic groups of the Mauritian nation. Leaving untouched the educational philosophy of Mauritian multiculturalism, the language of ‘intercultural education’ will thus not bring much change to the ways in which ethnicity, language, and cultures were already presented in the 2007 *NCF*.

A case in point, rather than challenging the systematic compartmentalization of optional languages along ethnocultural lines, the 2015 *NCF* endorses a similar conservative approach to language teaching in primary schools by insisting on its value as “a heritage deeply rooted in the country’s educational history” (p. 23). By doing so, it emphasizes the historical role of language curricula in mediating and reinforcing ethnonationalism. This is especially salient in the section of the document dedicated to Asian languages and Arabic:

Shaped by the diverse languages and cultures **brought by immigrants of African, Asian and European origin**, the Republic of Mauritius stands out as a multilingual and multicultural society. [...] Since 1955, multilingualism is promoted in Mauritius through the emphasis placed on the ancestral languages in formal education and **which therefore maintain these languages and the language communities**. [...] Language learning is not only seen as a means of developing communication skills and knowledge acquisition, but also for personal and cultural enrichment, more so when the languages are linked to the various cultures and traditions which



are vibrant in the Mauritian landscape. Learning an Asian Language and Arabic is viewed as **a means of preserving ancestral heritage, cultural identity and specificity**.

(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015, p. 42, *my emphasis*).

It is worth noting here that, while this quote from the *NCF* explicitly relates the diversity of languages and cultures in Mauritius to successive waves of immigrants and to their respective homelands outside of the island (Africa, Asia, and Europe), it makes no mention of the local Creole language and culture that are both ‘indigenous’ to the island and that are actually shared by the Mauritian population. Rather, it largely conceives of the country’s cultural and linguistic diversity in diasporic terms, and consequently emphasizes the role of ancestral languages in the education system in “maintaining” the “specificity” of ethnocultural groups and “preserving” their respective ancestral heritage. In its discussion of multilingualism and multiculturalism, the *NCF* thus clearly dismisses, ignores, and overlooks the importance of Creole language and culture as two of the most “vibrant” components of the “Mauritian landscape”. This is, I would argue, largely due to the fact that the term “Creole” in Mauritius predominantly refers to mixed descendants of African and Malagasy slaves.

In addition to discussions of language education, the absence of explicit references to the local Creole culture and people is likewise observable in the *NCF*’s description of other school subjects, taught at the level of primary education. Commenting on the instrumental role of History & Geography for providing learners with a ‘clear’ sense of the nation’s multiculturalism, the document specifies the following:

History is an account of events that happened in the past. It [...] enables learners to know about the different origins of people, their way of life and their role in the development of the country.

The study of history helps learners to recognise the need for harmonious co-existence of people

with different cultures, languages and values. It develops patriotism and a sense of commitment to preserve the national heritage.

(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015b, p. 80)

It is, once again, quite notable that the *National Curriculum Framework* would favor an approach to history that insists on the compartmentalization of the nation's ethnocultural diversity. As such, the *NCF* presupposes that learners can only develop a real sense of "patriotism" if they are led to acknowledge and understand that the Mauritian nation is made up, not of a single people, but of a diversity of peoples from "different origins" who have managed to live peacefully together and whose respective contributions to the "development of the country" are recognized on equal terms<sup>54</sup>.

Given the emphasis of the two national curriculum frameworks on the country's harmonious multiculturalism, it is not surprising that the teaching of History & Geography would display the same kind of compartmentalized approach to questions of multiculturalism and national heritage. The following two activities from the current Grade 6 History & Geography textbook, for instance, clearly illustrate the state's governmentality (Foucault, 1975/1995) which "continue[s] to solidify categories of ethnicity and identity that formed the mechanism of colonial governance" (Baptiste, 2013, p. 185).

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<sup>54</sup> In a rubric entitled "Understanding the Mauritian Culture and our Cultural Diversity", the Grade 7 History & Geography textbook reiterates these ideas of harmonious living and mutual respect in the multicultural nation by stating the following: "In a multicultural society, people with different cultures live together and no particular culture is imposed on anybody. This means that such a society respects and values cultural diversity. [...] In our islands too, we recognise that cultural diversity is our strength. / Some people use expressions like 'mosaic', 'rainbow', 'salad bowl' to show their appreciation of multiculturalism and cultural diversity" (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018b, p. 73).

History Geography **6** unit 2

● 1.1| ORIGIN OF THE PEOPLE LIVING ON THE ISLANDS

● You have learnt that when Mauritius and Rodrigues were discovered, they were not inhabited. However, today you find people of different origins on the islands. Let's find out where these people came from.

**FIG. 1** PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT ORIGINS LIVING ON THE ISLANDS TODAY

● Have you ever thought where your ancestors came from? Where they lived on the island? How were they living? What work they did? What were their leisure activities? How was their life different from the people living today?

● In this unit, you will learn about the origins of these people. You will also explore how they have worked to make Mauritius and Rodrigues beautiful places where everyone lives together peacefully and happily.

45

Figure 5: activity on the diverse origins of the Mauritian population in the Grade 6 History & Geography textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018a, p. 45)

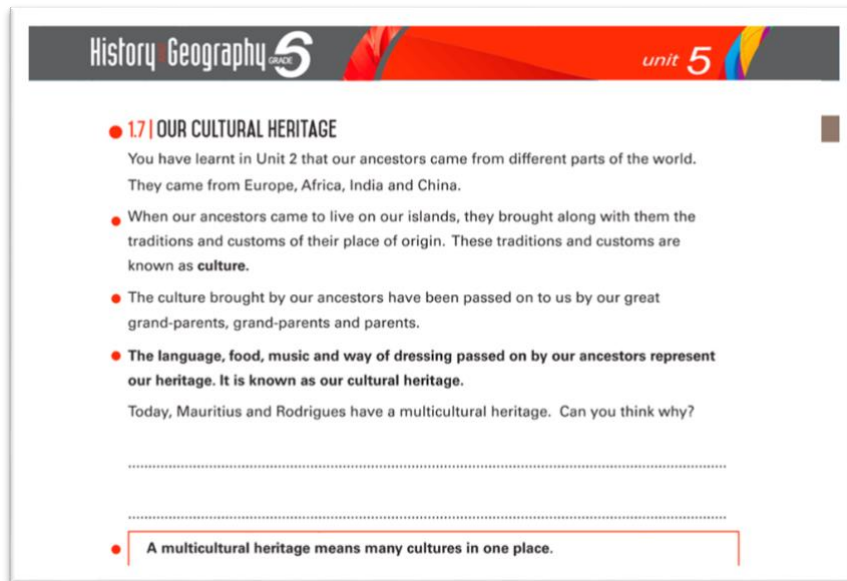


Figure 6: activity on the cultural heritage of Mauritius in the Grade 6 History & Geography textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018a, p. 119)

In both these activities (Figures 5 and 6), Mauritius is represented as a multicultural nation, composed of a variety of cultures that are not indigenous to the island, but that have been imported from continental spaces (Europe, Africa, India, and China) and transmitted from one generation to another. In the activity titled “Origin of the people living on the islands” (Figure 5) in particular, pupils are reminded from the onset that Mauritius and Rodrigues<sup>55</sup> were both uninhabited at the time of their discovery. Using an assemblage of photographs representing peoples from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, learners are subsequently prompted to “find out where these people came from”. While it is obvious that this kind of exercise relies heavily on the practice of relating phenotypical features to fixed ethnic, racial, and cultural categories, the activity further consolidates the link between Mauritian multiculturalism and the preservation of ancestral categories by inviting pupils to imagine who their ancestors were, how they lived on

<sup>55</sup> Rodrigues is an island located to the east of Mauritius and is part of the broader Republic of Mauritius.


the island, how they earned a living, and how their lifestyle were different from their descendants'. Reflecting on how these ancestors have “worked to make Mauritius and Rodrigues beautiful places”, learners ultimately have no choice but to conclude that, on the two islands, “everyone lives together peacefully and happily”.

While both these activities could appear innocuous or simply banal at first sight, I contend that they are far from being that simple or accessible to all Mauritian pupils, irrespective of their ethnocultural identification. In particular, I would argue that, when directed to pupils who identify as descendants of enslaved peoples, Creoles or *métis*—or more broadly to members of communities who have lost a clear sense of their filiation and cultural heritage, as a consequence of colonialism—, such activities can in reality result in severe forms of exclusion and marginalization. Yet, by insisting on a harmonious and idealized version of Mauritian multiculturalism, the *NCF* as well as the History & Geography textbooks blatantly neutralize—or at the very least downplay—the many inequalities, violence, and forms of domination and exploitation that have also marked the history of the country, and that precisely derive from essentialist discourses of ethnocultural difference, othering, and separatism, already at work under the colonial regime. As a result, the very teaching of history in Mauritian primary schools fails to acknowledge how the existence of a local Creole language and creolized culture also directly correlates with the complex and violent history of encounter among “different cultures, languages and values” that have ultimately turned Mauritius into a creolized society.

Given how the discourse of the two national curriculum frameworks pacifies the history of the island, in order to better romanticize the country’s harmonious multiculturalism, it is not surprising that the teaching of History & Geography would abject Creole/creolized culture and people, spaces and histories, to favor a compartmentalized vision of local cultures. Looking at

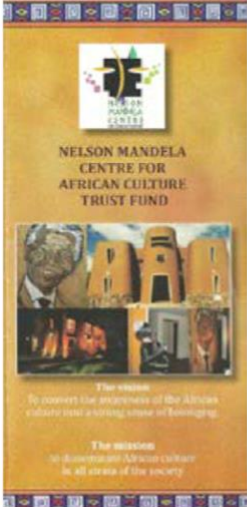
the History & Geography textbooks issued after the publication of the 2015 *NCF*, for instance, one quickly realizes that the term ‘Creole’ is not used a single time in relation to the local people and culture. While *Kreol Morisien* is the *lingua franca* of the country and the mother tongue of a majority of the population, even this language is never mentioned in the textbooks—as if it was simply not a part of Mauritian history. In fact, the word ‘Creole’ only appears a couple of times in Grades 4-6 History & Geography textbooks to refer to *Rivière des Créoles*, a river located in the southeast of the island. Except for this reference, the textbooks completely dismiss the history, culture, and language of the local Creole people, and erase its contribution to the nation’s grand narrative.

Actually, the only explicit reference made by History & Geography textbooks to Creole culture in Mauritius appears in the Grade 9 Social & Modern Studies textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018c, p. 96)—i.e. at the end of lower secondary education—as part of an ‘enrichment activity’ focusing on the “cultural roots, identity and heritage” of Mauritians of African origin (Figure 7).

 **ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY**

Nowadays, many Mauritians of African origin would like to find out about their cultural roots, identity and heritage.

The Nelson Mandela Centre for African culture has been created to make people aware about African and Creole culture.



Visit the Nelson Mandela Centre. Work in groups and create a poster to show your findings. Your poster can include drawings or pictures of the various aspects:

- (i) related to slavery and
- (ii) ways to promote African and Creole Culture.


 96

Figure 7: enrichment activity on Mauritians of African origin in the Grade 9 Social & Modern Studies textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018c, p. 96)

Following a brief introduction to the Nelson Mandela Center for African culture, the activity specifically requires learners to create a poster that showcases various aspects of “African and Creole culture” (in its singular form), but never actually defines the terms ‘African’ or ‘Creole’, nor even invites learners to reflect on the relationship between the two. On the contrary, by adopting a restrictive approach that largely equates ‘Creole’ to ‘African’, the activity conveys three implicit (and essentialist) statements that are worth interrogating. First, it presupposes that both Creole culture and African culture are singular, stable, exclusive, and homogenous categories that are not subject to change, transformation, and external influence. Second, it conceives of Creole culture and identity as linear derivatives of an imagined African culture,

when actually the term ‘Creole’ precisely connotes mixing, cultural diffraction, and loss of filiation. In other words, if the link to Africa is indeed constitutive of the local Creole culture, so is the link to Madagascar, Europe, or Asia. As a matter of fact, by erasing the role played by European colonialism in the deportation and enslavement of African and Malagasy peoples, this activity ultimately erases the complex and violent history of exploitation, abuse, racialization, and forced encounter that has led to the emergence of Creole identities, cultures, and languages, and that also involves the participation of several other racial, ethnic, and diasporic groups. Indeed, although used to designate an ethnic category locally, the word “Creole” is also the only local ethnic label that does not relate to ‘one’ ancestral homeland or culture, but to multiple ones—both known and unknown. It therefore conveys an open, fluid, and dynamic understanding of ethnic expressions that challenges the state-endorsed vision of ethnic categories as fixed, pure, and unalterable.

To conclude, I would however argue that this rare mention of the term ‘Creole’ in the Grade 9 History & Geography textbook is quite symptomatic of the logics of a multicultural curriculum that systematically abjects complex expressions of *métissage* and creolization, to favor more essentialist views of ethnic, cultural, ancestral, and linguistic identities. As such, within the ethnonationalist framework of the Rainbow nation, references to Creole culture are only deemed acceptable when they are made to fit the discourse of ethnic purity and cultural lineage, i.e. when they are paradoxically linked to a singular “putative place” or culture of origin outside Mauritius (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 200). This is indeed what subtends the discourse and promotion of ancestral cultures in the country. In other words, as long as it will connote *métissage*, mixing, and cultural hybridity, the term ‘Creole’ will continue to be seen as a threat to the stability of the multicultural nation. But, when presented in more essentialist terms—and



linked, for instance, to an imagined version of Africa or African heritage, as in the 1970s—Creole culture seems to benefit from a greater recognition by the multicultural curriculum.

According to Baptiste, the idea of the Mauritian nation is “a work in progress [where] the state and the different ethnic groups that make up the population negotiate the contours of citizenship and belonging [...]” (Baptiste, 2013, p. 4). Reflecting on the role of language and history curricula in mediating these negotiations, she adds that “[...] the education system represents the site where these claims are negotiated” (p. 5). In the next chapter, I shall turn my attention to the particular ways in which ethnocultural claims and discourses of ancestry—as they relate to the preservation of the country’s multicultural heritage—have both impacted and enabled the official introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum in 2012. In response to the historical marginalization of Creoles and *Kreol Morisien* in Mauritius, I shall namely examine how the strategic essentialism of an (Afro-)Creole identity movement in the 1990s-2000s has ultimately led to the long-awaited adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles by the Mauritian curriculum.

## CHAPTER 5: *KI TO ETE TWA?*<sup>56</sup>

### *OR THE MAKING OF KREOL MORISIEN AS AN ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE*

<i>Sa nou kiltir, nou ki'nn done</i>	This (is) our culture, we gave (it)
<i>Nou langaz, zot ignore</i>	Our language, they ignore (it)
<i>Nou zistwar, touletan zot pe mal fagote</i>	Our history, they're always mistelling

(**Kaya** – *Lam sakrifis*)

© 1996 Joseph Réginald Topize

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<sup>56</sup> This chapter's title is taken from a song by late Mauritian reggae/seggae singer Joseph Réginald Topize, better known as "Kaya". The death of Kaya in police custody in 1999 triggered the most violent ethnic clashes in Mauritius since independence. This event is generally perceived as key to the self-affirmation of Afro-Creoles who took to the streets to protest against police brutality, on the day following the death of the famous singer. The historical marginalization and injustices suffered by Creoles—especially those who identify as descendants of African/Malagasy slaves—indeed crystalized on the mysterious death of the Rastafarian singer. "*Ki to ete twa?*" can be translated as "Who/what are you?" The song speaks to the limits of essentialist ethnic entrenchments and 'communist' discourses. Taking no shame in calling himself a "bastard" [*Mo kone pa leta nesans ki konte. Pa laont ki mo a'pe dir mo enn batar*], Kaya sings that it is not one's pure essence that counts most.

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, my analysis of educational documents and resources discussed how the education system in Mauritius participates in the making of what Baptiste (2013) calls a “multicultural citizenry”. Indeed, while the country’s access to independence in 1968 has engendered a will to ‘Mauritianize’ the local education system, the constant reinforcement of ethnonationalist discourses, following the political failure of the Mauritianist ideology, resulted in the institutionalization of a compartmentalized vision of the multicultural, multilingual, and multireligious nation. As such, the *National Curriculum Framework* (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015b, 2015a, 2016) continues to reify the divisive principles of colonial taxonomies, that subtend a segregated and hierarchical approach to ethnic identities, diasporic histories, and ancestral ‘homelands’, based on the idea of cultural identities as discrete categories, rather than as fluid and dynamic formations.

As a result, the curriculum currently in effect in Mauritius still largely subscribes to an ideological vision of the postcolonial nation that hardly acknowledges transcultural, transversal or even relational processes of *métissage*, hybridity, mixing, and creolization. Rather, it endorses a version of multiculturalism and multilingualism that is based on essentialist discourses, ethnic purity, and ancestral legitimation. Consequently, groups that do not ‘fit’ the model of multicultural citizenry are simply not considered productive or legitimate citizens. This explains why school textbooks largely portray the diversity of the Mauritian population by simply juxtaposing peoples, cultures, and languages that ‘originate’ from Europe, India, China, or Africa, instead of acknowledging the dynamics of encounter, transformation, and diffraction that have resulted in new forms/expressions of cultural identities in the Creole island.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, since 1968, Mauritius has been praised as an exceptionally diverse nation. However, my issue with the particular discourse of multiculturalism adopted by the national curriculum lies in its conservative approach to cultural diversity as a mere collection of clearly delineated diasporic cultures and ethnic identities, rather than as a space and experience of exchange and becoming. By giving no visibility to culturally hybrid groups and experiences, the national curriculum indeed fails to acknowledge the cultural significance of a critical mass of multi-racial/cultural subjects whose genealogy cannot be mapped onto a single ancestral narrative. This is particularly apparent when it comes to the representation of Creoles—or even of those who identify as *perdi bann* in Mauritius, i.e. “who have lost their sense of belonging (or their community)” (Jean-François, 2014, p. 10). Mixed groups indeed tend to be excluded from and disregarded by curricular documents, because they cannot claim a ‘proper’ ancestral narrative under the present cultural taxonomy.

In the present chapter, I extend this approach and its preliminary findings, and turn my attention, this time, to the peculiar modalities governing the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum, as the ancestral language of Creoles in Mauritius. More specifically, I consider how the institutional recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as a school language relates to a bigger historical and ethno-political context, whereby the legitimation of ethnic groups by the multicultural state is contingent upon their capacity to produce an ancestral and/or diasporic narrative that directly relates to a putative place of origin outside Mauritius and that can therefore guarantee the group’s ‘purity’.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. First, I discuss the relevance and significance of the notion of ancestry—namely as it relates to language recognition, education, and political empowerment within the ideological framework of the multicultural

nation—and I argue that, in the absence of a known ancestral language, culture, or mainland, Creoles in Mauritius have been systematically deprived of the kind of ethnopolitical recognition which the Mauritian curriculum has historically granted to the other ethnic groups of the island. This explains why the reclaiming of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the Afro-Creole community raises important questions about the type of cultural claims, historical narratives, and decolonial agencies which the teaching of the language is expected to support, in the name of social justice and reparation. Using a historicizing method, my goal in this first section, is thus to demonstrate how and why languages acquire ‘ancestral’ status in Mauritius and how the recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language is also part of the bigger state apparatus that conceives of multiculturalism as the mere juxtaposition of various ‘imagined’ cultures.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider the complexities, ambiguities, and paradoxes attached to the term ‘Creole’ itself and discuss how the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles further extends the compartmentalizing approach of the curriculum and participates in the essentialization of an ethnocultural group that has historically been depicted as fragmented, heterogenous and open-ended. Indeed, while multiple studies have shown that Creoles in Mauritius have an ambivalent and complicated rapport with their past—namely because their ancestral history connotes mixing, impurity, and illegitimacy—I consider how the reclaiming of the term ‘Creole’ by a Creole identity movement growing nationally in the past two decades has played out in the ultimate introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Afro-Creoles in the curriculum.

## **“LANGAZ ARYER GRAN DIMOUNN”: KREOL MORISIEN AS ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE**

Among the plethora of postcolonial policy documents that describe the institutional function and pedagogical use of local vernaculars and foreign languages in the national curriculum of the Republic of Mauritius, only a handful refer explicitly to the combined linguistic, historical, and cultural relevance of teaching and learning *Kreol Morisien* as a school language. This comes out as a striking observation, given how the country prides itself of its multilingualism and of the long-standing presence of a diversity of languages in the school system. As a matter of fact, in Mauritian schools, English and French are two mandatory subjects; but several optional languages, defined locally as ‘ancestral languages’, are also taught: Hindi, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and Arabic. Given the rich linguistic kaleidoscope of the country, the academic relevance and cultural significance of all these languages have long been acknowledged and institutionalized, with English and French being considered the two prestigious international languages of the curriculum, while ancestral languages—although not commonly practiced by Mauritians in their daily lives—are mainly used for sociocultural, traditional, and/or religious purposes (Eisenlohr, 2006; Miles, 2000; Rajah-Carrim, 2003, 2007).

In spite of its status as the first and/or only home language of a majority of Mauritians, the pedagogical and cultural importance of *Kreol Morisien* as a school language is yet hardly ever discussed—let alone mentioned—in most of the policy documents issued by successive Ministries of Education since the country’s access to independence in 1968. In other words, despite the numerous interventions and post-independence debates that have underscored the benefits of using *Kreol Morisien* as the official language of the country (see for instance Ledikasyon Pu Travayer, 2009a, 2009b), only a few official reports and national investigations—

including the Richard Report (Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, 1979) and reports from the National Human Rights Commission (2008) and the Truth and Justice Commission (Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b, 2011a)—seriously consider the academic, socio-economic, and cultural bearing of *Kreol Morisien* on the education system.

Released in the context of the formal addition of *Kreol Morisien* to the national curriculum framework, the 2012 *Addendum to the National Curriculum Framework: Kreol Morisien* (henceforth *Addendum*)<sup>57</sup> (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012) is—as I mentioned earlier—the first policy document to actually clarify the state’s position on the matter; providing a detailed rationale for officially introducing the local vernacular as a school subject. Replaced, soon after, by a new *National Curriculum Framework* (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), this rare document was only made available on the website of the Ministry of Education for a few years. As a matter of fact, the *Addendum* was rapidly put aside, and its content largely diluted, dissolved with the publication of the new NCF. Because it was never printed, this unique document is now mostly unavailable to the public<sup>58</sup>.

As I begin to reflect on the historical and ethnocultural paradoxes associated with the teaching of *Kreol Morisien*, and how they participate in the creolizing of the curriculum, I yet turn to the *Addendum* precisely because it is the only state document that considers the complex and multifaceted importance of *Kreol Morisien* to Mauritian education in such a detailed,

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<sup>57</sup> See appendix for a copy of the *Addendum*’s rationale in *Kreol Morisien*.

<sup>58</sup> The *Addendum* contains a 17-page rationale that discusses the justifications and objectives associated with the formal introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in elementary schools. Following the 2016 education reform and the elaboration of a new *National Curriculum Framework*, the *Addendum* was removed from the Ministry of Education’s website and is no longer accessible to the public. As for the new NCF, it contains a section on *KM* but no longer includes the 6 *perspektiv* of the *Addendum*, which I shall discuss in the next paragraph. In other words, the revised *KM* curriculum notably leaves out the discussion of the sociohistorical, political, anthropological, and cultural significance of the language, and proposes, instead, a half-page rationale that focuses solely on the development of linguistic competencies in pupils’ L1.

pertinent, and critical fashion. Indeed, the document discusses the significance of the language from six distinct '*perspektiv*', or standpoints:

- 1) the psychological and affective standpoint;
- 2) the historical and anthropological standpoint;
- 3) the linguistic rights standpoint;
- 4) the political standpoint;
- 5) the economic and social justice standpoint;
- 6) the cognitive standpoint<sup>59</sup>.

While these six '*perspektiv*' are no doubt intertwined, “the historical and anthropological standpoint” identified by the *Addendum* is particularly relevant to my discussion here, as it considers both the anthropological and historical rationale behind the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum, while also complicating our understanding of its role, purpose, and cultural value in the education system.

As discussed in chapters 2 & 4, when used more generally to talk about geography, history, cultural heritage, and ethnic identity in Mauritius, the term 'Creole' is largely unstable, ambiguous, and versatile. Because of its interest in the encounter and subsequent transformation of species, peoples, cultures, experiences, bodies, and identities often deemed incompatible, the

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<sup>59</sup> The 'psychological and affective standpoint' discusses the importance of *Kreol Morisien* as home language in ensuring that the school environment is welcoming, safe, and fair to all pupils. The 'historical and anthropological standpoint' acknowledges the place of the (Afro-)Creole community within the multicultural nation, as well as its cultural and historical specificities. It also discusses the relevance of claims laid on *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles. The 'linguistic rights standpoint' insists on the rights of individuals and groups to use their first language in all state institutions. The 'political standpoint' describes the importance of *Kreol Morisien* in the nation-building process and the development of civic awareness. The 'socio economic and social justice standpoint' underscores the importance of revalorizing popular culture in the curriculum, namely as a form of reparation for the historical marginalization of Creole culture. Finally, the 'cognitive standpoint' insists on the importance of children's mother tongue for supporting learning and cognitive development.



word ‘Creole’ itself has long encompassed a diversity of meanings, processes, and paradoxes. Today, for instance, while it is often used in exclusive terms (when referring specifically to mixed descendants of African or Malagasy slaves), the word also frequently designates inclusivity and transcultural exchange (like, when employed, in contradistinction, to refer to the entire population of the island, regardless of ethnic identity) (see for example Boswell, 2006). Taking these ambiguities and paradoxes into account, it is worth noting that, as it discusses the “historical and anthropological” justifications behind the formal addition of *Kreol Morisien* to the curriculum, the *Addendum* endorses two critical statements that hardly find resonance in previous policy documents. One of them relates to the status of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language, while the other establishes a historical link between the language and enslaved peoples, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when this local vernacular was ‘invented’.

First, the *Addendum* explicitly refers to *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language, “at par with [the] other ancestral languages<sup>60</sup>” of the education system (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 7)—thus institutionalizing a taxonomic equivalence that is objectively debatable. Indeed, as I shall later demonstrate, although recently ‘recognized’ as ancestral by the curriculum, *Kreol Morisien* is not unanimously considered ancestral under the local multicultural regime. Rather, it was ‘made’ ancestral as a result of the strategic reclaiming of the language, meant to create more visibility for Afro-Creoles within the school curriculum. The document further specifies that this addition serves in no way to challenge the role and status of the languages already included in the *NCF*. In other words, according to the *Addendum*, the inclusion of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum was not meant to question—let alone to disrupt—

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<sup>60</sup> All translations from the *Addendum* are mine unless otherwise specified.

the ethnic distribution of language subjects long institutionalized by the multicultural education model of the country. Instead, it would bring stronger validation of this model:

*introdiksjon Kreol Morisien dan lekol pa vinn neserman remet an kestion plas bann diferan langaz deza prezan dan curriculum, me li retabli enn lekilib ant lansengman bann size-langaz, zot reprezantasion ek zot fonksion dan lasosiete.*

[The introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools does not necessarily question the place of the different languages already present in the curriculum, but it reestablishes the balance between language-subjects, their representation, and their function in society.]

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 7)

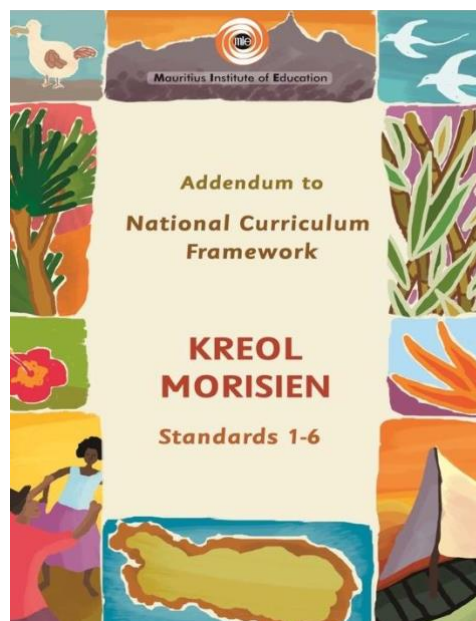


Figure 8: Cover of the Addendum to the NCF: Kreol Morisien  
(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012)

With this *mise au point*, the *Addendum* reveals how languages in Mauritius are not merely adopted within the curriculum on the basis of their social importance and/or pedagogical

relevance in the daily lives of the people. Should this have been the case, *Kreol Morisien* would have long made its way in the classrooms as the L1 of most Mauritian pupils. Instead, the recognition granted by the state to local vernaculars and ancestral languages within the curriculum is highly contingent upon the ability to make these languages ‘fit’ the multicultural narrative and official ethnodiasporic historiography of the country: “*tou bann lang opsjonal – ek osi enn lang obligatwar – ki nou retrouve dan lekol ena enn lien direk avek listwar nou pei ek listwar bann diferan group etnik e kiltirel ki form nasion morisien zordi* [optional languages in schools—and this also applies to compulsory languages—directly relate to the history of the country and of the various ethnic and cultural groups that make up the Mauritian nation today” (p. 6). According to the *Addendum*, indeed, optional languages are “*dibien sinbolik*” [symbolic assets] meant to be transmitted, used, and performed as identity markers (whether ethnic, diasporic, or religious), hence their status as “*swa lang ansestral, swa lang-leritaz, swa lang kominoter ou vernakiler*” [either ancestral languages, heritage languages, or community languages or vernaculars] (2012, p. 6).

Extending this line of thought, and applying it to *Kreol Morisien*, the *Addendum* further states that the local vernacular was spoken by “*aryer gran dimounn*” (i.e. by the ancestors who were among the first ones to use and to transmit it), thus insisting on the symbolic importance it has acquired over the centuries in preserving and upholding a specific (ethnic/racialized) community, and in allowing that community to access, consolidate, and pass over its history, culture, and identity, from one generation to the other. Considering how *Kreol Morisien* is even more widely spoken on the island today than it used to be at the time of its emergence during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is no doubt that the language—while used predominantly as an oral

vernacular—has enabled such a transmission of values, imaginary, experiences, and identity to occur over the past two centuries.

Reinforcing this genealogical argument, the *Addendum* however makes a second claim that captures our attention, namely when discussing questions of ancestral history, culture, and language from the particular perspective of slaves’ descendants. Indeed, when referring to the Creoles’ “*aryer gran dimounn*” [ancestors] who were among the first ones to speak, develop, and pass on the language to their children and grandchildren<sup>61</sup>, the document specifically traces the genealogy of this ethnic community and the filiation of *Kreol Morisien* to the enslaved peoples who, deprived from their own native languages, have largely ensure the transmission, preservation, and expansion of the shared vernacular:

*[Kreol Morisien] finn pran nesans pandan peryod lesklavaz dan Moris ek se bann desandan esklav ki finn asir transmision ek prezervasion sa langaz-la, antan ki lang ansestral ek kominoter, avan ki Kreol vinn enn lang veikiler ant bann diferan kominote dan pei, ek enn sinbol linite nasional. Par konsekan, li lezitim ki lakominote kreol idantifie li avek langaz Kreol Morisien, lor plan kiltirel ek etnik.*

[*Kreol Morisien* was born at the time of slavery in Mauritius and slaves’ descendants were the ones to ensure the preservation and transmission of this language both as an ancestral and community language, even before it became the shared language of the country and a symbol of

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<sup>61</sup> The *Addendum* acknowledges that *Kreol Morisien* was primarily spoken by enslaved people who were not allowed to use their native tongues. However, the document clearly overlooks the fact that the language was co-created by the diverse groups of people who inhabited Isle de France (the former name given to Mauritius under the French colonial rule), including white French settlers who did not necessarily all speak French. Besides, Franco-Mauritians also spoke a peculiar variant of *Kreol Morisien*. For more details on the practice of *Kreol Morisien* by the White population of Mauritius, see Hookoomsing’s chapter titled “*Les blancs de la mémoire créole*” which is published in Furlong & Ramharai (2006).

national unity. Consequently, it is legitimate for the Creole community to identify with *Kreol Morisien*, both culturally and ethnically].

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 7)

By representing the enslaved ancestors of the Creole community as the primary speakers of *Kreol Morisien*, the *Addendum* foregrounds the critical role played by this community in transmitting and enriching a Creole language, culture, and way of being that have allowed generations of slaves and their (mixed-raced) descendants to survive and to fight for their dignity and reconstruction, despite the violence and the legacy of slavery and colonialism in Mauritius: “*Nou pe koz isi spesifikman lakominote kreol dan Moris, ki desandan esklav ek ki finn plizoumwin metise depi peryod kolonizasion ziska zordi*” [we are specifically referring here to the Creole community in Mauritius, i.e. to slaves’ descendants that have more or less been creolized since the colonial period until today] (2012, p. 6).

With clear references to the challenges of historical reparation and ethnocultural empowerment in post-abolition/post-plantation contexts, the *Addendum* thus suggests that *Kreol Morisien*—as a language of survival, resilience, and resistance—may serve again to empower newer generations of slaves’ descendants and marginalized communities, who—until today—struggle to ‘belong’ within the broader multicultural model of the nation, precisely because of the enduring consequences of slavery and colonialism. According to the authors of the *Addendum*, prior to becoming a *lingua franca* and a symbol of national unity, *Kreol Morisien* was long disregarded, despised, and dismissed as the language of this disenfranchised community, hence the necessity to re-establish and acknowledge the latter’s ancestral ties to the language.

### *Ancestral vs national: tensions in the Addendum*

The designation of *Kreol Morisien* as one of the ancestral languages of the curriculum has generated strong debates in both the educational and ethnopolitical arenas of the country. As discussed in chapter 4, at the heart of this controversy is the tension between the official recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as the national language of all Mauritians (which it already is, *de facto*) and its actual institutionalization as the ancestral language of a particular ethnocultural community (a claim long pursued by a number of local associations and ethnopolitical groups). This conflicting representation of the language is something the authors of the *Addendum* had to address while drafting the first state-endorsed document solely dedicated to discussing the relevance and contribution of *Kreol Morisien* to the national curriculum.

This tension becomes apparent in section 2.4 of the *Addendum* which ponders over the political rationale behind the inclusion of *Kreol Morisien* in the *NCF*. Titled “*Kreol Morisien enn lang nasional ek enn lang sitwayin*” [*Kreol Morisien*, a national language and a language of citizenry], the section clearly emphasizes, on the one hand, the contemporary status and unifying role of *Kreol Morisien* as a cross-cultural patrimony and a shared language, to which all Mauritian citizens—regardless of their ethnocultural belonging—can relate and identify (Eriksen, 1998). On the other hand, the authors however further argue that this unifying dimension of the language should not overshadow its value and significance as an ancestral language. In other words, for the authors of the *Addendum*, these two political functions of *Kreol Morisien* are neither in contradiction, nor complementary; they cohabit within the complex cultural and linguistic matrix of the island:

*Kan nou revinn lor bann epizod listwar Moris ek ki nou konsider manier ki bann langaz finn evolue ek trouv zot plas dan bann diferan interaksion alafwa sosial ek kiltirel, nou pa kapav ignore zordi ki langaz Kreol Morisien, ki alabaz ti enn langaz kominoter vernakiler asosie a group bann desandan esklav, finn ousi vinn enn langaz transkominoter, donk veikiler; e ki zordi, se sa langaz-la presizeman ki garanti ek permet bann interaksion kotidien ant bann individi ki vinn depi bann diferan konpozant ki fer parti nasyon morisien. Se dan sa sans-la presizeman ki nou dir ki langaz Kreol Morisien li ena omwin de prinsipal fonksion sosio-idantiter: li ena valer langaz ansestral pou kominote kreol dan Moris (cf. perspektiv istorik ek antropolojik), ek li ousi posed enn dimansion federater ki bien inportan pou tou Morisien, indepandan de zot kominote. Sa de fonksion-la pa kontradiktwar, zot pa neserman konplemanter non pli, me zot koresponn avek de realite bien tanzib ek bien inportan dan bann reprezantasyon ek dan litalizasyon ki bann lokiter langaz Kreol Morisien adopte.*

[When we look at the history of Mauritius and consider the ways in which languages have evolved and found their place within different realms of social and cultural interaction, we can only appreciate how *Kreol Morisien*—which initially served as the vernacular of a specific community associated with slaves’ descendants<sup>62</sup>—has now become a cross-cultural language, a lingua franca. Today, it is precisely this language that both ensures and enables daily interactions among individuals belonging to the many constituents of the Mauritian nation. For this reason, we contend that *Kreol Morisien* holds at least two main social functions: it has an ancestral significance for the Creole community in Mauritius (c.f. the historical and anthropological standpoint), and it serves a unifying role for all Mauritians, regardless of their respective

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<sup>62</sup> While this precision about *Kreol Morisien* being initially used as the vernacular of a specific community associated with slaves’ descendants appears to make sense in the *Addendum*’s argument, the document never quotes any historical and/or anthropological study to substantiate this claim. As such, the latter should be taken with some precaution. One could indeed imagine that, as in the context of other Creole-formation scenarios, *Kreol Morisien* was used as a lingua franca from its very inception. I’d like to thank Prof. Michel DeGraff for drawing my attention to this hypothesis which somehow also points to the ideological bias of the *Addendum*.

community. These two functions are neither contradictory, nor complementary; they rather correspond to two tangible and critical realities when it comes to the representations and uses of *Kreol Morisien* by its speakers].

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 11)

This quote from the *Addendum* obviously acknowledges the tension between the terms ‘ancestral’ and ‘national’ in Mauritius. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the authors of the document do not attempt to neutralize—let alone disentangle—the overlapping functions and often paradoxical roles attributed to *Kreol Morisien*. Rather, they claim that language practices are complex, multifaceted, and caught within multi-layered realities. While I agree with their claim that the ancestral and national dimensions of *Kreol Morisien* should thus not necessarily be seen as contradictory, I would argue that descriptive categories, taxonomies, and terminologies pertaining to language practices should not be naturalized, nor taken for granted, precisely because they are profoundly dynamic. As such, it is important to understand how communities in Mauritius understand and claim an ancestral language.

Since the Mauritian Government took the decision to introduce *Kreol Morisien* in schools as an ancestral language, “at par with other ancestral languages”, a number of politicians, civilians, and intellectuals—including proponents of *Kreol Morisien*, labelled by some as “Nationalists” (Thornton, 2019)—have taken to the press to claim that the language could not be introduced on such terms, namely because one could always argue that it is today, not just the ancestral language of the Creole community, but that of the entire population. For this reason, before getting back to my discussion about the ancestrality of *Kreol Morisien* in relation to the Creoles, I will briefly discuss those claims that tend to present *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of all Mauritians.



***“Languages of forefathers”: Ancestral for ‘All’ vs for a ‘marginalized minority”***

As I have indicated in previous chapters, many Mauritians—including *Kreol Morisien* speakers, which make up the majority of the population—have an ambivalent, if not fraught, relationship with the language (Aumeerally, 2005). Numerous studies that examine language attitudes, namely in the context of schooling, have described and underscored this ambivalence (Bissoonauth, 2011; Rajah-Carrim, 2007; Sauzier-Uchida, 2009); and findings to such studies generally tend to concur that, while most people in Mauritius do not view *Kreol Morisien* as comparable in prestige, complexity, and pedagogical potential as the other languages of the curriculum (especially English and French), an increasing number of participants still strongly identify with *Kreol Morisien* both as their home language, and the language given to them by their parents and/or grand-parents. As such, despite the long-standing perception that *Kreol Morisien* was but a much-maligned French ‘patois’, the various ethnic groups of the island have, for the most part, ultimately shifted from their respective vernaculars and other languages that acquired ancestral status (see Bissoonauth, 2011), to adopt *Kreol Morisien* as their primary language, thus investing it with “a new dimension” (Rajah-Carrim, 2003, p. 73).

To better understand how this shift affects claims being made that *Kreol Morisien* holds as much of an ancestral value to ‘Non-Creoles’ as it does to Creoles, I propose to consider a peculiar classification included in the Mauritian official language census: the ‘language of forefathers’<sup>63</sup>. Adopted by census questionnaires since 1952, this specific category initially required respondents to identify the primary language of their parents, regardless of whether

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<sup>63</sup> The terms “Linguistic group” and “Mother tongue” have also been used as synonyms to “language of forefathers” in census reports before 1983. In 1972, the term “linguistic group” was used to refer to the language spoken by the individual’s forefathers (Central Statistical Office, 1972, p. vi).

they—as respondents—spoke that same ‘language of their forefathers’ or not. Yet, with time, this category also became a fairly reliable indicator of language practices and shifts, namely as they relate to notions of ethnic and ancestral representations. A case in point, the place given to *Kreol Morisien* in census reports since then is an interesting one. Indeed, although not considered a ‘proper’ language back in the 1950s, it still featured in language questionnaires, as attested by The Central Statistical Office:

Creole has been quoted as a language, although it is essentially a local vernacular, derived originally from the French and almost peculiar to Mauritius alone. The Creole language, however, assumes in Mauritius and its dependencies a great importance, as will be gathered from the proportion of the population in all ethnical groups making current use of it<sup>64</sup>.

(Central Statistical Office, 1952, p. 2)

This “great importance” of the Creole “vernacular” is further emphasized by the 1952 language census in that the latter reveals a major transition in language use from the ‘Indian vernacular’ of the island, i.e. Bhojpuri, toward *Kreol Morisien* (Hookoomsing, 2007). Nevertheless, if back in 1952, 44%<sup>65</sup> of the population reported speaking *Kreol Morisien* “usually” at home, while a further 50% reported using it “occasionally”, only 37% of the respondents would actually designate *Kreol Morisien* as the language of their forefathers. In comparison, more than 40% of these same respondents reported Hindi as the language of their parents. At the time indeed, Hindi was reported to be used daily by approximately 39% of the population.

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<sup>64</sup> The 1972 census mentions that: “‘Créole patois’, a vernacular derived mostly from French, has been accepted as a language for the purpose of the census (Central Statistical Office, 1972, p. vi).

<sup>65</sup> All percentage figures have been rounded up.

It is worth noting, at this point, that this figure of 37% remained quite steady throughout language censuses carried out in 1972, 1990, and 2000<sup>66</sup>. According to Rajah-Carrim, the discrepancy long-observed between people reporting *Kreol Morisien* as their daily home language and those reporting it as their ancestral language shows:

a clear awareness of the differences between ancestral language and language usually/most often used at home. Mauritians are conscious of their cultural past and language is an important way for them to assert their ethnic identity in this multiethnic nation. Also, they still seem to relate the question about ancestral language to their ethnic origins.

(Rajah-Carrim, 2003, p. 74)

Commenting on the subsequent language shift that occurred and whereby *Kreol Morisien* became the home language of a majority of the population, Rajah-Carrim also observes that *Kreol Morisien* “supplanted the original ancestral languages of [...] Mauritians” (2003, p. 69), “tak[ing] over a domain where ancestral languages used to be spoken” (2003, p. 73).

Nevertheless, back in 2003, the scholar still deemed it hard to predict whether *Kreol Morisien* would take over the ancestral status of (Asian) languages that were being abandoned.

Bringing new figures to this debate, the latest language census carried out in 2011 presented numbers that were even higher than what Rajah-Carrim had anticipated. Indeed, in that year leading to the introduction of the language in schools, a staggering 66%<sup>67</sup> of Mauritians

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<sup>66</sup> The percentage of the population stating *KM* as a language of forefathers actually dropped to 28.9% in 1983, a year marked by the breakup of the Government coalition and the subsequent electoral defeat of the (then) left-wing political party MMM, which had tried to establish a Mauritianist agenda which is discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> The 2011 census figures (Statistics Mauritius, 2012) show that 39% (500,699) Mauritians declared that their forefathers spoke Creole (or *KM*) only. Added to this number are those who mentioned their forefathers speaking *KM* in combination with either Bhojpuri (18%), Chinese [not specified which Chinese language], English, French, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, or another language (with all of them being less than 1%).

reported *Kreol Morisien* as the language spoken by their forefathers. This number prompted Hookoomsing to argue that:

*La mutation du kreol en morisien est en passe de faire de cette langue progressivement la principale langue ancestrale des Mauriciens. Et de rendre caduc et obsolète le concept même de langue ancestrale. Il est temps de commencer à y réfléchir et à en tirer les conclusions qui s'imposent.*

[The transformation of Kreol into Morisien is gradually turning this language into the main ancestral language of all Mauritians. This makes null and void the very concept of ancestral language. It is time to start thinking about it and to draw the necessary conclusions.]

(Hookoomsing, 2012)

Taking this language shift into consideration, it is not surprising that a number of Mauritians—especially those (self-)identify as non-Creoles—would express concerns and reservations about *Kreol Morisien* being introduced in schools as an optional ancestral language for Creoles. Back in 2011, for instance, some of my former students at the Mauritius Institute of Education would actually worry about the implications of this designation<sup>68</sup> and argue that, since *Kreol Morisien* had been spoken over several generations in most families, it was only fair to suggest that it was also the ancestral language of all Mauritians who identify it as such, regardless of their respective ethnic identification. Indeed, like a majority of Mauritians, most of my non-Creole students had developed such a profound and intimate relationship with *Kreol*

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<sup>68</sup> I recall some of these debates being actually raised in a course titled “*Introduir Kreol Morisien dan klas: kifer ek pou ki fer?*” [Introducing Mauritian Kreol in the classroom: why? To what effect?] which I taught in 2012 and 2013.

*Morisien*—whether in their families or their social and professional interactions at large—that they wrestled with the idea that the *de facto* national language of the country could primarily be claimed as the property of a specific ethnic group.

In contradistinction, activists, intellectuals, and politicians engaged in the promotion of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the Creoles primarily/exclusively, do not always view this extension of the ancestral rationale to the entire Mauritian population in the most favorable light. Rather, a number of them continue to be suspicious of recent claims made by non-Creoles over the language as a strategy to hijack the long-sought project of reparation and social justice which marginalized communities of slaves’ descendants have been fighting for. Commenting on parliamentary debates pertaining to the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, Thornton (2019) remarks, for instance, that those she labels as “Nationalists” and “Orientalists”<sup>69</sup> have been actively reinvesting discourses/ideological frameworks of colorblindness and postracialism, as a means of downplaying Afro-Creole claims for justice through ethnicization, knowing that such claims were actually made in response to the systemic and structural exclusion of Creoles from a society founded on multiculturalism and ethnic separation.

In light of the prevalence of communalism and ethnic essentialism in the “reality of daily life”, Harmon also questions the reliability of census figures that “obviously show that KM is ‘the main ancestral language of all Mauritians’”(Harmon, 2017, p. 8):

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<sup>69</sup> In an article titled “Race, Nativity, and multicultural Exclusion: Negotiating the Inclusion of Kreol in Mauritian Language Policy”, Thornton (2019) conceptualizes three perspectives/camps from which Parliamentary Members have been debating the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools between 2009-2011. According to her, the “Orientalists” constitute a subset of Indo-Mauritian Parliamentary Members who have long advocated for the primacy of Asian ancestral languages over *Kreol Morisien*, which they viewed as being inferior namely because of its direct link with Blackness and Africanity.

In the realm of multi-ethnic Mauritius and the reality of ‘social groupings’ marked by communalism, KM is not the ancestral language of Mauritians because the ‘ancestral’ terminology is still associated with Asian or Oriental languages in common parlance and ethnic politics discourse.

(Harmon, 2017, p. 8)

In fact, at the time of its establishment in 2011, several other members of the Mauritian Kreol Academy (AKM) insisted on the critical importance of foregrounding the ‘Afro-Creole ancestry’ of *Kreol Morisien* within the curriculum and school textbooks. According to them, the promotion of *Kreol Morisien* as a national language (rather than on the basis of its ethnohistorical significance for slaves’ descendants) would fail to change the ethno-political status quo for Creoles, let alone address the systemic logics that had long deprived them from their cultural and linguistic heritage. Besides, many intellectuals and public figures self-identifying as Afro-Creoles felt concerned about the institutional biases of the Mauritius Institute of Education, tasked at the time with designing the first *Kreol Morisien* curriculum. Indeed, because Creoles themselves were largely underrepresented in this institution (namely in comparison to a Hindu intelligentsia), they feared the MIE’s lack of engagement with questions related to Creole culture and history (Harmon, 2017), and suspected that Creole faculty members and curriculum developers would feel pressured into “downplay[ing] their Creole identity” (Thornton, 2019, p. 22).

The drafting of the *Addendum* also featured this tension between the national and ancestral dimensions attributed to *Kreol Morisien*. A former member of the AKM, Catholic priest and anthropologist Alain Romaine, for instance, underscored the following in his review of a preliminary version of the *Addendum*:

*Trwasiem soutit dan paz 3, Plis ki enn lang ansestral, nou lang nasional vinn rey la realite et vinn indik klerman lopsion arbitrer—selon lozik eksklisif ‘either/or’—ki finn pran pou minimiz ek efas dimansion idantiter KM ki kreol, desandan esklav, finn invante apartir zot lexpierians istorik. Sa laspe-la enn leritaz nasional ki tou morisien rekonet ek integre san problem. Selon enn lozik dialektik, ti kapav ekri par examp « enn lang ansestral, li osi enn lang nasional » parski enn pa anpes lot, bien okontrer.*

[The third subtitle on page 3, *More than an ancestral language, our national language*, erases the reality and clearly indicates an arbitrary choice—following an exclusive logic of ‘either/or’—meant to minimize and erase the identity that Creoles, i.e. slaves’ descendants, have crafted from their past experience. This is a part of the national heritage that all Mauritians can easily recognize and acknowledge. Following a dialectical logic, one could write instead: “an ancestral language, it is also a national language”—since one does not prevent the other, on the contrary.]

(Romaine, 2011, p. 2, my translation)

When reflecting on the stakes of teaching *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language, Romaine’s observations are particularly interesting insofar as he does not present ‘ancestral’ and ‘national’ as mutually exclusive categories. This, at least, is how he justifies his disagreement with the expression “**more than** an ancestral language, a national language” (my emphasis), which he sees as misleading and irrelevant. Rather, according to him, these two characterizations of *Kreol Morisien*—‘ancestral’ and ‘national’—are part of a complex and multi-layered linguistic and cultural reality; which is why opposing the national relevance of *Kreol Morisien* to its ancestral value runs the risk of undermining the critical role played by “Creoles, i.e. slaves’ descendants” in shaping the modern Mauritian nation.

At this point, it is yet worth mentioning that, as he nuances these two concepts, Romaine does not once acknowledge that non-Creoles in Mauritius may also rightfully claim and identify *Kreol Morisien* as their ancestral language the way they have for other languages. In this sense, just like Harmon, his approach to ‘ancestrality’ comes as an extension of the compartmentalized ethno-politics of the multicultural nation, whereby if, on the one hand, *Kreol Morisien* is indeed the *de facto* national language of the people, its ancestral value is only seen, in contradistinction, as relevant to (Afro-)Creoles. In other words, while some might contend that the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries—namely via the teaching of ancestral languages—is ultimately detrimental to the construction of a national identity, it seems that for both Harmon and Romaine, strategic essentialism and the valorization of ethnic specificities are what actually guarantee real potential—to the various communities of the island—for full participation in the postcolonial Mauritian society (Baptiste, 2013; Boudet, 2003, 2013; Eisenlohr, 2006). If in contrast, however, one considers the ancestral claims made by Mauritians who do not identify as Creoles (as in mixed slaves’ descendants), but who still argue that *Kreol Morisien* is the language of their ancestors, one is left with the following questions: what, then, is an ancestral language? When does a language become ancestral? Who can ‘rightly’ claim the ancestrality of a language, and why? In short: how is an ancestral language ancestral in Mauritius?



*Language recognition and political empowerment: How ancestral languages became ancestral in Mauritius*

While the expression ‘ancestral language’ has become quite ubiquitous in the Mauritian education context<sup>70</sup>, the concept itself has no universally accepted definition. In historical linguistics, for instance, an ancestral language commonly refers to a ‘proto-language’ i.e. the most common ancestor in a particular *Stammbaum* or ‘family tree’ of genetically related languages (Campbell, 2013). Long concerned with reconstructing genealogies of particular languages and dialects, historical linguists indeed define an ancestral language as one from which several other languages have presumably originated and evolved to become distinct “daughter” and “sister” languages (Campbell, 2013, p. 187). In contradistinction, rather than designating processes of linguistic change and diversification, the expression ‘ancestral language’ in Mauritius derives its meaning from a colonial approach to multilingualism that foregrounds purity, preservation, and clearly delineated linguistic boundaries, as underscored by the current *National Curriculum Framework*:

Since 1955, multilingualism is promoted in Mauritius through the emphasis placed on the ancestral languages in formal education and which therefore **maintain** [sic] these languages and the language communities. The seven oriental languages (Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu) are optional subjects offered to pupils as from the first year of primary education [...]. Learning an Asian Language and Arabic is viewed as a means of **preserving ancestral heritage, cultural identity and specificity**.

(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2015b, p. 42)

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<sup>70</sup> Harmon (2014, 2017) has more recently used the concept of ‘Heritage Language’ (Fishman, 2001) to think through the situation of optional languages taught in the Mauritian curriculum, drawing further parallels with movements focused on the preservation and protection of indigenous languages and rights.

It is worth noting here that, even prior to the country's access to independence, the term 'ancestral' in Mauritius has long been exclusively associated to "Asian" or "Oriental" languages—as pointed out by my earlier quote from Harmon. This is because, under the British colonial regime, this category already served as a means of preserving the "ancestral heritage, cultural identity and specificity" of the various diasporic groups that had relocated to Mauritius, and whose languages—unlike French and English—were neither used in official/administrative contexts, nor made mandatory in schools. The so-called "Oriental" languages—featured as "ancestral" and "optional" within the national curriculum since the 1950s—were supposedly brought to the island by Asian migrants. They preexisted European presence and colonization in the Indian Ocean, and were thus considered receptacles of cultural traditions that date way back, and that had been maintained and transmitted over extended historical periods, as attested by the work of linguist Philip Baker, later quoted by Rajah-Carrim:

Ancestral languages are the languages that the Asian migrants spoke at the time of their arrival in Mauritius and include Bhojpuri, Hindi, Gujerati, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu (Baker, 1972: 14-18). Today, most of these languages do not function as native languages but as important markers of religious and ethnic identity (Rajah-Carrim, 2005).

(Rajah-Carrim, 2007, p. 52)

To Baker and Rajah-Carrim's explication of ancestral languages in Mauritius, I would yet bring two points of clarification. First: while it has indeed contributed to the preservation of "important markers of religious and ethnic identity", the direct association between the ancestral languages of the curriculum and their 'respective' ethno-diasporic communities not only overlooks important processes of language contact happening over time; it also rests upon the

assumption that the contours of migrant communities as they settled on the island were both fixed and well-established. Moreover, in relating ancestral heritage to “Asian migrants” exclusively, both scholars fail to acknowledge the many languages spoken by diasporic groups from Europe, Africa, and Madagascar, at the time of their arrival in Mauritius. In fact, Rajah-Carrim only implicitly refers to these other languages by talking about “the native languages” of the country, which—according to her—do not fully qualify as ancestral.

Of course, European languages, such as French and English, have long featured as mandatory school languages within the national curriculum. Yet, what about the ancestral language(s) of Afro-Creoles and mixed slaves’ descendants? It is indeed quite telling that neither Baker nor Rajah-Carrim considers *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles, thus perpetuating the idea that because it was ‘imported from nowhere else’ and because it could not be linked to an ancestral homeland and culture as ‘naturally’ as the Asian ancestral languages were, *Kreol Morisien* could simply not qualify as ancestral. This, in turn, corroborates Eisenlohr’s assessment that “the institutionalized ideology of ancestral languages suggests that for a language and cultural tradition to count as ancestral, it has to be linked to a putative place of origin outside Mauritius” (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 200).

Given the ambiguities associated with such a multilayered concept, I would argue that, instead of defining what ancestral languages *are* in Mauritius, it is worth asking what they actually *do*, and how they are ‘made’ ancestral, and for what purpose. In fact, I insist on this point as a way of underscoring that ancestral languages in Mauritius do not necessarily become ancestral on the basis of historical facts; rather they are ‘made’ ancestral because of the ethnocultural symbolism that is attached to them, often *a posteriori*, and in ways that do not

necessarily corroborate historically verified events<sup>71</sup>. To this end, I wish to briefly consider the relevance and significance of the notion of ‘ancestrality’ (not to be confused with ‘ancestry’), namely as it relates to language recognition, education, and political empowerment within the discourse of the multicultural nation.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, Mauritius had no indigenous inhabitants, which is to say that the actual Mauritian population is the result of successive waves of migrations (from Europe, Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, India, China, etc.), following permanent French colonial establishment in 1715. For this reason, most likely, the various ethnocultural groups of the island have historically been labeled and categorized according to their place, culture, religion, and/or language of origin. As a result, expressions such as ‘ancestrality’, ‘ancestral cultures’, and ‘ancestral languages’ have traditionally been used to delineate the contours of those ‘imagined’ diasporic communities (Anderson, 2006). With the political recognition which this ethnic distribution based on cultural particularisms enabled, the respective contribution of each ‘group of citizens’ to the nation’s history, its economic success, and unique multiculturalism and linguistic landscape could be acknowledged and underscored (Baptiste, 2013).

Yet, as I mentioned already, one might legitimately ask what accounts for the tight link between the idea of ancestrality—as a way of recognizing an ethnic group’s particular history and cultural identity—and the emphasis on Asian languages or cultures? Concerned more

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<sup>71</sup> This also implies that ethnic communities in Mauritius do not necessarily claim an ancestral language on the basis a historically verified link between that language and a given community; rather an ancestral language becomes one as a result of a ‘narrative’ which ultimately presents a particular language as the ancestral property of a given ethnic group. In other words, the category of ancestral languages is not subtended by historical facts but by ethnocultural representations. This also explains that, although *Kreol Morisien* was not historically ‘invented’ by slaves per se, the ethnocultural link, which is established in popular representation, between the language and the mixed-slaves’ descendants, i.e. (Afro-)Creoles, is ultimately what tends to serve as the basis for claiming that *Kreol Morisien* is the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles.

specifically with the place occupied by ancestral languages in the education system of Mauritius, Eisenlohr's work historicizes the making of this particular designation to investigate both its origins and strategic instrumentalization in the gradual unfolding of a Hindu hegemony in Mauritius in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a richly documented study titled *Little India* (2006), the anthropologist reinvests Chatterjee's theory of "reactive" anticolonial and postcolonial nationalism (Chatterjee, 1993) to argue that the ancestral language category, although instituted by the British administration, represents a complex formation that was not merely imposed by a colonial apparatus operating 'from above', but that was later also instrumentalized in "an ideological struggle between different groups of colonizers and various factions among the Indo-Mauritians over the definition of ethno-linguistic identities" (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 170). Drawing from Eisenlohr's argument, I shall now briefly discuss how ancestral languages have long played a critical role in the strategic instrumentalization, empowerment, or resistance of certain racialized/ethnic groups in Mauritius.

As evidenced by numerous historical accounts, the British administration was the first to consider providing formal education to Indian immigrants, arriving massively in Mauritius to work on sugarcane plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1835. At a time when the Franco-Mauritian plantocracy—which relied heavily on an uneducated and unskilled workforce—was unwilling to see sugar estates' workers schooled, this signaled a major shift from French colonial policies. In the year that led to the promulgation of the compulsory education ordinance in Mauritius (1857), Anglo-Irish Governor Higginson<sup>72</sup> was the first to advocate for the setting up of separate Anglo-vernacular schools for children of Indian immigrants, including "one for children from Madras, in the Tamil language; the other for Calcutta children, in the Hindoo

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<sup>72</sup> James Macaulay Higginson was Governor of Mauritius from January 1851 to September 1857.

Dialect” (Annual Report on Education in Mauritius, 1856, quoted in Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 83).

Met with strong resistance from the part of the Franco-Mauritian elite, he however had to abandon his velleity for vernacular education.

Similar plans were later enacted under the stewardship of J. Comber Browne, the Superintendent of Schools in the Mauritian colony, who succeeded in opening the first vernacular schools of the island, where Tamil and Hindi were used respectively. An advocate of Victorian moral ideals, Browne’s vision for educating Indians was however “one of panoptic supervision, which would yield more controllable and loyal colonial subjects” (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 178). In other words, the Superintendent viewed vernacular schooling as a means of turning recent immigrants—which excluded both French estate owners and former slaves—into civilized and disciplined subjects (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 174). By departing from the French assimilationist approach—that expected colonized subjects to identify with Frenchness—the aim of the British was thus to produce a “recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 122, author’s emphasis). With Indians becoming the majority of the colony’s population by the end of the 1850s, this was a politically astute means to guarantee British political leverage vis-à-vis the wealthy Franco-Mauritian establishment that had long asserted political, economic, and cultural domination on the island.

It is worth mentioning at this point that, because Indian immigrants spoke a diversity of languages beyond Tamil and Hindi, it quickly became evident that not all Indian languages spoken in Mauritius at the time would be acknowledged by the British administration. As a matter of fact, this was not the goal either; and, as argued by Eisenlohr: “The institutionalization of ancestral languages and ancestral cultures is based on the erasure of the great diversity of regional origins, religious or sectarian affiliation, and linguistic diversity that characterized the

original immigrants, who later were classified as belonging to the same community” (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 200). Indeed, Indian immigrants at the time—just like former slaves and their descendants—presented a diversity of cultural traits that were ultimately absorbed, homogenized, and standardized through the establishment of ‘ancestral’ politics. This is to say that in Mauritius, the ancestrality of Asian and ‘Oriental’ immigrants is, to a large extent, a historical and cultural construction whose ethno-political relevance does not lie in its anthropological or linguistic accurateness (or verifiability) but rather in its viability to offer coherence, meaning, and political agency—defined *a posteriori* and through strategies of cultural essentialisms—to initially diverse cultural groups. To a certain extent therefore, ancestral languages—just like ancestral beliefs, religions, foods, cosmologies, and music—are altogether critical, selective, and somehow subjective cultural markers, claimed by the ‘imagined’ ethnic (or ethnodiasporic) communities of Mauritius to present themselves as legitimate ‘groups of citizens’ within the multicultural model. As such, although largely reinvested in discourses of cultural heritage, preservation, and purity, I would argue that ancestral languages are the result of a creative process of cultural re-engineering that has historically enabled the formation—and subsequent empowerment—of communities willing to identify with ancestral imaginaries, as a way to gain political leverage.

A case in point: when forcefully relocated to Mauritius during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, enslaved peoples from East Africa, Madagascar, and Mozambique were not allowed to speak their native languages, let alone to transmit them. As a result, although Malagasy was at a time spoken within the enslaved population (Chan Low, 2003)<sup>73</sup>, no ‘African’ language is today

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<sup>73</sup> Tirvassen mentions in a newspaper article published in *Le Mauricien* in 2011 that *Kreol Morisien* might actually have been a killer for African and Malagasy languages. This idea that *Kreol Morisien* is a ‘killer language’ for African language recalls Hubert Devonish’s related observations about the vitality of Creoles vs. moribund Amerindian languages in Guyana (Devonish, 1986).

commonly spoken in Mauritius. In contradistinction, since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Asian and ‘Oriental’ languages have gradually made their way as ancestral languages within the school curriculum, providing the opportunity to several generations of diasporic subjects from India and China, to bond together around the idea of a shared belonging or ancestrality, while in exile. According to sociolinguist Rada Tirvassen, the promotion of ancestral languages became so important in the 1940s that it literally “constituted the best means through which the Hindus sought to achieve social legitimacy in their attempt to uplift themselves to an iconic position, although it was also matched by the control they exerted at the political level” (Tirvassen & Ramasawmy, 2017, p. 45).

Meanwhile, in the absence of a known ancestral language, culture, or mainland (if not ‘simply’ Africa, conceived for the most part in broad abstract terms) that could bring and bond together mixed slaves’ descendants in Mauritius, (Afro-)Creoles were systemically discriminated against and deprived of the kind of ethno-political recognition which the Mauritian curriculum had historically granted to the other racialized groups of the island. Because they “[could] not claim an ancestral culture or ancestral language originating outside Mauritius, the benefits of [a] system of political patronage with its economic and legitimizing ideological aspects” (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 199) were simply not made available to Creoles by the Mauritian state. By acknowledging *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the Creole community, the *Addendum* however not only ratified a critical linguistic addition to the multilingual curriculum of the country; it also enacted a form of a reparation vis-à-vis the Creole community, whose significant role in the nation-building process had been historically and politically undermined.

*Kominote kreol ki revandik langaz Kreol Morisien kouma so ‘langaz ansestral’ parski se zot aryer grand-dimounn ek zot zanfan ki finn invariant ek gradielman koumans koz sa langaz-la.*



*Deryer rekonesans Kreol Morisien, ena rekonesans simbolik lapor kominote kreol dan kontriksion nou nasion. Istorikman ek antropozikman, langaz Kreol Morisien, li enn dibien inegale ek inegalab ki bann esklav ek zot zanfan finn donn sa pei-la ek so popilasion.*

[The Creole community claims *Kreol Morisien* as its ancestral language because their great grandparents and their children were those who invented the language and who gradually began to speak it. By acknowledging *Kreol Morisien*, we are also acknowledging the symbolic contribution of the Creole community as it helped build our nation. Historically and anthropologically, *Kreol Morisien* constitutes a unique and unmatched gift which slaves and their children have offered this country and its people]

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 7)

As it acknowledges the ethnolinguistic claims laid by the Creole community over the ancestry of *Kreol Morisien*, the *Addendum*'s rhetoric recalls some the recommendations of the Truth and Justice commission's report that had already insisted on the link between linguistic rights and practices, and ideals of inclusion, social justice, and democracy. Indeed, prior to the 2012 introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in primary schools, numerous attempts by (Afro-)Creoles to resort to the 'ancestral card' in order to force state recognition in their favor had been systematically short-circuited by successive waves of Hindu-led governments. Instead, the school curriculum kept representing Creoles as an a-historical or a-cultural group, in the sense that they were '*perdi bann*': as slaves' descendants, they had 'lost' their ancestral filiation and heritage, and could thus simply not aspire to be recognized as a legitimate community the way other racialized communities were (see discussion in chapter 4).

At this point of my discussion, however, I would argue that there are at least two important elements from this quote which call for critical attention: First: in suggesting that the status of *Kreol Morisien* as one of the ancestral languages of the curriculum is ultimately determined by its ability to unify and empower the Creole community, the wording of the *Addendum* corroborates my argument that ancestral languages are not intrinsically or naturally ancestral. Rather they ‘become’ ancestral from the moment they are claimed, used, and performed as such; and whenever they begin to provide strategic leverage within the ideological framework of the multicultural nation, whereby no ethnic group can assert or negotiate its own socio-economic and political power, in the absence of a ‘proper’ ancestral narrative.

This being said, it is also worth noting here that in establishing a ‘symbolic’ ancestral link between *Kreol Morisien* and Creoles, the *Addendum* uses an ambiguous rhetoric that does not so much insist on the cultural experience of *métissage*, mixing, and creolization that is often associated with Creoles. Rather it establishes a direct (and yet historically arguable) equation between “slaves and their children” and what it refers to as those “great grandparents and their children [...] who **invented** the language” (my emphasis). In other words, the *Addendum* does not only single out “slaves” as the only known ancestors of ‘mixed’ Creoles (instead of talking about ancestors from multiple racial groups); it further argues that these ancestors (i.e. slaves) have “invented” the language, when in effect the language was not “invented” by slaves only, since it was born from the interaction between slaves, white settlers and other ethnic groups present at the time of the language’s emergence (Mufwene, 2003, 2015).

As I discussed in chapter 2, many historians and anthropologists have used the concept of ‘creolization’ as a way to underscore how “enslaved and self-liberated Africans, against all odds, **created** new institutions (languages, religions, legal systems, and more)” (Price, 2017, p. 14, my

emphasis). This being said, this idea of “invention” or “creation” needs to be considered with caution since it tends to overlook the role played by other racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities in the emergence of Creole languages. Moreover, while preoccupations about the legacy of slavery and the contribution of enslaved peoples to the Mauritian nation seem to bring the authors of the *Addendum* to naturally assume that *Kreol Morisien* is the language of the Creole community, I contend, in my next section, that the term ‘Creole’ itself refers to a largely unstable, fluid, and open-ended racial, cultural, and socio-economic group in Mauritius.

### ***KREOL MORISIEN, (AFRO-)CREOLE IDENTITY, AND THE STRUGGLES FOR LEGITIMATION***

Colonial fantasies and neocolonial imaginaries have long portrayed Creoles (in Mauritius and elsewhere) as a disparate community of individuals who “do not belong” —namely because of their direct or indirect experience of rupture with their “ancestral culture”, as a result of enslavement, displacement, and creolization. For this reason, the endorsement of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the Creole community by the curriculum raises important questions about the type of cultural claims, historical narratives, and decolonial agencies which the teaching of the language is expected to support, convey, and enact. While many might thus justly assume that the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* serves, in this context, as a means to foster epistemic justice—in response, namely, to the long-standing marginalization of Creole culture, experience, and identity in Mauritian classrooms—, the complexities, ambiguities, and paradoxes attached to the term ‘Creole’ itself are such that one might ask the following: Who can ‘rightly’ claim to be Creole in Mauritius today; and which, among the many groups that have historically been labelled or (self-)identified as Creoles in Mauritius, can ‘legitimately’ claim *Kreol Morisien* as

their ancestral language? Furthermore, to what extent should institutional policies and pedagogical approaches relating to *Kreol Morisien* be based on specific cultural agendas and ethnopolitical claims? Is ‘*Kreol Morisien* as ancestral language’ an inclusive designation or an exclusive one? In other words, is *Kreol Morisien* meant to act as a unifying factor for what is today a largely heterogenous and open-ended community? Or is it expected, in contradistinction, to legitimize a more Afro-centric and essentialist approach to the legacy of slavery and the experience of creolization? While focused on the experience of Creoles and their relationship with *Kreol Morisien* in particular, these complex interrogations obviously connect with the broader questions I pose earlier about how an ancestral language becomes ancestral and how communities end up claiming a language as ‘their’ ancestral language.

In the previous section indeed, I already argued that there is nothing ‘natural’ per se about the notion of ancestral languages. In spite of all appearances, what eventually qualifies a language as ‘ancestral’ in Mauritius is not the mere fact that it was spoken by Asian immigrants who, once relocated to the island, passed it on to subsequent generations. Rather, as highlighted by Eisenlohr (2006), the ancestral status conferred to ‘Oriental’ languages by the national curriculum has always been but a response to specific ethnopolitical claims meant to promote the cultural heritage and specificities of the various ‘imagined’ communities of the multicultural nation. In this context, Harmon (2017) makes a strong case in arguing that it is precisely the Creole community—and more specifically Afro-Malagasy Creoles—that has the stronger claim to *Kreol Morisien* as their ancestral language. However, what Harmon presents as a logical assumption becomes more complicated once we think of the inability of those who self-identify as Creoles in Mauritius to also think of themselves as a coherent and homogenous group with a shared history, a similar condition, and a common destiny.

Unlike the other local cultural groups that have long managed to essentialize themselves as clearly-delineated ethnic communities—via the promotion of ‘their’ ancestral language, history, religion, and culture—, Creoles in Mauritius are, to this day, largely depicted as the most fragmented, heterogenous, and disunited community of the multi-island republic. Numerous scholars, for instance, have commented on the inability of Creoles to coalesce around a shared history, or even to think of themselves as part of a grander teleological narrative of success (Baptiste, 2013). Yet, studies also reveal that many Creoles have an ambivalent and complicated rapport with their past, namely because their ‘ancestral history’ connotes mixing, impurity, and illegitimacy—whether biological, cultural, or linguistic—that do not align well with the more compartmentalized discourse of the multicultural nation, and that have resulted in forms of Creolophobia. Indeed, while the rhetoric commonly used in relation to Creoles foregrounds ideas of *métissage* and cultural hybridity, these processes are still seen as largely incompatible with the logics that inform discourses of ancestry.

A direct reminder of the racialization and brutal dehumanization of Africans and Afro-diasporic communities under the colonial regime, the history of Creoles in Mauritius also forces one to reconsider the long-term effects of the slave trade and the plantation colony, that have laid the uneven foundations of what was to become the ‘Rainbow nation’ (Carter, 1998). This is to say that the inability for many Creoles to acknowledge and engage with core elements of this ancestral narrative also derives from their inability to embrace a *longue durée* history of exploitation and marginalization. It is indeed hard to claim one’s past—let alone to feel proud of it—when this past almost always references loss, trauma, shame, and violence, instead of survival, courage, power, and redemption.

As I extend my discussion of the ethnocultural tensions and paradoxes examined in the first part of this chapter, my intention in this section is thus to shift the focus from trying to understand ‘who’ is Creole, to actually considering ‘how’ Creoles became Creoles in the first place, and how the institutional recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles is also part of this ‘becoming’ process. As I argue in chapter 2, there is a complex and diverse history to the term ‘Creole’ both globally and locally, which is why I will make use of a historicizing method in order to uncover the trajectories of the very tensions and debates regarding the role and place of *Kreol Morisien* within the curriculum. For the rest of my discussion here, I will refer to a set of sources—including interviews, dictionary entries, historical archives, and policy documents—in order to tackle the following questions: What are the historical, cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences that qualify one as Creole? What accounts for the definition of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the Creoles?

### ***The “C-Word” Again<sup>74</sup>***

Earlier in this dissertation, I briefly referenced a discussion I had several years ago with my own students and teacher-trainees at the Mauritius Institute of Education, in a class titled “*Kreol Morisien dan lekol: kifer? Pou ki fer?*” [*Kreol Morisien* in schools: why and to what end?]. During one of our sessions, students from this class were actively debating on the relevance and accurateness of referring to *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language; and while some of them—irrespective of their ethnic background were eager to relate *Kreol Morisien* to the history of enslaved Africans and Malagasy people, others proved suspicious vis-à-vis such a direct

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<sup>74</sup> This subtitle is taken from a 2007 piece written by anthropologist Stephan Palmié, which was published in an edited volume on Creolization (Palmié, 2007).

association. Some of them—who happened to be non-Creoles for the most part—further argued that the historical correlation between the emergence of (several) Creole languages and the reality of plantation systems around the world, could not be invoked to deprive a broader category of islanders, who speak a Creole language and have a Creole/creolized way of life, from their actual freedom to self-identify as Creoles. In the course of this discussion, a few students even emphasized that slaves were not the only ones present in Mauritius at the time when the island’s Creole culture and language were formed. Indeed, as I have mentioned before, other ethnic and racial groups also participated in the process of cultural and linguistic creolization.

During one of my fieldwork trips to Mauritius in summer 2018, I was faced with similar paradoxes and discontents when discussing the term ‘Creole’, namely in a series of four individual interviews which I conducted with local scholars and curriculum developers—two men and two women—who had all worked, to varying degrees, on the effects of *Kreol Morisien* in schools. The female participants (Indira and Mala) were both Indo-Mauritians/Hindus, working as faculty members of the Mauritius Institute of Education. As for the male participants (Sydney and Johnny), who both identified as Creoles, they were academic staff of the SeDEC i.e. the Catholic school authorities<sup>75</sup>.

I began all four interviews with the same question: “What does the term ‘Creole’ evoke for you?” With this initial prompt, my goal was to initiate a discussion that would not strictly rely on so-called objective ‘definitions’ of the term, but that would also make space for allusions, impressions, perceptions, and discrepancies. Just as I expected, the word ‘Creole’ triggered a variety of responses that featured tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictions. The answers themselves touched upon a variety of topics ranging broadly from Creole language to Creole

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<sup>75</sup> Pseudonyms have been given to all the participants interviewed.

culture; Creole society, cuisine, aesthetics, and identity. However, the latter aspect of the term, i.e. Creole identity, clearly challenged some of the participants as they engaged more directly with questions of ethnic/racial identity/identification, which are usually quite taboo in Mauritius, particularly when it comes to Creoles.

First interviewee Sydney, for instance, framed his comments about Creole identity in Mauritius by referring to a particular kind of “struggle”: “When you talk about Creole [*sic*] in the Mauritian context, for me it’s somehow almost always associated with a struggle”. Invoking “a sense of identity that goes beyond nationhood”, he further explained that it was in fact while living in another Creole context (the Seychelles) that he had really encountered and experienced a celebratory rapport to Creole identity and culture. This is to say that the realities and experiences encompassed by the term ‘Creole’ can be highly contextual. And while Sydney acknowledged its relation to bitter struggles everywhere, he also underscored that in Mauritius in particular Creole identity is more of a taboo and a stigma than it is something to be embraced.

Indira, the second interviewee, expressed some discomfort when answering that same question, namely as she specified that the term ‘Creole’ is usually associated with a particular ethnic group in Mauritius. She also stressed that this was not ‘her’ definition but rather an understanding that she had developed from living in the local context. In the course of our conversation, I could sense that Indira was very cautious and, while she was obviously hesitant to relate Creole identity to an ancestral narrative or an ancestral homeland, she nevertheless mentioned ‘Africa’: “So, let’s say that’s something I’ve seen, and sort of absorbed maybe, or taken for granted: it’s basically people who are descendants of... who have ancestors who come from Africa”.



The third interviewee, Mala, expressed a similar feeling of discomfort; and her response actually reminded me of the discussion I had with my former students. Indeed, although locally identified as Hindu, Mala saw her way of life as creolized and, in this sense, considered herself a “Creole person”. Because of her Indian heritage, and in the absence of an African ancestry, she nevertheless also mentioned being well aware of how sensitive it could be to openly claim a Creole identity for herself in the Mauritian context:

[...] in Mauritius it [Creole] is associated with an ethnic group. And with the question, which is a difficult one in Mauritius: isn't the whole island a Creole island? Yet, we both know that everybody wouldn't be comfortable with this [...]. Yeah, I consider myself as a Creole person... in the sense that I'm very much the intersection [sic], and Creole for me is that question of intersection of various things having come together... I consider myself as a Creole person living in a Creole society, in a Creole island. However, I'm very much aware that I'm not of African descent but of Indian descent, and I think that I still very much grapple with all these things.

While particularly interesting and thought-provoking, the response I obtained from Johnny—the fourth interviewee—about his understanding of the term ‘Creole’ probably foregrounded the most tensions and paradoxes. A public intellectual and a leading figure of the Afro-Creole identity movement in Mauritius, Johnny was among those who advocated for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, on the basis of its ancestral value for the Creole community. It is worth mentioning that, from the onset, Johnny indicated his intention to depart from scholarly definitions of the term ‘Creole’ in order to discuss a more “customized”, embodied, and idiosyncratic vision of what it meant to him, based on his own experience as a

Creole himself, living in Mauritius. As such, Johnny's first intuition was to engage with the word 'Creole' by relating it to the other ethnic groups of the island:

So, for me, in the Mauritian context it [Creole] is a particular group... and I'm part of this group. But I don't live in isolation... I interact with other cultures. I fully assume [my Creole identity] in the same way as some who would call themselves Muslims, Chinese, or... Hence, it's in this same way that I present the word 'Creole'...

Talking of paradox, it is worth noting that Johnny's response clearly emphasized cultural "interaction" over "isolation". Nevertheless, his rhetoric also used terms such as "us" and "they", which tend to suggest that, for him, Creoles make up a clearly delineated and "particular group"; one that should consequently be approached and defined on the same terms as the other mutually exclusive ethnic groups of the country. Yet, when prompted to be more specific about the 'peculiarity' of this group, Johnny's reflection almost instantly shifted to the more unstable or ungraspable contours of Creole identity—something that does not quite correspond to the more traditional ways in which most ethnic groups are generally conceived in Mauritius:

Mmm... a Creole is mixed... for instance if I take my own story [...] [a Creole] is mixed [...] and I think the element of mixing is very important. And then we transgress all interdictions [...] we are able to do what others for instance can't do... because we are a culture that absorbs so much. We are open, *nou tou* [we are all/everyone/everything]. For me that's what makes the particularity of Creoles.

Of course, similar references to ideas of openness—namely as it relates to practices of transgression, border-crossing, exchange, and transformation—are often used to describe Creole peoples and their cultures around the world. But, more specifically, Johnny’s emphasis on ideas of “mixing” reminds us that Creoles in Mauritius are the result of an intense and diverse process of *métissage*; one that is somehow viewed in a more favorable light today, but that was long deemed immoral, dangerous, and “nightmar[ish]” by colonial administrators (Loomba, 2015, p. 128)<sup>76</sup>. Eriksen explains, on this question, how Creole cultures—which he considers “mixed cultures *par excellence*” (Eriksen, 2019, p. 5)—have historically been “held in low esteem by anthropologists: they were created by miscegenation and contamination [...] and were deemed mundane and unexciting under the exoticizing gaze of anthropology” (Eriksen, 2019, p. 5). Freed today from the gaze of colonial administrators, and yet still subject to the compartmentalized logics of the multicultural nation, Creoles in Mauritius continue to suffer from damaging stereotypes and cultural prejudices, namely because of their inability to subscribe to the more traditional discourse of lineage and ancestry. On this subject, Eriksen (2007) observes that “[i]n Mauritian public discourse, notions of change, flux, personal choice, and hybridity are routinely contrasted with tradition, stability, commitment to fixed values and purity” (p. 163).

It is worth mentioning that Johnny’s comments about openness, mixing, and transgression as key features of Creole culture are not merely based on the idea that cultural mixing results from interbreeding. As such, his description of Creole culture as one that literally “absorbs so much” can be related to Mala’s earlier response, namely when she explains that, as a Hindu, she still considers herself a “Creole person” because of the ways in which her “way of life” differs from the more “traditional” Indian values observed in her extended family. Indeed,

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<sup>76</sup> In some colonies, miscegenation was eventually recast and encouraged by colonial administrators who “dreamt of racial mixings that would produce the ideal colonial subject” (Loomba, 2015, p. 128).

Mala's self-identification as "a Creole person"—rather than simply as "a Creole"—derives from her appreciation of Creole culture as "open" and therefore more relatable to her "way of life".

Yet, as I mentioned already, in the absence of a known African ancestry, Mala also realized that she could not simply claim a Creole identity for herself on the basis of her lifestyle only. This hesitancy raises a number of important questions related to the specificities of the local context: Is the term 'Creole' only applicable to African descendants in Mauritius? Is it legitimate for individuals of Indian origins to also claim a Creole identity? Or is 'Creole' but a 'residual' designation, i.e. one which individuals claim when they do not/cannot identify with any of the other ethnic groups or their respective ancestral traditions?

Scholars like Eriksen have previously argued that there have long been no fixed or definite criteria for being considered Creole in Mauritius (Eriksen, 2003, p. 80). This explains, for instance, that in the local repertoire, the term is still commonly ascribed to individuals labelled as *perdi bann*. Commenting on the state of distress which this inability to belong or to be acknowledged generates, late Catholic priest Roger Cerveaux initially coined the expression "*malaise créole*" [Creole malaise] in the 1990s to refer quite specifically to the marginalization of racialized Creoles—i.e. darker-skinned Creoles—within the Mauritian society. A Creole himself, he however also argued that, in the same way Creole culture had given to the country its main language of communication and communion, it also had the capacity to incorporate, include and "absorb" the *perdi bann* from other communities. In other words, outcasts from other communities always have a place in the Creole "family"<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Roger Cerveaux's comments are taken from an interview he gave in 1993 to the local newspaper *Week-End*. The following is an excerpt of his comments (untranslated), which are quoted in Gerbeau (2009): "*La valeur dont je suis le plus fier en tant que créole – déclare le P. Roger Cerveaux–, c'est le fait que nous avons donné à notre pays sa langue de communication et de communion [...]. Et même si le créole étouffé sous ses problèmes, la fête est là [...]. Il y a également la capacité d'accueil de cette communauté de tous les 'perdi bann' des autres communautés. Les membres dont ils ne veulent pas ont toujours une place dans la 'famille' créole*" (Cerveaux, 1993 quoted in Gerbeau, 2009, pp. 70–71).

In a 2003 article titled “*Tu dimunn pu vinn kreol*” [All people will become Creole], Eriksen discusses the porous and dynamic contours of the Creole community and argues, on the one hand, that “it is to some extent possible to *become* a Creole within one’s lifetime” (2003, p. 79, author’s emphasis), namely because Creoles “are more tolerant of intermarriage than other Mauritian groups” (2003, p. 79). Commenting on factors such as language choice, level of education, upward social mobility, and *métissage* resulting in lighter skin color, the anthropologist however adds that “there is a tendency that successful Creoles are no longer considered Creoles” (2003, p. 78). In other words, for Eriksen, the ‘Creole’ experience in Mauritius is less defined by skin color than it is by a lower socioeconomic status and the lack of education and/or access to elite circles. As such, Creole identity, in Eriksen’s terms, is neither fix, nor stable; rather it is a process since one can “become” Creole, but one can also “no longer be considered as Creole”. The ‘becoming’ or ‘unbecoming’ of Creole as two possible processes thus point, in Eriksen’s discussion, to a continuum of experiences, an array of possible identifications, rather than as a set of established racial/ethnic criteria:

on top, there is a pale (European), well educated, urban, wealthy, French-speaking person; at the bottom, there is a dark-skinned (African), illiterate, rural, poor, Creole-speaking person. Between these extremes, there are numerous socially important distinctions, and colour, language, place of residence, education and wealth are the main markers. When a Creole moves upwards, he or she has traditionally been re-defined as a “coloured” (*gens de couleur*), in other words as someone aspiring to European or Franco-Mauritian values. In fact, this classification has little to do with actual skin colour, although successful Creole men nearly always marry light-skinned women. In other words, “Creole” the way it is used in Mauritius refers not only to slave ancestry and cultural impurity, but to low class; it belongs to the proletariat of the *milieu populaire*.

(Eriksen, 2002, p. 78)

In this quote, Eriksen explicitly argues that the term ‘Creole’ in Mauritius does not refer “only to slave ancestry [...], but to low class [...] to the proletariat of the *milieu populaire*”. Nevertheless, his description of how racial and economic paradigms interrelate to produce such a social stratification also points to the divisions and vertical hierarchies at work within the Creole continuum itself, namely with “dark-skinned (African)” Creoles situated at the bottom end of the spectrum. By proposing that individuals located at a lower echelon can “move up” and be “**redefined** as a ‘colored’” (my emphasis), Eriksen yet subtly points to the fact that the racialized socio-economic mobility within the broader Creole community paradoxically tends to reinforce the lack of recognition of “dark-skinned (African) Creoles” and the invisibility of their particular struggles and challenges. In other words, because “successful” Creoles—regardless of their “skin colour”—are often re-labelled as “*gens to couleur*” and not as “Creoles”, their mobility and socioeconomic progress, enabled namely via education, tend to conceal or neutralize the concrete issues related to racial stigmatization instead of addressing it.

For this reason, several public figures and Creole intellectuals in Mauritius have engaged in essentialist maneuvers and Afro-centric discourses presenting the lower-class and dark-skinned Afro-Creole community as the subsection of this continuum that truly embodies a ‘genuine’ Creole identity and the group’s most profound claims for legitimation and recognition. When asked, for instance, about his assessment of the link between Creole identity and the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language in schools, one of these intellectuals and long-standing activist—Johnny—recounted how he came to this realization: indeed, at the beginning of his career, his advocacy work for using *Kreol Morisien* in schools was mainly geared toward what he calls an “ideological mother tongue agenda” (similar to the one endorsed by the Left-Wing NGO *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*). Having spent a number of years working on

the PrevokBEC—a pioneering mother-tongue based prevocational program implemented by Catholic secondary schools in 2004—he came to realize that the status of *Kreol Morisien* in schools was inseparable from a reflection on the place occupied by Creoles in the Mauritian society:

*Lerla mo realize ki la-kestion lang kreol dan Moris li ousi étroitement liée à la place des Créoles à Maurice. E la ousi kan nou pe dir kreol, nou pa pe dir kreol kouma mwa, middle-class [...] Me basically sa kestion langaz-la li lie efektifman a kestion sosyal, a listwar. Donk kan nou dir kreol vedit enn nwar, vedit bann nasion, vedit bann ki dernie...*

[Then I realized that the topic of *Kreol* language in Mauritius is also closely linked to the place of Creoles in Mauritius. And when we say Creoles, we're not talking about middle-class Creoles like me [...] But basically this language question is tightly linked to questions of society and history. So, when we say Creole it means black, it means the *nasion*<sup>78</sup>, it means those who are last...]

Johnny's realization of the inextricable correlation between *Kreol Morisien* and Creole identity was further informed by contextual factors, such as the local emergence of a Creole consciousness which Bunwaree (2004) describes as an “awakening” and “forging of an identity”. Indeed, as pointed out by Harmon (2017), between 2008 and 2010 a Creole identity movement growing nationally, gained the attention of political lobbyists and thus “made the claim for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as one of their main aims” (Harmon 2017, p. 76). From this moment, the official recognition of *Kreol Morisien* by political authorities became a “part of this

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<sup>78</sup> In Mauritius the term ‘*nasion*’ is often used as a pejorative term to designate dark-skinned Creoles.

struggle to get a share of the ‘national cake’” (Harmon, 2017, p. 22). However, for this kind of strategic maneuver to operate fully within the established framework of the multicultural nation—namely as it relates to ancestral narratives and diasporic ties—the promotion of Creole identity had to be linked to a putative place of origin outside Mauritius. For those adhering to the Creole identity movement mentioned by Harmon, both Africa and Madagascar came up as the most obvious and ‘legitimate’ sites for this endeavor, namely because these are places from which dark-skinned and non-Asian slaves originated.

Commenting more specifically on the development of the first curriculum for *Kreol Morisien*, Johnny recounted how, back then, the Chairperson of the *Grupman Larkansiel Kreol Morisien* sent a petition to the Mauritian Ministry of Education and the *Kreol Morisien* Academy (AKM), in support of the claims laid by the Creole identity movement. In particular, the letter emphasized the importance of foregrounding the “[h]istorical and cultural aspects for citizens of Afro-Malagasy, slave and maroon descent” in the curriculum. It also insisted that consultations related to curriculum development should not leave out “the socio-cultural and historical backdrop of *Kreol Morisien* and its civilization aspect” (Richard, 2003 quoted in Harmon, 2014, p. 505).

This is to say that the expectation that curriculum developers and policy makers would go beyond technical aspects of language and literacy, and explicitly address the Afro-Malagasy heritage of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum framework, was never neutral, but in line with ongoing claims for reparation and legitimation. Indeed, as further underscored by Johnny, Afro-Creole history, identity, and culture were, from the onset, *sine qua non* to the validation of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum by members of the Creole identity movement. It is thus not coincidental that the *Addendum* itself acknowledges that the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in



schools came as a result of the long-standing commitment, from the part of activists and sociocultural organizations, on matters of social justice and reparation vis-à-vis slaves' descendants <sup>79</sup>.

### ***An inclusive definition that ultimately excludes***

While the rationale of the *Addendum* explicitly inscribes *Kreol Morisien* within an ancestral rhetoric that links it to the enslavement of Africans and their displacement to Mauritius in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is worth recalling that the term 'Creole' itself has not always been used as a substitute for the words 'African', 'Afro-diasporic', 'Black', or even 'slave'. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 2, the term was originally used to discriminate White people born in the colonies of the 'New-World' from those born in the 'Old-World' metropolis (Stewart, 2007)—as widely attested by entries featuring in prominent Western dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster* ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)), *Larousse* ([www.larousse.fr](http://www.larousse.fr)), *Le Robert* ([dictionnaire.lerobert.com](http://dictionnaire.lerobert.com)), and *Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisée* ([www.atilf.fr/tlfi](http://www.atilf.fr/tlfi)).

According to Harmon (2017, p. 44), however, definitions that tend to associate the word 'Creole' with Whites have historically been used to deprive Creoles in Mauritius from numerous opportunities of being recognized as a legitimate ethnic group. In the context of class discussions, I have myself often heard former students use similar dictionary entries—in conjunction namely with the other common understanding that 'Creole' also designates, by

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<sup>79</sup> Please refer to the following quote from the *Addendum*, which I already discuss on page 165: "The introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools is the outcome of the ongoing commitment of individuals and sociocultural associations to matters of reclamation and reparation [...] In both historical and anthropological terms, *Kreol Morisien* is an unmatched and unmatchable cultural asset that slaves and their children have given to this country and to its population" (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 7).

“extension” (*Le Robert*), all the inhabitants of an island formerly colonized by Europeans—as a counter-argument to the claims laid by Afro-Creoles in Mauritius over this designation. Hence, I can relate to Johnny’s critique of Eurocentric and/or universalized definitions of the term, that either generate cultural misunderstandings (Chaudenson, 2001) or invalidate local epistemologies.

In Mauritius today, for instance, ‘Creole/*Kreol*’ is seldom used to refer to a White person; with the rare exception of the lighter-skinned Creoles who are more commonly labelled as ‘*milat*’<sup>80</sup> or ‘*ferblan*’<sup>81</sup>. While the term is instead almost exclusively associated with black/racialized bodies and cultural heritage, the focus on Afro-Creole experiences is even endorsed by institutional spaces of knowledge production, in support to “those who are on the margins and who identify themselves with KM [*Kreol Morisien*] as a symbol of identity affirmation” (Harmon, 2017, p. 49). As such, I find strong resonance between Johnny’s “customized” definition of the term ‘Creole’ and the one provided by Carpooran’s *Diksioner Morisien* (Carpooran, 2011a) (henceforth *Diksioner*), the first monolingual dictionary in *Kreol Morisien*. Considered a “keystone”<sup>82</sup> in the standardization process of the language and in its introduction in Mauritian schools, the state-endorsed *Diksioner*<sup>83</sup> is a useful pedagogical resource

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<sup>80</sup> The Kreol word “*milat*” derives from the French “*mulâtre*” [English: ‘mulatto’].

<sup>81</sup> There is an interesting polysemy attached to the term “*ferblan*” in *Kreol Morisien*. It can be read as a noun deriving from the French “*fer-blanc*” [Eng: ‘tin’], or as verb phrase which would translate as “passing as white” in English [French: ‘*faire blanc*’].

<sup>82</sup> The introduction of the dictionary opens up with a quote by linguist Albert Valdman (2005) which stresses that the elaboration of a monolingual dictionary is certainly the keystone [*la clé de voûte*] toward the standardization of a language.

<sup>83</sup> The second edition of the *Diksioner Morisien* was officially launched in 2011 by the then Prime-Minister of Mauritius, Dr. Navindchandra Ramgoolam. This historical piece of work was led by Prof. Arnaud Carpooran, a sociolinguist at the University of Mauritius, with the collaboration of diverse scholars and former university students. The *Diksioner* bears the seal of the AKM, thereby conferring it official status.

for teachers and students, and therefore bears high significance on the teaching of the language<sup>84</sup>.

A case in point, the noun ‘*Kreol*’ is defined in the following terms by the *Diksioner*:

- 1) The name of an ethnic group in Mauritius which regroups slaves’ descendants and the *métis* population of Christian faith. *The symbolic relationship with Africa is a fundamental component of the identity of Creoles in Mauritius* <Ref. **Afro-morisien**>.
- 2) The name given to the inhabitants of an island that experienced the realities of colonization and slavery. *In the Seychelles all inhabitants consider themselves as Creoles.*

(Carpooran, 2011, p. 550, my translation, author’s emphasis)

As an adjective, ‘*Kreol*’ is further defined as follows:

- 1) born in Mauritius during the period of slavery. *Creole language, Creole music, Creole cuisine, are things that slaves have left as a heritage to the Mauritian population.*
- 2) that has a relationship with the Creole community or with Creole culture. *Different Creole organizations emerged during recent years to campaign for the recognition of their identity.*

(Carpooran, 2011, p. 550, my translation, author’s emphasis)

I find these two series of entries especially relevant to my discussion about the type of ideological and/or ethno-strategic reclaiming of the term ‘Creole’ that has played out in the ultimate adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Afro-Creoles in the curriculum. Indeed, while these entries remind me of Johnny’s comments about Creole identity, the various examples included here to illustrate suggested definitions clearly emphasize a specific and

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<sup>84</sup> Some of the main objectives of the *Diksioner* are to “[o]ffer a tool of reference for primary and secondary school teachers who wish to acquire more expertise in the description and functioning of the mother tongue of a majority of their students” (Carpooran, 2011, p. 39); and to be “a referential work for students (as from the upper grades of primary school)” (Carpooran, 2011, p. 39).

contemporary use of the term ‘*Kreol*’ in Mauritius, namely as it relates to African ancestry, the legacy of slavery, or the struggle for ethnocultural recognition. This is to say that, while the *Diksioner* prioritizes a local understanding of ‘*Kreol*’ in a way that insists on its link to Africa and the history of slavery.

Of course, as highlighted in chapter 2, we know that the term ‘Creole’ encompasses a diversity of meanings in various cultural contexts (Stewart, 2007). But in what appears as an attempt to uphold more contemporary claims for legitimation, reparation, and social justice on behalf of slaves’ descendants and Afro-Creoles in Mauritius, Carpooran’s *Diksioner* makes no mention of historical ambiguities and multiplicities pertaining to the term, reifying through this process the same logics of strategic exclusion already embedded in the multicultural framework. As a matter of fact, when referring to Mauritius in the first entry quoted above (“*The symbolic relationship with Africa is a fundamental component of the identity of Creoles in Mauritius*”), Carpooran’s dictionary does not extend the ‘Creole/*Kreol*’ designation to the entire population of the island. Instead, through the use of the sign <Ref. **Afro-morisien**>, it explicitly records ‘Afro-Mauritians’ as the main reference and equivalent entry for referring to the ethnic group hereby identified as Creoles<sup>85</sup>. In contradistinction, to illustrate a more inclusive definition of Creoles as the “inhabitants of an island” quite broadly, the *Diksioner* turns to the Seychelles instead of Mauritius, and seems thereby to take no issue in acknowledging that, in Seychelles, “all inhabitants consider themselves Creoles”. This, of course, recalls what my interviewee Sydney had mentioned about the shared celebratory rapport to Creole identity and culture in Seychelles.

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<sup>85</sup> The symbol <Ref...> is used in the *Diksioner* as “a cross-reference [...] to the entry for the main variant” (Carpooran, 2011, p. 51). An Afro-Mauritian is defined in the *Diksioner* as “someone who has or claims close ancestral links with Africa” (Carpooran, 2011, p. 89, *my translation*).

In reaction to the historical and ethnopolitical erasure of Afro-Creoles in the official discourse of the nation, the *Diksioner* thus endorses a particular local meaning of the term which, in turn, purposefully leaves out critical nuances and complexities that have long turned ‘Creole/*Kreol*’ into a term too fluid to grasp. As such, it paradoxically participates in the ‘legitimation’ of a Creole identity/ethnicity that finds its roots in Africa and Madagascar, but not in Mauritius. However, it is worth considering what accounts for this insistence on Africa and Africanness locally, when in other Creole spaces such as the Franco-creolophone Antilles, since the late 1980s, Creoleness/*Créolité* has been defined as a cultural experience of the “New” World that is “[n]either Europ[ean], nor Afric[an], nor Asi[an]” (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 886).

### ***The Creole “disease” and its cure***

The stance taken by the *Diksioner*, as it delineates and illustrates the meaning of the term ‘Creole/*Kreol*’ in Mauritius, contrasts quite notably with previous dictionary entries. This is likely because, as underscored by Harmon (2017), the ethnopolitical consciousness and claims of so-called Afro-Creoles is fairly recent in the history of the country. Indeed, Creoles in Mauritius have not always acknowledged, claimed, or even embraced their ‘Africanness’. As I recall in chapter 4 of this dissertation, several campaigns requesting the official recognition of *Kreol Morisien* as the national language of the country in the 1970s-1980s subscribed to an anticolonial agenda which explicitly overlapped with class struggle. However these campaigns did not involve any Black/Afro liberation movements known to advocate for the rehabilitation of a peculiar Afro-Creole heritage on the basis of its exclusion from mainstream political or educational discourses.

In fact, according to historian Jocelyn Chan Low (2003), it took more than a century following the abolition of slavery for an authentic Black consciousness movement to emerge in Mauritius. Meanwhile, during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of those commonly identified as slaves' descendants even rejected the label Afro-Mauritians and found in the substitute 'Creole' a more neutral designation that did not necessarily denote Blackness, nor express a strong diasporic tie to Africa and/or slavery. More recently, however, voices and instances advocating for a rethinking/reconfiguring of Creole identity and culture in Mauritius have seemed to align with conceptual, discursive, and interpretive frameworks relating to questions of Blackness and/or Afrodiasporic imaginaries. A fact worth mentioning, Mauritian anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell even claims that “[i]ncreasingly, middle-class Creoles are recasting Creoles solely as the descendants of slaves and as the impoverished people of Negroid phenotype living in Mauritius” (Boswell, 2005, p. 201). In a sense, one could always argue that this is precisely the kind of shift that both the *Diksioner* and Johnny's “non-scholarly” definition of the term ‘Creole’ seeks to acknowledge.

As I have mentioned before, numerous civilians and intellectuals in Mauritius have however repeatedly condemned the modalities of the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, namely because they deemed it more appropriate to use this *lingua franca* as a shared medium of instruction and a language of literacy for all, rather than as an ancestral language, mutually exclusive with the other ancestral languages of the curriculum. Disavowing the state's long-standing practice of maintaining ethnic divisions through ancestral frameworks and institutional policies, some critics have even taken aim at the vocal claims made by proponents of the Afro-Creole identity movement, reproving them for ‘ethnicizing’ *Kreol Morisien* and for playing an

‘ethnic card’ that ultimately reifies colonial logics of exclusion (Auleear Owodally & Unjore, 2013; Eisenlohr, 2018).

While I am myself critically aware of the consequences of tabulating *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language (i.e. mutually exclusive with other ancestral languages) within primary schools’ schedules, I contend nonetheless that one must be mindful of the historical and social circumstances that have led to the emergence of a local Afro-Creole movement in order to understand better how the inclusion of *Kreol Morisien* within the curriculum has become a receptacle to the movement’s ethno-political claims and subsequent expectations. Moreover, I believe one should remain cautious, while examining these questions, not to judge advocates of an Afro-Creole agenda today on the same terms as those who formerly possessed the political knowledge, power, and leverage to deliberately establish and consolidate a system of ethnic division for their own benefits.

To make better sense of the attempt of Creoles today to renegotiate their ethnocultural identity through Afro-centric claims and genealogical frameworks, it is worth recalling how pervasively the experiences of Afro-diasporic communities around the world have been described using a rhetoric of loss, errantry, and trauma. In Mauritius, likewise, Creole identity has long been associated with negative connotations of lack, impurity, and abjection. As

Vaughan recalls:

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. The Creole community is the residue of these racial/ethnic/cultural categories, a residue that purportedly lacks a distinct culture and suffers from what is known as “*la [sic] malaise créole*,” a “disease” not only of poverty, but of social marginality and abjection.

(Vaughan, 2005, p. 3)

As I briefly explained earlier, the expression ‘*malaise créole*’ [Creole malaise], coined by Catholic priest Roger Cerveaux in the mid-1990s, has become quite an important and unprecedented rallying cry in the history of the local Creole community. This is especially true of the lower-class, darker-skinned Creoles—also offensively labelled as ‘*ti kreol*’ [little Creoles] or ‘nasion’ [nation]—who are still the most violently impacted today by the long-intertwined effects of racialization and colonization in Mauritius. Originally used by Cerveaux for calling out the Catholic church on its involvement in the marginalization of Creole parishioners—who happen to be a majority of Catholics—, the expression ‘*malaise créole*’ indeed speaks to the lack of recognition, consideration, and opportunities for Creoles. It also addresses the systemic and enduring forms of exclusion which mixed slaves’ descendants have had to face in various spheres of the Mauritian society since the abolition of slavery. In his assessment of the ‘*malaise créole*’, Cerveaux further denounced the *main-mise* of White Franco-Mauritian landowners on the Catholic church, as well as the broader exclusion of Creole priests who, until then, were not authorized by the religious institution to officiate at masses in *Kreol Morisien*.

Interestingly enough, the expression ‘*malaise créole*’ was coined at time when the local Government, led by Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, was about to initiate a significant reform in the education sector. With a majority of Hindu members, Jugnauth’s party—the Mauritian Socialist Movement (MSM)—had indeed decided to include results obtained in Asian ancestral languages in the final count toward the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exam. A national examination that ranked students at the end of elementary schooling, the CPE yet also determined admissions in secondary schools and therefore had a significant impact on students’ future. The MSM’s project raised strong controversy, since some feared it would only benefit students of Asian origins. While the case was debated in court, the ruling of *Brown v. Board of*



Education of Topeka was even referenced<sup>86</sup> to oppose what some had already equated to the ‘separate but equal’ policies that defined the U.S. education system before 1954 (See Miles, 2000). At the time, many Creoles also contested the reform, fearing that their children would be further disadvantaged since precisely (most) Creole children did not learn an ancestral language in school<sup>87</sup>.

In the meantime, the 1990s marked a number of social and political events which fueled the emergence of the Creole identity movement evoked by Harmon (2017). Already, a growing number of Creoles had started to take pride in their ‘ancestral’ heritage by exhibiting long-repressed albeit obvious expressions of African/Afro-diasporic cultures, including clothing and haircuts, in public spaces (Boswell, 2006). This said, what historian Jocelyn Chan Low labels as an “authentic Black consciousness” (Chan Low, 2003)<sup>88</sup> really gained critical momentum with the death in police custody of renowned Rastafarian singer Kaya—an iconic figure and inventor of the Creole *seggae* music—in February 1999. Following the death of the artist, many Creoles took to the streets to denounce police brutality and the State’s lack of consideration for Creoles. However, the demonstrations quickly turned sour, and resulted in ethnic riots opposing Creoles and Hindus, that lasted for several days. As a matter of fact, it took many efforts from several

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<sup>86</sup> While the Supreme Court of Mauritius declared this reform unconstitutional, its ruling was ultimately overturned by the Privy Council of the Queen of England. Even if Mauritius gained its independence from the UK in 1968, and became a republic in 1992, the Supreme Court of Mauritius is still subject to the British Monarchy’s highest court.

<sup>87</sup> Some Creole families enroll their children in optional languages classes like Mandarin or Hindi, not because of their ancestral status, but because of their status as ‘world languages’ (not to be confused with ‘languages of the world’). This is still common practice today despite the introduction of *KM* as an optional ancestral language. For a long time, the Asian/‘Oriental’ ancestral languages of the curriculum were offered at the same time as Catechism. Baptiste (2002) mentions the case of “*zenfan anba pie*” (p. 212) [children under the tree] to refer to those Creole students who had no ancestral languages and who were sitting outside the classroom (usually under a tree) during the ‘ancestral’ language period.

<sup>88</sup> In his article, Chan Low discusses the direct correlation between the emergence of this Black Consciousness and the ‘*malaise créole*’: “en dépit de la proximité de l’Afrique, il faudra attendre plus d’un siècle et demi après l’abolition de l’esclavage avant de voir un ‘Black consciousness’ authentique, et ce, dans un contexte marqué par le discours du ‘malaise créole’” [despite the proximity with Africa, it took more than a century and a half following the abolition of slavery for an authentic ‘Black consciousness’ to emerge, namely in a context marked by the discourse on ‘malaise créole’] (Chan Low, 2003, p. 39).

parties to bring an end to the conflict and reinstate peace in the country. Meanwhile, the events had sparked nationwide debates about the ‘*malaise créole*’ as critical masses of Creoles coalesced for the first time around a shared claim for recognition and legitimation.

Not coincidentally, the beginning of the new millennium witnessed the formation of several sociocultural organizations, as well as academic and political clusters dedicated to the promotion and rehabilitation of Creoles’ culture, history, language, and heritage. Decrying the systemic exclusion and discrimination of Creoles within state bodies and institutions including education, civil services, and political administrations, these organizations—namely those with an explicit Afrocentric agenda—began to lobby the Mauritian state on issues of social justice and reparation. This led, among other things, to the promulgation of an Equal Opportunities Act to ensure fairness in the workplace (Equal Opportunities Division, 2008), as well as to the setting up, in 2009, of a Truth and Justice Commission, meant to assess “the consequences of slavery and indentured labour during the colonial period up to the present” (Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b, p. 1).

Notable transformations also occurred within the education sector, as a result of this movement. Under the insistence of a collective of (Creole) academics and staff from Catholic schools, for instance, the then director of the Catholic School Authorities first agreed to introduce a bilingual prevocational program in English and *Kreol Morisien*, namely for students who had failed the CPE. Via the Catholic Bishop, this collective also lobbied the Ministry of Education to introduce *Kreol Morisien* as an optional subject in elementary schools, as a way “to respect the linguistic and cultural rights of any child who wants to study *KM* as it is the case for other optional languages” (Harmon, 2017, p. 16). In August 2010, the Minister of Education subsequently organized a National forum to discuss both the eventuality of introducing *Kreol*

*Morisien* in schools by January 2012—in fulfillment, namely, of a critical electoral promise—and the official appellation of the language<sup>89</sup>. The ‘*malaise créole*’—largely considered a “disease” (Vaughan, 2005)—had somehow, and perhaps unexpectedly, just turned into its own cure, in the sense that it ultimately created an opportunity for a long-fragmented Creole community to coalesce around a common narrative of marginalization and subsequent reclamation, that would force the state to recognize them as a ‘ethnic’ group in their own rights.

### ***Afro-Creole curriculum or ‘creolizing of the curriculum’?***

Harmon claims that the Creole identity movement of 2004-2010 has generated “a Copernican revolution at all levels in the Mauritian society” (2014, p. 286), in the sense that it has profoundly altered the nature of those discursive formations (Foucault, 2005) that have historically prevented Creoles from taking pride in their ethnocultural identity and from embracing their African heritage. It is thus not surprising that—at a time where claims relating to Creole agency and Creole affirmation began to inflect the position of the Mauritian state and of its institutions on questions of recognition and legitimation—the education sector itself, as a site of knowledge production and transmission, took center stage in the debates. Perceived as “a tool for reparation” (Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b), educational policies and curriculum documents were indeed expected to respond to the historical marginalization of Creoles in ways that uphold social, historical, and epistemic justice. On that matter more specifically, the 2011 report from the Truth & Justice Commission recommended the following:

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<sup>89</sup> The official appellation of the Creole language spoken in Mauritius was hotly contested during this national forum. While some proposed that the language be simply called ‘*Morisien*’ [Mauritian], others argued that removing the word ‘*Kreol*’ from the official appellation would, once again, participate in the invisibilization of Creoles (see Harmon, 2017, pp. 16-17).

Education policy should be placed within its broader social, cultural, political and economic context, as an integral part of a human development strategy that places the people at the heart of the whole process. Education must help to engender a new Humanism, one that contains an essential component and sets considerable knowledge of, and respect for, the cultures and spiritual values of different civilizations as a much-needed counterweight to a globalization of the world.

(Truth & Justice Commission, 2011b, pp. 744-745).

The report's mention of "a new Humanism"—which education is expected to help generate—is particularly striking in the sense that it recalls not only Marxian projects, but also Fanon's concluding remarks in his famous essay *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2004): "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man" (p.239). By highlighting how the revalorization of long-repressed ethnocultural and spiritual values can counter the centripetal and hegemonic forces of globalization and universalization, the report indeed reiterates Fanon's ideas about the necessity of rehabilitating and preserving the diversity of expressive cultures and artefacts undermined by (neo)colonial theories of human and/or language across the world.

I realize that this idea of "new Humanism" raises a number of philosophical questions. One might ask, for instance, whether it implies a radical "epistemological break" (Clarke, 2000; Glissant, 1999) from "a theory of the subject that conserves particular principles of reason, agency, and change" (Kirchgasler, 2017, p. 43) or, *a contrario*, whether it involves a return to the lost root and the 'Old World'. But while these debates are beyond the scope of this chapter, my point is that the report tends to suggest that, in a number of postcolonial contexts, education is to be envisioned and conceived as a site of emancipation that involves the re-imagining, the re-

making, and the transforming of those human subjects, subjectivities and experiences, discarded by universal theories of the human.

Throughout this chapter, I have insisted several times on the critical importance of ‘imagining’ Creole languages, peoples, and cultures *differently*—i.e. in a more positive and empowering light—in order to ensure their rehabilitation and revalorization. This is a concern shared by many postcolonial artists, writers, academics, and politicians, whose work strive to ‘liberate’ Creole epistemologies and Creole practices from the condescending colonial gaze that had long construed them as inferior. Yet, the conceptual, ideological, or methodological terms of this rehabilitation and revalorization process do not always generate consensus, and they are seldom neutral.

By speaking of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral or a heritage language, for instance, Harmon (2017) foregrounds a particular “kind” (Hacking, 2006) of Creole identity, culture, and history, as an essential component of any *Kreol Morisien* curriculum and textbooks. In doing so, he uses a rhetoric that turns a selective (and exclusive) experience of ‘Creoleness’ into both a prescription and a logical expectation vis-à-vis the teaching of the language. In line with UNESCO’s “Heritage language model” (L’Express, 2011; UNESCO, 2018), Harmon also draws from the natural sciences and approaches *Kreol Morisien* as a “naturalized language which intersects with categories of indigenous and community languages” (Harmon, 2017, p. 92). Referencing indigenous and aboriginal curricula in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland, he thus emphasizes the critical role played by culture, linguistic heritage, human environment, and experience in addressing the “cultural inequality” (p. 268) which Creole students have endured, especially when compared to students of Asian ancestral languages.

As a matter of fact, Harmon's work presses curriculum developers to counter the lack of representation of "the Mauritian of pure African parentage" and of his/her "contribution [...] to the pluralistic society of Mauritius" (Barker, 1996, p. 14) in the education system. But while he claims that "AfroKreol consciousness goes beyond the Afro phenotype" (Harmon, 2011, p. 137), Harmon's insistence on the greater authenticity of Afro-Creole experiences paradoxically establishes an order of legitimacy within the diversity of Creole expressions which draws from essentialized conceptions of indigenous identity. This most likely explains why his analysis of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks, is so critical of what he describes as "the **total obliteration** of the Creole community whether in terms of the ambiguity noted for facial phenotype representations in pictures and absence of cultural referents or artefacts" (Harmon, 2014, p. 424, *emphasis added*).

It is worth mentioning that Harmon's critiques never clearly (or unambiguously) specify what constitutes Afro-Creole identity and Afro-Creole history. By equating "ambiguity" to "total obliteration" and "absence" to invisibilization, he seems instead to suggest that it is possible to define a Creole subject as a clearly recognizable Other (Appadurai, 2005; Bhabha, 2004). Yet, whenever intellectuals and activists from the Creole identity movement make use of essentialist rhetoric to define Creole identity—whether in terms of phenotype, color bar, language, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, or aesthetic preferences—they are also inevitably excluding a number of 'perdi bann' or non-Afro-Creoles who may still commonly identify as Creole because they may not/cannot identify with one single ancestral culture.

In response to similar attempts to fix, essentialize, or standardize Creole experiences, the section on '*gens de couleur*' in the report of the Truth & Justice Commission precisely

references questions of *métissage* to caution against the use of exclusive or restrictive definitions of the term ‘Creole’, that tend to feature a single origin instead of multiple ones:

[...] the term ‘Creole’ must now be redefined to incorporate more historically and demographically correct information. By denying one part of one’s origins in favour of another, is one not deliberately embarking on another type of ‘cultural genocide’?

(Truth & Justice Commission, 2011, p. 244)

While I tend to agree with the general principle of inclusivity expressed in this section of the report, I would argue that the use of the expression “cultural genocide” to refer to the possible effects of (Afro-)Creole essentialism in Mauritius is extremely problematic, if not merely insensitive, given the precarious and marginalized position occupied by Afro-Creoles in the broader society. Indeed, processes of group formation always involve forms of exclusion and essentialism; but genocidal actions require a different kind of (ethno)political agenda which does not apply here. In other words, I am strongly critical of the allegorical use of the term “genocide” in this context, in the same way Tuck and Yang cautioned against the metaphorical use of the word “colonization”(Tuck & Yang, 2012). This being said, I do share the report’s concern that the quest for a singular myth of origin—which draws from theories of discrete identity-formation developed first by anthropologists about African or indigenous societies, and questioned today across a range of disciplines—does not do justice to the complex evolution of Creole identities and experiences in Mauritius. Rather, by engaging in Afrocentric claims that remind me of the well-known *négritude* movement of the 1930s, I would argue that the agenda of the Creole identity movement fails to emphasize ideas of cultural fluidity, creativity, subversion, and

irreducibility which, according to Stuart Hall, precisely constitute the “power of creolization” (Hall, 2003).

As I conclude this chapter on the ethnopolitical significance of *Kreol Morisien* within the multicultural curriculum of Mauritius, I thus want to raise the question of the conceptual, anthropological, and philosophical differences between the kind of ‘Creole’ experience which a strategic and essentialist mobilization of the curriculum endorses, and what I would call the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’. Indeed, if the ‘*malaise créole*’ has ultimately enabled many (Afro-)Creoles to think of themselves differently and to embrace aspects of their historical and cultural heritage that had long been repressed, attempts to align discussions of Creole identity with Afrocentric discourses and referents only, run the risk of undermining the multiple, contrasting, and potentially paradoxical experiences of Creoles and creolization that have always contributed to the profound cultural dynamics of the country. Similarly, I would argue that the expectation of (Afro-)Creole activists that the teaching and learning of *Kreol Morisien* should serve the recognition and empowerment of Afro-Creoles primarily—namely through the elaboration of school textbooks that emphasize a particular ‘kind’ of Creole identity, heritage, and history—can prove problematic for the broader Creole community itself. As pointed out by Boswell, for instance, attempts to instrumentalize the ‘*malaise créole*’ in ways that overemphasize passive and homogenizing views of slavery, not only overlook “the diverse and hybrid forms that Creole identity has acquired since slavery” (Boswell, 2005, pp. 213–215) but also flatten out “the diversity of Creoles’ experiences and response to oppression” (2005, p. 215).

It is worth recalling, in this sense, that in 1901 a majority of Afro-Mauritians actually rejected the colonial census’s attempt to disaggregate the ‘General Population’ category by introducing a more systematic classification that proposed a separate ‘African’ category (Chan



Low, 2003; Christopher, 1992). Indeed, out of the estimated 2000-3000 individuals which the Census labels as inhabitants of ‘pure’ African ancestry, only 643 chose to identify as such, with the others opting instead to register under the label “Europeans, whites, mixed and coloured” (Central Statistical Office, 1902). If, on the one hand, this refusal to identify with the Census’ category of ‘African of pure ancestry’ can be interpreted as a repression and rejection of Africa (Chan Low, 2003)—which it certainly is, namely because of its historical association with the racialization and enslavement of Africans—on the other hand, one could *also* interpret this negation as a refusal (thus an agency) to conform to colonial taxonomies of race.

While, indeed, these two readings of the situation are not mutually exclusive, such ambivalences and contradictions are notable aspects of processes of creolization, in the sense that creolization, as discussed in chapter 2, does not produce mere homogeneity, coherence, and singularity. In fact, unlike essentialization or essentialist discourses, creolization does not fulfill any kind of ethnopolitical agenda (it has no ‘morale’). It seeks neither good, nor bad; nor is it scripted and predictable (Glissant, 2002). Instead, the ambivalence of Creole peoples and cultures, as well as their fraught relationship with their African heritage, speak to the many tactics of survival and adaptation (through subversion, mimicry, ruse, and sly civility) which Creoles have had to develop in post-plantation and post-abolition societies. And while such tactics are often paradoxical, they are also a part of what Glissant calls the “right to opacity” (Glissant, 2010). Indeed, as argued by Lionnet:

To be Creole is thus emphatically not to be an abstraction, not to aspire to become an ideal and coherent individual subject. It is to be grounded in the concrete material realities of daily life on the plantation and to develop appropriate coping tactics (Certeau). It is to value networks of solidarity in which the collectivity is more precious than the heroic and the singular “one”.

(Lionnet, 2008, p. 1510)

As I prepare to embark on the final chapter of this dissertation— “the creolizing of the curriculum”—I conclude this one by arguing that, despite the tactical claims laid by Afro-Creoles on *Kreol Morisien* as the language of their forefathers, the school curriculum and textbooks of *Kreol Morisien* may not limit their scope to a singular definition of Creole identity, as one that primarily features a lost, and yet unique African root. As such, despite the expectations of Afro-Creole activists that the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum should emphasize more visible forms of “Africanisms” (Palmié, 2019), it is crucial that curriculum developers remain sensitive to other hybrid forms, expressions and experiences of creolization within the Mauritian context. As argued by Mauritian scholar Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François:

Creole (or even Afro-Creole) identity cannot be defined simply in terms of ethnicity, ancestral culture or even past processes of cultural mixing. Creolization is an ongoing and unending process. For this reason, it requires that the cultural repertoire used adopt a multidimensional perspective on local forms of diversity—even if it means moving beyond notions of ethnicity and nationhood to better appreciate factors affecting contemporary cultural narratives and trajectories.

(Jean-François, 2014, pp. 24–25)

As I transition to the next chapter and reflect on Jean-François’ idea of “moving beyond notions of ethnicity and nationhood to better appreciate factors affecting contemporary cultural narratives and trajectories”, my goal is thus to consider Glissant’s philosophical approach to creolization as an unscripted, ongoing, and unending process that produces newness, in order to better “appreciate” the more invisible dynamics and creative discourses of hybridity, transformation, and adaptation at work in the curriculum. Indeed, as I have mentioned before, I do not view the curriculum as a space that should neutralize tensions and paradoxes. In other

words, I do not consider the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as the act of making the curriculum ‘look’ more Creole; but rather as a relational and subversive practice that foregrounds processes of Becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and brings to light the diversity of Creole histories, trajectories, and aspirations within the curriculum.

## CHAPTER 6: KI PASE LA?

### FROM A CREOLE CURRICULUM TO THE 'CREOLIZING' OF THE CURRICULUM

*Pou twa mo tizil ki mo pe sante  
Ek tou so dimounn ki mo pe adrese  
San mo konsider kouler so lapo  
Pa mem osi so kalite relizion  
Kan nou get isi kouma dimounn panse  
Napa mem enn sel ki ena panse linitie  
Kan mwa mo fier mo sant seki mo 'nn tande*

*Pou mo tizil  
Ou ou ou ou  
Lil Moris  
Ou ou*

*Inn ler pou aret dir enn sel lepep enn nasion  
Deplizanpli sa pe vinn pli ipokrit  
Inn ler ousi aret koz malez kreol  
Kreol so malez zot pa ti ankor mem alez  
Seye viv inpe seki nou santiman dir  
Napa kont lor mwa pou ekout larelizion  
Mo tizil plore personn pa souy so lizie*

*Pou mo tizil  
Ou ou ou ou  
Lil Moris...*

To you my little island I'm singing  
And to all its people I'm addressing  
Regardless of skin color  
Or religion  
When we look at how people think here  
None thinks of unity  
While I'm proud to sing what I've heard

For my little island  
Ooh ooh ooh ooh  
Mauritius  
Ooh ooh

Stop talking about one people, one nation  
This is more and more hypocritical  
Stop talking about Creole malaise too  
Creoles' real malaise is they were never at ease  
Try and live according to your feelings  
Don't count on me to follow religion  
My little island weeps, no one wipes its tears

For my little island  
Ooh ooh ooh ooh  
Mauritius

**(Kaya – Mo tizil)**

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## INTRODUCTION

As I have shown in the previous chapters of this dissertation, the national curriculum of Mauritius lies at the crossroads of a wide array of political agendas, historical conjunctures, and ethnocultural claims that affect how ideas of nation, culture, and identity are ‘imagined’ and conveyed by the local education system. In chapter 4, for instance, I argued that the predominant discourse of the multicultural nation has led to the systemic erasure of the term ‘Creole’ from curricular documents and textbooks, thus consolidating the long-standing abjection of the local Creole people, language, and culture by the Mauritian state. In response to this phenomenon, I discussed in chapter 5 how (Afro-)Creoles have more recently mobilized essentialist discourses, claiming *Kreol Morisien* as their ancestral language, in view of obtaining social justice, historical reparation, and state recognition.

As I embark on this final chapter, however, I would argue that political calculus, institutional discourses, and ethnocultural claims can never fully apprehend or foresee the more paradoxical or subversive processes that are generated by the officialized presence of the language in Mauritian schools. For this reason, I propose to shift the focus from discussions relating to notions of ‘multicultural curriculum’ or ‘curriculum for Creoles’, to further explore the more unscripted dynamics of the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’, which I approach as the uneven, creative, and often paradoxical process of adaptation and relation which the formal addition of *Kreol Morisien* to the national curriculum framework also engenders. But unlike some of the other concepts I have discussed in previous chapters, the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’, as I define it here, is not meant to operate as a descriptive or explanatory model. Rather, I see it as an interpretive framework that serves to appreciate the paradoxes, syncretisms, and rhizomatic connections at work in the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum in general and *Kreol*

*Morisien* textbooks, in particular. Hence, my goal is to move from the political, historical, and ethnocultural perspectives foregrounded in chapters 4 and 5, to engage in a more dynamic and relational analysis of the ways in which the teaching of *Kreol Morisien*, in particular, continues to participate in the creolizing of identities, epistemologies, and pedagogies.

This said, I want to specify that I do not view the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as a harmonious, consistent, and stable process that precludes ambivalence and ambiguity, or that evens out disparities, inequalities, or inconsistencies. Nor do I view it as a process that subscribes to *a priori* discourses of morality, i.e. as a process that should be seen as exclusively positive or exclusively negative. On the contrary, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, my goal is to also demonstrate that, while the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ obviously disrupts the logics and classifications of the multicultural curriculum, it may not be completely exonerated from these very logics and classifications. In other words, because any national curriculum is bound to normalizing technologies of representation, hierarchies, and values that run through all schooling, I approach the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ as a phenomenon that challenges such technologies, but that does not necessarily elude them entirely.

I shall further discuss this paradox of the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ later, but as a preamble to my analysis, I want to reiterate the critical distinction between my use of the terms ‘Creole’ and ‘creolization’/‘creolizing’. As I have previously emphasized, the word ‘Creole’—both as a noun and adjective—has slippery meanings in Mauritius, and is used in different contexts to refer to a variety of cultural, ethnic/racial, historical, and linguistic experiences (Lionnet, 2015a; Stewart, 2007). In fact, the polysemy and sometimes paradoxical uses of the term ‘Creole’ in *Kreol Morisien* and in the Mauritian context are largely due to the overlapping semantics of the term in French and English, that are also commonly used in the country. As

such, the term ‘Creole’, as discussed in chapter 2,<sup>90</sup> is used locally to refer to both a particular ethnic group of the country (Chan Low, 2003); and to all the inhabitants of the island (Eriksen 2002, 2007). But interestingly, Carpooran’s *Kreol Morisien* dictionary (Carpooran, 2011a) prioritizes a definition of the term ‘Creole’ that references a language, culture, and way of life which African and Malagasy peoples (both enslaved and free) and their descendants have nurtured and transmitted in Mauritius, as they gradually interacted and mixed with the other ethnic, racial, and cultural groups of the island (Boswell, 2006; Eriksen, 2007). Today, the obvious outcomes of this creolization process are what enable Afrocentric discourses associated with the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* in schools to describe, codify, and historicize the local Creole language, culture, and people.

Drawing from the work of Glissant (Glissant, 2010) and from his philosophical (rather than linguistic, anthropological, or historical) discussion of creolization, my use of the term ‘creolizing’, in contradistinction, is less interested in the classificatory and normalizing technology of the curriculum, but in the more fluid, and rhizomatic processes that would instead necessitate a non-linear, open-ended, and dynamic approach to the study of curriculum and of its established categories. As such, my goal in having recourse to the term ‘creolizing’ is to avoid limiting myself to thinking of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum as the mere finality of a teleological quest for ethno-political recognition and reparation (Harmon, 2011) that rests on the making of a particular and clearly identifiable ‘kind’ of Creole. Rather, I approach the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* as an ‘expression’—captured at a given moment—of a broader (inter)active process of relation and reciprocal transformation, that renders visible the fracturing of (ethno)national identities within the multicultural model more broadly. For that reason, while my analysis of the

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<sup>90</sup> Please refer to page 41 for the various overlapping definitions of the term ‘Creole’ in Mauritius.

creolizing dynamics will focus on the ways in which *Kreol Morisien* textbooks destabilize essentialized or Afrocentric representations of the local Creole culture in particular, I would argue that the reach of this creolizing process does not only affect the representation of one ethnocultural group. In other words, I do not necessarily view creolizing dynamics as something that is exclusive to Creoles. Rather, I would suggest that the creolizing of so-called Creole referents, which I observe in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, is also indicative of the ways in which the teaching of this *lingua franca* challenges the very logics of the multicultural nation, by underscoring how this creolizing process disrupts the very idea of bounded ethnocultural referents.

Based on a selection of *Kreol Morisien* textbooks issued between 2012 and 2018, and on their subsequent reception by a number of scholars and activists, my exploration of the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ will follow a bipartite sequence. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how, despite the official status of ‘optional ancestral language’ conferred upon *Kreol Morisien* in the multicultural curriculum, the pedagogical content and representations of actual textbooks foreground a much broader scope of the language which underscores its critical role—not just as ‘ancestral’, but also as national and transethnic—by disrupting the fixity of ethnocultural categories laid out in the multicultural curriculum. Namely, I argue that the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ brings to the fore some of the ambiguities, paradoxes, and ambivalence which the entanglement of competing discourses and representations generate in textbooks and curriculum design.

In the second section of this chapter, I turn my attention to a specific collection of *Kreol Morisien* textbooks—*Ki pase la? Bann lavantir Vanessa ek Leo*<sup>91</sup> [*Who’s passing by? The*

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<sup>91</sup> “*Ki pase la?*” can be translated from *Kreol Morisien* as “Who’s passing by?” or even as “What’s happening?”. It is drawn from the title of a popular Creole rhyme.



*Adventures of Vanessa and Leo*] (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2013-2017)—to consider how it has generated an unprecedented space, within the curriculum, for thinking more relationally about linguistic practices and cultural experiences that are deemed ‘specific’ to the local Creole culture. And because my use of the word ‘specific’ does not entail any form of exceptionalism, my goal in this section is not to identify a fixed set of ‘Creole content’ within the textbooks, but rather to demonstrate how the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’ is visible in the fluid and rhizomatic ways in which the textbooks engage with epistemologies, experiences, and ways of being that directly reference the elaboration and ongoing adaptation of the local Creole culture, and that consequently envision so-called Creole referents as profoundly relational.

In particular, I discuss in this section how the inclusion of elements of both tangible and intangible heritage brings into question the compartmentalization of identities and the hierarchical ordering of knowledges inherited from the colonial education system. As I reflect on the methodological principles adopted by textbooks designers for the establishment of a written corpus in *Kreol Morisien* in *Ki pase la?*, I further argue that their recourse to practices of retranscription, adaptation, collaboration, and intertextuality embody forms of extension, linkage, crossing, and intersection that are characteristic of creolizing methods and that ultimately destabilize the fixity of long-established categories and discourses (of literary genres, languages, and imaginaries). As I examine the rhizomatic principles at work in these practices, I look at them within Glissant’s framework of Relation that all at once links, relays, and relates (Glissant, 2010); and argue that the kind of intersectional spaces observable in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks provides the language with unprecedented and multidirectional possibilities for teachers and pupils to think and learn across languages, cultural expressions, geographies, and temporalities, that have traditionally been separated within the multicultural curriculum.

## A PARADOXICAL PROJECT: AMBIVALENCE AND AMBIGUITY IN THE CURRICULUM

In an article published in 2014, i.e. two years after the official launching of *Kreol Morisien* in Mauritian schools, language specialist Mooznah Auleear-Owodally was one of the first scholars to study the content of *Kreol Morisien* Grade 1 textbook in a full-length academic piece. Known for her work in literacy ideologies, multilingual education policies, and language choices, the author opted for a comparative approach while investigating the complex correlation between cultural pluralism, language, and ethnic identities as core elements of the ‘ancestral languages’ curriculum. While my goal here is not to repeat what I have already discussed in previous chapters regarding multiculturalism, ancestral politics, and language learning, I believe Auleear-Owodally’s comparison of textbooks in Hindi, Urdu, and *Kreol Morisien* highlights an interesting phenomenon which I will use as the starting point to my own discussion of ambivalence and ambiguity as key manifestations of the creolizing of the curriculum. Commenting on the overlapping of discourses in “Kreol textbooks”, namely when compared to Hindi and Urdu textbooks, the study points to a striking discrepancy between the three, which is described as follows:

The analysis of the three language textbooks has revealed **an interesting paradox**. While the three textbooks officially share the same status as ancestral language and are thus, in principle, guided by the same curriculum guidelines, it is clear that the curriculum guidelines are differently realised across the three textbooks. While the Urdu textbook introduces a limited number of words, foregrounding its status as a foreign language for the Mauritian language learners, and includes some images which carry ethno-religious connotations, the Hindi textbook tends more towards emphasising the ethno-religious-diasporic identity of Hindi in its choice of both words-

texts and images. As for the Kreol textbook, it presents Kreol as a national language of initial literacy with a few snapshots of an ethno-religious discourse mediated through some images.

How does one explain these nuances and differences across three textbooks, these three spaces?

(Auleear Owodally, 2014, p. 335, my emphasis)

As I began to reflect, several years ago, on the tensions, paradoxes, and competing discourses at work in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, I found Auleear-Owodally's remarks to be particularly thought-provoking. Indeed, what she labels an "interesting paradox" actually stems from the fact that, although they are similarly presented as 'ancestral languages' within the curriculum, the relevance and actual significance of Hindi, Urdu, and *Kreol Morisien* for "Mauritian language learners" are ultimately defined and conveyed very differently from one textbook to another. It is worth noting, however, that the author's assessment of "the Kreol textbook" stresses the multidimensional representation of *Kreol Morisien* and its triple role as "national language", language of "initial literacy", and ethno-religious symbol<sup>92</sup>: a complex and composite feature which differentiates it from other ancestral languages such as Hindu and Urdu.

Commenting on the frustrating nature of this "interesting paradox" as something that is either illogical or simply inconsistent vis-à-vis established policies, Auleear Owodally asks: "How does one explain these nuances and differences across three textbooks [...]?" To some degree, the question implies that *Kreol Morisien* textbooks infringe official "curriculum

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<sup>92</sup> As argued previously, the teaching of ancestral languages in Mauritius has long served within the multicultural education framework to consolidate the ethnocultural and religious identity of the various ethno-diasporic groups of the country. As such, references to religion have traditionally been an important—albeit sometimes implicit—component of the teaching of ancestral languages. In the case of *Kreol Morisien*, Auleear Owodally writes that "it [*Kreol Morisien*] is an ancestral language—the language associated with the descendants of the enslaved, the Creoles, and by extension, it is the language associated with Christianity since most enslaved were made to convert to Christianity" (Auleear Owodally, 2014, p. 319). This probably explains why Auleear Owodally highlights the presence of "a few snapshots of an ethno-religious discourse mediated through some images" (p. 335) in her analysis of the Grade 1 *Kreol Morisien* textbook. Her observations here are largely based on the reading of images included in the textbook, that feature, for instance, a bride adorning a traditional Christian wedding dress.

guidelines”. In other words, they are seen as objects that have digressed from their initial purpose; they are the unforeseen and largely ‘incoherent’ results (or *résultantes*) of an unexpected process. Yet, in pointing to the textbook’s lack of ‘coherence’ as something problematic and unreliable, I would argue that Auleear-Owodally overlooks how creative and unscripted dynamics impacting the curriculum can in fact circumvent established taxonomies and categories.

Indeed, in Glissant’s theory, paradox, contradiction, and uncertainty are key indicators of an active process of creolization. In his *Traité du Tout-monde*, for instance, he defines creolization as “the meeting, the interference, the shock, the harmonies and disharmonies between [sic] cultures, in the realized totality of the world-earth” (Glissant, 1997, p. 194 Wiedorn, 2018, p. 6). As I consider how conflicting views regarding the cultural and pedagogical relevance of *Kreol Morisien* ultimately find their way in policy documents and textbooks, my goal is thus not to disentangle these views, but to examine instead how the teaching of the language is caught within layers of contradictions, that are expressed through ambivalent discourses and ambiguous representations. More specifically, with the term ‘ambivalence’, I refer, on the one hand, to the apparent discrepancies or inconsistencies between political discourses, ethnocultural expectations, and how they actually translate in the textbooks’ pedagogical and cultural approaches. As for the term ‘ambiguity’, I use it, on the other hand, to discuss the so-called unreliability, or lack of transparency and/or identifiable features, which some scholars and activists have underscored in their analysis of textbooks, namely when considering the representation of ‘Creole’ cultural heritage (through stories, images, themes, and names).

While some of these critiques specifically address the tensions at work in textbooks' representations of (Afro-)Creole experiences, I would argue that the creolizing of the curriculum precisely challenges the fixity and stability of *a priori* definitions of language, culture, and identity. In other words, this creolizing process may not completely escape systematic planning and techniques of normalization and hierarchization that subtend the 'ancestral language' framework; still, it produces non-teleological *résultantes* that do not subscribe to the established guidelines, principles, and categories of the multicultural curriculum. As I think through the complexities of this process, I realize however that if ambivalence and ambiguity indeed trouble 'clear' or essentialized representations of Creole identities, histories, and experiences, they also presuppose the very existence of these representations within the curriculum. It is thus with this idea in mind that I propose to investigate how the tensions and paradoxes at work in the textbooks generate unstable or fluid meanings that simultaneously participate in the rehabilitation of Creole culture while also challenging the naturalized logics of representativeness at work in the multicultural curriculum.

### ***An ambivalent curriculum***

*Kreol Morisien* was officially introduced in the national curriculum framework as an ancestral language, "on a par with other ancestral languages" (Harmon, 2017, p. 8); yet, its place and significance within the Mauritian society encompass at least two additional dimensions which are rarely associated with these "other ancestral languages". Indeed, in addition to being considered an important component of (Afro-)Creole heritage, *Kreol Morisien* is not only the mother tongue of a wide majority of Mauritians (Statistics Mauritius, 2011), but it also stands out as the only *lingua franca* of the country which is shared by all the ethnic groups of the nation.

This is to say that the ancestral value which *Kreol Morisien* bears for (Afro-)Creoles was but one of at least three possible justifications for officially introducing the language in schools in 2012. In chapter 5, I explained how the ethnocultural claim was ultimately prioritized as the principal justification for the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum. But despite the official status of ancestral language bestowed upon *Kreol Morisien*, and despite the curriculum guidelines governing this status, its pedagogical value as mother tongue and national language always remained at the forefront of curricular debates.

On the first page of their *Addendum to the National Curriculum Framework: Kreol Morisien*, for instance, Rughoonundun-Chellapermal and Jean-François (2012) clearly acknowledge the contribution of representatives from various institutions and stakeholders of the local education system, whose endorsement was crucial to the adoption and implementation of the project. A number of these stakeholders, however—including *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, Playgroup, and ABAIM—had historically opposed the ethnicization of the language in schools, to better foreground its significance as mother tongue and/or national language, arguing that the use of *Kreol Morisien* as an official medium of instruction, instead of merely an optional school subject, would be more beneficial to the education system and to Mauritian children in general. Indeed, the advocacy of such groups in favor of the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as a medium of instruction in schools raises the question of linguistic rights and of the pedagogical value of learning both about *Kreol Morisien* and in *Kreol Morisien*. In other words, it points to the limits and implications of the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language, for all the ‘non-Creole’ children who have *Kreol Morisien* as their mother tongue but who are still expected to

use English as the official school language for the acquisition of basic literary and numeracy skills.<sup>93</sup>

This is to say that, from the onset, the curriculum brought together a wide array of competing perspectives, discourses, and agendas which did not sit well together—at least when measured against the established categories of the multicultural curriculum—but which nevertheless spoke together to the complex ethnocultural, linguistic, and political landscape of the country. This intermingling of discourses is precisely what will turn the *Kreol Morisien*

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<sup>93</sup> In fact, until its formal addition to the curriculum in 2012, the idea of opting for *Kreol Morisien* as the official medium of instruction (in lieu of English) in Mauritian schools has received critical support from a number of associations and pedagogical institutions, including Playgroup, ABAIM, *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer* (LPT), and BEC. Since 1979, for instance, the Federation of Pre-school Playgroups has continuously emphasized the critical role played by *Kreol Morisien* in the psychological and cognitive development of children. In addition to issuing and publishing several pedagogical materials designed to educate young children, it has, for over thirty-five years, developed and implemented a particular pedagogical approach foregrounding the use of children’s mother tongue, that has been adopted by several private pre-primary schools across the island. Similarly, the well-known association ABAIM has, since 1995, centered its action on the rehabilitation of vulnerable children, namely through the valorization of popular/folk Creole culture and the use of *Kreol Morisien* as a viable medium of instruction in its extracurricular “Saturday Care” program. Over the years, ABAIM has provided educational and social support to several generations of children who, otherwise, would not have been able to succeed at school. As a means to address the high number of failures at the end of the primary school cycle, the Catholic education authority (BEC; now SeDEC), also launched the PrevokBEC—a pioneering mother-tongue based prevocational program implemented in their secondary schools in 2004. Intended for students who joined the prevocational stream as a result of an unsatisfactory performance at the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), the program was the first nation-wide initiative to feature *Kreol Morisien* both as a formal medium of instruction and as a taught subject (Harmon, 2017). These various initiatives ultimately demonstrate that mother-tongue based education has long been at the center of the debates regarding the necessity to use *Kreol Morisien* in schools. With a specific focus on the working class, the left-wing oriented non-governmental association LPT has also historically stood at the forefront of the promotion of *Kreol Morisien* in its campaign against illiteracy. Notably, the association organized an international hearing in October 2009 to discuss the harm caused to children whose mother tongue is suppressed in schools (Ledikasyon Pu Travayer, 2009a, 2009b). With the participation of acclaimed writer-activist Lindsey Collen, and the collaboration of renowned linguistic human rights scholars Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, LPT long lobbied for the elaboration and implementation of a mother-tongue based multilingual curriculum, that would center the role of *Kreol Morisien* in formal schooling. A case in point, most of the groups, organizations, and institutions aforementioned (i.e. at least Playgroup, ABAIM, LPT, and BEC/SeDEC)—which advocated for the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as a medium of instruction, on the basis of its role either as mother tongue or as national language—were actually invited to attend the National Forum organized by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources on August 30, 2010, to discuss the policies and modalities associated with the introduction of the language in schools in 2012. This being said, the political decision to introduce *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language ultimately marginalized the existing debates around the importance of *Kreol Morisien* as a medium of instruction for all Mauritian children who are entitled to the use of their mother tongue in schools. While this chapter focuses on the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* as a school subject, rather than as a medium of instruction, it is however worth highlighting that this question of learning both about and in one’s language continues to feed into the ambivalent discourse around the purpose and significance of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum.

curriculum into an ambivalent project that would not only foreground competing perspectives, but that would also subsequently ‘contradict’ itself.

In an attempt to reach an agreement between these many institutions and stakeholders involved in the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, the *Addendum* has recourse to the six *perspektiv* (standpoints) as a methodology for identifying, isolating, and/or categorizing imbricated dimensions of the language, which are *in fine* not that easy to disentangle. In its very first *perspektiv*<sup>94</sup>, for example, the *Addendum* ponders on the psychological and affective significance of *Kreol Morisien* for primary school learners. Namely, this *perspektiv* emphasizes the language’s critical importance as mother tongue, by highlighting the necessity of establishing “*enn pon ant lakaz ek lekol atraver langaz ki bann zanfaz deza pe koze dan zot fami*” [a bridge between home and school, by means of a language which children already use in their family] (Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, the *Addendum* specifies that:

*Se langaz dan ki zot viv ek se langaz ki zot servi pou konstrir zot bann interaksion, dekrir zot lanvironnman ek rakont zot lexyans [...] Kan enn zanfan pe kapav servi, explwat ek explor so lang maternel, se lansanb bann experyans ek bann reper ki sa langaz-la veikile dan so lavi ek*

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<sup>94</sup> As mentioned in chapter 5, the “Psychological and affective” standpoint—which insists on the importance of *Kreol Morisien* as the home language of a majority Mauritian children—actually precedes the “historical and anthropological” *perspektiv* of the *Addendum*. Although deliberate, the authors’ choice to discuss the pedagogical role of *Kreol Morisien* as mother tongue, prior to spelling out its ethnocultural significance for Creoles, is at odds with the official rubric of ‘ancestral language’ under which the *lingua franca* was officially introduced in the curriculum. This said, the ‘inconsistencies’ around the role and status of the language is, I would argue, a recurring feature of the creolizing of the curriculum, since they bring to the fore the intertwining of representations and discourses that ultimately generates paradoxes and contradictions in the very conception of the curriculum. As a reminder, the curriculum itself has a normalizing role in schools, which is to say that it is largely governed by logics of classification and categorization that subscribe to the ethnonationalist discourses of the multicultural nation. Such inconsistencies in the curriculum therefore underscores the limits of Mauritian multiculturalism by suggesting that all the children of the country—regardless of their ethnic (self-)identification—would benefit from the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* in schools.



*dan so bann linteraksion, ki li pou kapav amenn avek li dan lekol [...]. Prezans Kreol Morisien dan lekol, li pou ousi diminie risk ki nou sistem ledikasyon—kot lansengnman ek laprantisaz fer ofisielman an Angle—vinn enn lespas alienasion ou marzinalizasion aköz bann fenomenn diskriminasion lingwistik.*

[It's the language they [the children] live in, and the language they use to build social interaction, describe their environment and share their experience [...]. When a child is able to use, perform, and explore **his mother tongue**, he is able to bring to school the wide repertoire of experiences he has in that language [...]. The presence of *Kreol Morisien* in schools also reduces the risk that our education system—where English is the official medium of instruction—becomes a space of alienation or marginalization, as a result of linguistic discrimination.]

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, pp. 4–5, my emphasis)

What the beginning of the document foregrounds as the principal reason behind the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* in schools is not its ancestral value but its relevance as mother tongue for addressing linguistic discrimination. But by prioritizing the sociocultural paradigm of (language) learning over the ethnocultural claim that has actually made the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools possible, the *Addendum* also introduces a confusion as regards the status of the language in the curriculum, raising the following questions: should *Kreol Morisien* be taught in schools as an ancestral language (that focuses on particular questions of ethnocultural identity and heritage) or as a language of initial literacy (see Auleear-Owodally's discussion above)? What exactly is the main function of the language in the curriculum? Who are the learners really concerned by the teaching of *Kreol Morisien*? This is something which Sydney—one the local academics I interviewed in 2018 about his views of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum—also

brought up during our conversation. Part of Sydney's remarks indeed referenced this overlapping of discourses and the kind of back-and-forth which he observed in the curriculum between the idea of mother-tongue based multilingual education and the focus on the 'ancestrality' of *Kreol Morisien*:

**I think one important issue is the issue of expectations.** [...] I don't know whether it was deliberate or it happened haphazardly but it was a policy that gave rise to the emergence of a lot of expectations. **For some dreadful [...] [a]nd for the others, very hopeful expectations.** Now you have different agents that explain this. [...] The way the policy was announced [...] in a speech in Parliament [...] as a policy to foster learning, because everywhere in the world mother-tongue based multilingual education is being [sic]—citing UNESCO and whatever. **So, you create one set of expectations. The expectations here are of a pedagogical nature.** [...] Now after that [...], the expectations shift from the pedagogical nature to a sort of reparation, you know, we are repairing an injustice for one segment of the population and it is there that the ethnic dimension comes in. It is there that **we shift from pedagogy to ancestral language.** [...] Now when curriculum developers write the curriculum this features there. It is spelled out as well, the Afro-Mauritian community and so on... and their ancestral language [...]. I get the impression that it was an exercise of [...] tight rope walking. [...] you try to restore the balance. You know you restore the balance, that's why I call it an exercise of tight rope walking. [...] You see this pattern in the *Addendum*. And so, **curriculum developers they need to balance things.**

(Interview with Sydney, Summer 2018, my emphasis)

Sydney's comments about the change in focus from mother-tongue based education as an inclusive measure, to ancestral language as an act of reparation, calls to attention how linguistic functions are isolated, categorized, and pitted against each other within the national (or

multicultural) curriculum framework. His discussion also points to the fact that national curricula (and curriculum developers) are primarily expected to ‘normalize’, implement, and enforce specific educational policies; and not to put them in question or render them ambivalent. With regard to the official status of *Kreol Morisien*, Sydney thus argues that the “shift from pedagogy to ancestral language” affects people’s representations, attitudes, trust, and expectations. For him, the oscillation between these two ‘opposite’ frameworks—at least if we abide by the classificatory techniques of the existing curriculum—reveals how the inclusion of additional *perspektiv* that do not strictly conform to official guidelines ultimately generate instability and ambivalence. By assuming that the expectations vis-à-vis *Kreol Morisien* are “for some dreadful [...] and for others, very hopeful”, he indeed anticipates possible reactions on the part of the various institutions, stakeholders, and pressure groups—including ‘Afro-Mauritian’ activists—whose expectations inevitably correlate with the fact that *Kreol Morisien* was ultimately introduced in schools for its ancestral significance, and not because of its pedagogical value.

Sydney’s reading of competing expectations presupposes clear distinctions and boundaries between categories of discourse and “sets” of expectations. As such, his assessment tends to relate the ambivalence of the curriculum to what he describes as a shift from one fixed discursive category to another, when in effect these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, they often overlap and co-exist alongside each other. But, even as he draws from a teleological approach to this notion of ‘shift’, change, or evolution, Sydney’s remarks still point to the fact that the ambivalence of the curriculum results from the heterogeneity of (incompatible) discourses, agendas, and visions related to the status of *Kreol Morisien*, that involves constant (re)negotiations and (re)adjustments. By using the metaphor of the “tight-rope walking” to describe the approach of the *Addendum*’s authors—broadly labeled here as

curriculum developers—he thus compares their recourse to multiple *perspektiv* to an act of “balanc[ing] things”, i.e. of refraining from reducing *Kreol Morisien* to a unique social, political, or ethnocultural function.

As I reflect on the inclusion of multiple *perspektiv* in the *Addendum*, I would contend however that this inclusion does not necessarily neutralize tensions, nor does it reach a consensus between so-called irreconcilable or competing visions of *Kreol Morisien*. Rather, it acknowledges the complex overlapping of linguistic experiences which the introduction of the language in the curriculum renders visible. One could refer, for instance, to the fourth *perspektiv* of the document (“the political standpoint”), where the authors insist, this time, on another double significance of *Kreol Morisien*, which holds both ‘ancestral’ and ‘national’ value in Mauritius:

*langaz Kreol Morisien li ena omwin de prinsipal fonksion sosio-idantiter: li ena valer langaz ansestral pou kominote kreol dan Moris (cf. perspektiv istorik ek antropozik), ek li ousi posed enn dimansion federater ki bien inportan pou tou Morisien, independaman de zot kominote. Sa de fonksion-la pa kontradiktwar, zot pa neserman konplemanter non pli, me zot koresponn avek de realite bien tanzib ek bien inportan dan bann reprezantasyon ek dan litalizasyon ki bann lokiter langaz Kreol Morisien adopte.*

[*Kreol Morisien* holds at least two main social functions: it has an ancestral significance for the Creole community in Mauritius (c.f. the historical and anthropological standpoint), and it serves a unifying role for all Mauritians, regardless of their respective community. These two functions are neither contradictory, nor complementary; they rather correspond to two tangible and critical realities when it comes to the representations and uses of *Kreol Morisien* by its speakers.]

(Rughoonundun-Chellapermal & Jean-François, 2012, p. 11)

In terms of its content and rhetoric, this quote is symptomatic of the kind of paradox at work in the curriculum. Indeed, while the authors of the document had already identified *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles, here they insist on the multiple and compound significance of the language, by reminding readers of its unifying potential as a national symbol. The reference to (and discussion of) the double function of *Kreol Morisien* further mobilizes a rhetorical figure which presents the language both as the property of a specific group and as everybody's. But how can a language be both exclusive and inclusive? How can it belong to a few and to all at the same time? How can it be both particular and national?

In her comparative critique of the *Kreol Morisien* textbook for Grade 1, Auleear-Owodally raises similar questions, and insists on the lack of consistency between the official policy that subtends the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language, and the actual content of the textbook which additionally foregrounds its national value:

Even though the textbook is written by government-authorised writers working within the paradigm of 'Kreol as an ancestral language', the history of Kreol and its double identity have caught up with the writers' representation of the language in the textbook. [...] **This juggling between the two discourses of 'Kreol as a national language' and 'Kreol as an ethno-religious language'**, reveals, reflects and contributes to maintaining **the historical ambivalence that surrounds the identity of Kreol**. This tension in the discourse at the level of the textbook is shaped by the tensions found in the local context; in parallel, this tension in the discourse at the level of the textbook presumably contributes to perpetuating the ambiguity around the identity of Kreol.

(Auleear Owodally, 2014, pp. 335–336, my emphasis)

Auleear-Owodally's description of the ambivalence at work in *Kreol Morisien* Grade 1 textbook recalls Sydney's discussion of the *Addendum* namely as she references official policy guidelines regarding *Kreol Morisien* (i.e. ancestral) as a barometer for gauging the more unofficial (and therefore questionable) presence of a national rhetoric in the textbook. Once again, it is worth noting that the metaphor of the juggler implies a lack of coherence (and stability) on the part of textbook writers. It also suggests that the only way to address multiplicities efficiently is through disentanglement and clear delineation.

While I tend to agree with Auleear-Owodally that this kind of ambivalence is indicative of the paradoxes at the heart of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum project itself, her take on 'ambivalence' contrasts with the stance taken by the authors of the *Addendum* who argue—in the quote above—that the double feature of *Kreol Morisien* (i.e. 'ancestral' and 'national') "is neither contradictory, nor complementary". Indeed, in approaching the complex social, political, and ethnocultural dimensions associated with the language, Rughoonundun-Chellapermal and Jean-François do not present the overlapping of discourses about the status of *Kreol Morisien* as a paradox that needs to be neutralized. Rather, the *Addendum* acknowledges these complexities and insists on the fact that these contrasted functions "correspond to two tangible and critical realities when it comes to the representations and uses of *Kreol Morisien* by its speakers". As such, the document embraces forms of multiplicities and entangled linguistic practices that have long been abjected and dismissed by the national curriculum (see chapter 4). Ultimately, the *Addendum* illustrates how, within the creolizing dynamics of the curriculum, predetermined categories have to be acknowledged and addressed as part of the classificatory techniques of the curriculum; but they may not be necessarily conceived as fixed, discrete, and mutually exclusive.

In other words, if the *Addendum*'s discourse around the status of *Kreol Morisien* inevitably operates within the pre-established constraints of the linguistic categories of the multicultural curriculum, it still approaches these categories as relational (rather than oppositional) by suggesting that they are part of a shared network of relation, exchange, and reciprocal influence, which I shall further discuss in the second part of this chapter.

### ***Ambiguous Representations***

A key component of the local multicultural education model, the teaching of ancestral languages in Mauritius has long served as an ethnopolitical device for reproducing and consolidating the idea that the multicultural nation is composed of a collection of discrete and clearly delineated ethnic/racial groups. These ethnic groups are commonly differentiated on the basis of essentializing markers or referents—including names, phenotype, skin color, language, religion, sociocultural practices, cuisine, garment, etc.—recognizable by all, and considered evidence of their legitimate ethnocultural identity. For this reason, the institutional value of most ancestral languages (in contrast with a national language, for instance) directly correlates with their ability to unambiguously 'represent' one particular ethnic group, and to engage with this group's specific history, way of life, and place within the broader Mauritian landscape, in as explicit terms as possible.

Before looking more closely at how the representation of Creoles is performed in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, I want to briefly return to some components of my earlier discussion of the complex expectations associated with the presence of the language in schools. Given the official status of 'ancestral language' under which it was introduced in the curriculum, it indeed seems legitimate that one would expect *Kreol Morisien* textbooks to actually serve a strong/unique

‘representational’ purpose vis-à-vis the Creole community of the island, whose history, culture, and knowledge have long been abjected within formal education. But, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, the term ‘Creole’ itself is often used in a paradoxical way, insofar as it is both specific and fluid, both exclusive and inclusive. If, on the one hand, Creole identity in Mauritius presupposes an identification to the history and legacy of African and Malagasy slaves, it is, on the other hand, also strongly associated with a history of miscegenation, *métissage*, syncretism, and adaptation. In other words, Creoles in Mauritius are as much defined by their shared and “imagined” (Anderson, 2006) African and Malagasy ancestry, as by their collective experience of cultural creativity, newness, and constant transformation. To think through the complex use of the term ‘Creole’ and its representations in Mauritius, thus requires one to be attentive to broader ontological and phenomenological considerations, i.e. to think of ethnic identities at large not as mere abstract categories confined to stable and predetermined markers, but rather as relational and embodied practices, that are subject to change, variability, and reciprocal influence.

In response to the conceptual tensions generated by this double approach to ethnic identities, theologian and anthropologist Danielle Palmyre-Florigny notably argues that no ethnic group in Mauritius can claim to have been more creolized than Afro-Creoles. By doing so, she acknowledges the fact that all the ethnic groups of the island are obviously creolized, but still insists on the particular degree to which Afro-Creoles have been creolized. This is because—in contrast with other ancestral or diasporic groups of the island—Black African and Malagasy peoples saw their cultures, languages, and expressive practices (music, clothing, oral literature, arts, etc.) rejected, denied, and literally prohibited, sometimes even prior to their arrival in Mauritius. Hence, they were forced to adapt to a new cultural, linguistic, social, and ecological environment; and this process of forced adaptation is what made them the first ‘real’ Creoles of



the island (Palmyre-Florigny, 2003). According to Palmyre-Florigny, to claim one's identity as Afro-Creole in Mauritius thus means to acknowledge the violent history that has forced slaves and their descendants to have recourse to creolizing strategies for the sake of (cultural and social) survival; but it also means to move beyond the recognizable and so-called typical markers of African or Malagasy heritage, to embrace *métissage*, multiplicity, and hybridity, as the obvious manifestations of this creolizing process.

In chapters 4 and 5, I insisted on the ambiguity long associated with Creoles, and their subsequent abjection as 'those who do not belong' within the multicultural framework of the nation, because of their general inability to identify—if only arbitrarily—with a single people, culture, language, or land of origin. Drawing from Glissant's approach to creolization, and from his relational approach to identities in general, Palmyre-Florigny argues that Creole identity is both open [*identité ouverte*] and irreducible—which is to say that, beyond their link to Africa and Madagascar as places of ancestry, memory, and cultural heritage, Creole genealogies overtly transcend vertical or linear logics of filiation, by branching out to multiple geographies, histories, cultures, and imaginaries, through a practice of Relation (Glissant, 2010):

*les Créoles peuvent étendre leurs liens identitaires non seulement à l'Afrique, mais aussi aux mondes créoles les plus divers, ceux de l'océan Indien comme ceux des Caraïbes, tout comme ils peuvent reconnaître une part d'eux-mêmes dans les cultures indiennes et européennes.*

[Creoles may claim links not only to Africa, but also to a diversity of Creole worlds located in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean; just like they can identify with Indian and European cultures.]

(Palmyre-Florigny, 2003, p. 6)

While the practice of Relation is certainly not exclusive to Creole identity—which is to say that creolization indeed affects all the so-called ethnic groups of the island to varying degrees—Palmyre-Florigny’s discussion reminds us of how the particular representation of Creole identity as ambiguous, unclear, and illegitimate (because of the lack of a unique filiation) has historically led to the exclusion and marginalization of Creoles in Mauritius, including in the education system and the national curriculum framework (see chapter 4). Indeed, objects and entities commonly considered as ambiguous are hard to classify or categorize, precisely because they display features generally associated with two or more categories within a given taxonomy. An expression of “in-betweenness” (Bhabha, 2004), ambiguity tends to connote opacity, lack of fixity, and dissolution of frontiers. As such, it is often viewed as negative or deceiving, at least when read from the purist or essentialist perspectives of the multicultural curriculum. In the following pages, however, I consider how this ambiguity, as it relates to multiple forms of identification, is precisely what allows *Kreol Morisien* textbooks to represent Creoles in ways that subtly challenge the essentialist logics of the multicultural curriculum. Namely, I argue that this ambiguity—in conjunction with the wide array of possible identifications—disrupts clearly-delineated ethnic categories and acts as the unscripted manifestation of the ‘creolizing of the curriculum’.

In his 2017 monograph titled *Heritage Language and Identity Construction: A Study of Kreol Morisien*, Harmon is one of the first scholars to actually call to attention the issues of ambiguity and visibility at stake in the visual representations of Creoles adopted by *Kreol Morisien* textbooks. In his study, he specifically considers the phenotypic elements associated with the main characters of *Ki pase la? Bann lavantir Vanessa ek Leo*, a series of textbooks designed for Grades 2 to 6, and featuring two primary school children, Vanessa and Leo. With

the textbook series bearing their names in its very title, the two fictional characters are systematically represented on each of the textbooks' covers (see Figure 9). For the sake of my discussion of ambiguity as manifestation of creolizing dynamics, I shall thus focus my attention on both characters.



Figure 9: Covers of *Ki pase la?* textbooks (Mauritius Institute of Education 2012-2018)

Prior to her leading role in *Ki pase la?*, Vanessa's character originally appeared in a story from the Grade 1 *Kreol Morisien* textbook. Drawn by visual artist Evan Sohun, the original illustration (see Figure 10) of Vanessa features a bold and frolicsome colored girl (of roughly 5 to 6 years old), being chased by a young boy (later replaced by Leo). From the onset, Vanessa's physical appearance, and more specifically her hairstyle, was what made her endearing, especially for young pupils. Dark in color, her two high puffs—in contrast, namely, with smooth silky hair—indeed became her most distinctive feature. From the textbook covers reproduced above (Figure 9), we can however note that both Vanessa's skin and hair color tend to vary slightly from one drawing to the other, making room for a rather fluid interpretation of the character's phenotype. As for Leo—who had a less prominent role than Vanessa, in the

beginning—he is also largely represented using the same skin and hair color as his female counterpart.



Figure 10: Original illustration of Vanessa in the Grade 1 *Kreol Morisien* textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017a, p. 43)

Commenting on the principal ethnic referents foregrounded in *Ki pase la?*, Harmon writes that “the *KM* textbook in terms of its content (pictures, facial and phenotype representations and activities) render ambiguous the visibility of cultural referents of the Creole pupils” (Harmon, 2014, p. 415). In other words, in his appreciation of the textbooks, Creole characters and Creole referents are not Creole enough because they appear too ambiguous. In his analysis of the ethnic features associated with Vanessa and Leo, Harmon starts by discussing the names attributed to the two characters:

[...] the panel opted for ‘neutral names’ which would not be identifiable with any ethnic group in Mauritius [...] but names ‘with a bit of European accent’ were formulated. Thus the two main

characters of the textbook bear the names ‘Leo’ (boy) and ‘Vanessa’ (girl). [...] But the fact that ‘a bit of European’ names have been chosen represents a European cultural hegemony.

(Harmon, 2017, p. 271)

Using an Afrocentric approach—which tends to cast all non-African and non-Malagasy referents as non-Creole—Harmon contends that the choice of names such as ‘Vanessa’ and ‘Leo’ neutralizes the protagonists’ ethnic identity and undermines the kind of ethnocultural identification usually expected from the teaching of an ancestral language. As such, his remarks point to the same kind of tensions which I discussed earlier between exclusive and inclusive definitions of Creole identity. While it is true that names such as Vanessa and Leo are neither of African nor Malagasy origin, I would argue that this question of names brings to the fore an interesting aspect of the textbook’s approach to the question of Creole identity as something that is both “open and irreducible”. A transethnic first name *par excellence*, ‘Vanessa’ is indeed commonly used across many ethnic groups in Mauritius, which means that it is given as much to Creoles as it is to Franco-Mauritians, Sino-Mauritians, and Hindus (more specifically Tamils). While it is thus in practice a Creole name, ‘Vanessa’ is not exclusively (or restrictively) Creole. For this reason, I would agree that the choice of a name such as ‘Vanessa’ does not necessarily emphasize the Afro-centric origin of Creole identity in Mauritius; rather, it relates this identity to the principles of inclusivity, fluidity, and non-fixity that are constantly at work in the process of creolization.

It is in fact worth mentioning at this point that while the textbook series presents Vanessa as a Creole character, it actually makes no mention of her ancestral origin as such. In the Grade 5 textbook (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017c), however, we do learn that her grandmother is a Hindu woman named Dadi Sita; which is to say that, as regard its approach to ethnic identities

and ancestral links, *Ki pase la?* does not consider references to India and/or Hindu culture as incompatible with Creole culture<sup>95</sup>. By doing so, the textbooks series not only circumvents the kind of essentialist discourse that exclusively relate Creole figures to Africa; it also includes the contribution and active participation of non-African groups in the ongoing dynamics of creolization in Mauritius. But, interestingly enough, Harmon’s critique does not mention the link to India. Rather, he discusses the implications of referencing what he defines as European heritage (or what he describes as “European cultural hegemony”) over African heritage. According to him, names like ‘Vanessa’ are supposedly “neutral” because they are not “identifiable” enough. In other words, they do not fit the Afrocentric and clearly-delineated ethnic construct that accounts for the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language in schools. Yet, I would argue that, while names such as ‘Vanessa’ and ‘Leo’ do not explicitly reference an African filiation, they point to the presence of a non-essentialist vision of culture and identity that implicitly runs through *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, and that ultimately resists the predominant paradigm of ethnic separatism, ancestral filiation, and cultural exclusivity that affect the representation of all ethnic groups of the island within the multicultural curriculum.

This “open” depiction of Creole identity—as one that is also “irreducible”, opaque, and paradoxical—calls to re-assessment Harmon’s discussion of “neutrality” as a mere reification of “European cultural hegemony”. Indeed, as argued by Glissant and others, the process of creolization does not necessarily diffuse or avoid the tensions at work in post-colonial or post-abolition contexts; neither does it neutralize power differentials or view them as binary. Rather, a

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<sup>95</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the first four volumes of *Ki pase la?* (published between 2013 and 2016) make no mention of the ethnic identity or ancestral origin of Vanessa’s parents or grandparents. The Grade 5 issue of the series, published in 2017, is in fact the first one to specify that Vanessa’s grandmother is Hindu, in a story written by Mauritian writer Carl de Souza. As such, I would argue that the ‘fictional’ stories included in *Ki pase la?* tend to approach Creole identity and culture as inclusive and relational, in contrast with the official guidelines that predominantly conceive of ethnic identity as exclusive and bounded.

creolizing approach acknowledges tensions and paradoxes, by working through them, with them, and in spite of them. A case in point, the practice of giving European names to children is still widespread in a majority of formerly colonized spaces, including Sub-Saharan Africa. And while the 1990s' episode of the *malaise créole* has prompted a few (Afro-)Creole parents to give Ashanti or Yoruba first names to their offspring in Mauritius (Eriksen, 2007), this practice has not gained currency. Today, most Creole children still bear European or Christian first names, such as 'Jacques' or 'Marie'; and while this is obviously part of a colonial history of Christianization and cultural hegemony, it also points to the broader dynamics of cultural creolization that involves changes and exchanges as a result of uneven encounters between various racial and cultural groups since the colonial period.

In addition to his analysis of the two characters' first names, Harmon formulates a similar description of their phenotypic features: "All human appearances in the pictures are not real life [sic] characters but character drawings. The characters are not easily recognisable in terms of the different phenotypes existing in Mauritius. But what is striking is that none of the pictures are portrayals of African phenotype [...]" (Harmon, 2017, p. 226). During a personal exchange I had with him in 2018, Harmon elaborated on this description and further commented on the visual representations of Vanessa and Leo:

*To pou trouve ki mo konklizion, 'textbook' Kreol, 'first, Creole identity' oblitere ladan in! Bann-la fer linpas. Mo 'nn analiz bann zimaz, mo 'nn analiz bann dimounn, bann linz. E pwi seve. [...] lerla kan to gete, bann zimaz Leo ek sipa Vanessa, to pa fouti dir sipa Leo enn Kreol ouswa Vanessa enn Kreol parski zimaz-la li 'blurred'. To pa trouve mem sipa li enn rasta sipa li soz. So seve mem pou inposib dir twa sipa to kav idantifie li a tel group etnik dan Moris.*

[I came to the conclusion that in the *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, first, Creole identity is obliterated. They [the textbook writers] undermined it. I have analyzed images, representations of human figures and clothing. And hair. [...] even when looking closely, one can't tell whether Leo is Creole or whether Vanessa is Creole; their images are blurred. You can't even tell whether she is a rasta, or whatever. Even her hair does not allow you to situate her within an ethnic group in Mauritius.]

(Interview with Harmon, Summer 2018)

In his analysis of ethnic representations, Harmon concludes that “one can't tell whether Leo is Creole or whether Vanessa is Creole”. Given however that Creoles in Mauritius actually look very different from each other—because of varying degrees of *métissage*—what constitutes the basis of an ‘absolute’ Creole phenotype is highly debatable. Moreover, to confine Creole identity to a fixed set of phenotypic referents such as skin color and hair type runs the risk of reproducing the same logics that have subtended the colonial taxonomies of racial and ethnic difference at work in the multicultural curriculum. As discussed in chapter 4, the promotion of such demarcated identifications is precisely what has led to the abjection of Creoles from the national curriculum in the first place, because of connotations of impurity and illegitimacy. In other words, if Creoles are indeed defined by relation, as much as by filiation; by *métissage* and syncretism, as much as by African/Malagasy ancestry; why would Vanessa or Leo not qualify as Creole ‘enough’?

By casting ambiguous and non-Afrocentric names and figures as not “identifiable” and “not easily recognizable”, Harmon's discussion of *Ki pase la?* brings back to mind some of the foregrounding questions of this dissertation: How does the national curriculum respond to the complexity and irreducibility of Creole identity within the multicultural framework? How does



the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* as an ancestral language engage with this complexity? And how can the creolizing of the curriculum help us to better appreciate the multiplicities and ambiguities associated with Creole experiences, through its implicit critique of the long-standing marginalization of non-essentialized identities within the curriculum? In the absence of an ontological discourse that could account for an absolute Creole phenotype, Harmon dismisses the paradoxes and ambiguities that subtend Creole identity, by turning once again to the compartmentalizing framework of the multicultural nation. From there, he sustains his claim for more “explicit cultural referents” by arguing that it is the ethno-political function of ancestral languages to ‘clearly’ represent their respective ethnic groups:

In the textbook, the pictures are ambiguous in terms of ethnic identification. The colour used and the image resolution seem to have deliberately hidden such identification. [...] Oriental Language textbooks contain Asian human faces and have explicit cultural referents (e.g. names, stories, religion and cultural traditions). So, I would say that pupils who study Oriental Languages have cultural referents whilst Creole pupils have none. The invisibility of the Creoles in the textbook [...] suggests that talking about the Creole community was a taboo. [...] In fact, the Creole culture and identity are neutralised in a sense by a folk culture ideology in the KM textbook.

(Harmon, 2017, p. 271)

It is worth noting how, from his comparison with the other ancestral languages of the curriculum, Harmon equates the ambiguity of visual representations in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks to mere “invisibility”. In doing so, he not only denies the hybrid features of Creole identity—by extending the same essentialist principles imposed on local “Oriental” referents—, but he also dismisses the fact that “[a] relevant aspect of Creole identity, as opposed to other ethnic identities

in Mauritius, is its fluidity and openness” (Eriksen, 2007, p. 161). By treating ambiguities and the lack of transparent cultural referents as mere symptoms of a cultural or ideological taboo, Harmon’s analysis fails to appreciate how *Kreol Morisien* textbooks ultimately challenge the ethnonationalist logics long conveyed by the multicultural curriculum. Indeed, because creolizing dynamics entail the breaking away from the fixity and stability of discrete ethnic representations, I would argue that ambiguous representations within *Kreol Morisien* textbooks are not merely coincidental. They are not mere symptoms of a cultural taboo, underpinned by a “folk culture ideology”. Rather, they can be seen as the *résultantes* of the creolizing epistemologies and relational methodologies at work in the textbooks, which I shall further examine in the next section.

## **CREOLIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES AND RELATIONAL METHODOLOGIES**

Eriksen writes in “*Tu Dimunn Pu Vinn Kreol: The Mauritian Creole and the Concept of Creolization*” that a creolizing process is one “whereby new-shared cultural forms, and new possibilities of communication, emerge due to contact. It highlights the open-ended flexible and unbounded nature of cultural processes, as opposed to the notion of cultures as bounded, stable, systems of communication” (Eriksen, 2002, p. 81). As I keep on exploring how the creolizing of the curriculum addresses representations of Creole culture and identity, as well as their respective definition within the multicultural curriculum and the ‘ancestral language’ framework, my main goal in the second part of this chapter is to examine how *Kreol Morisien* textbooks approach so-called Creole referents—not as a discrete, “bounded” and “stable” body of knowledge, isolated from (or opposed to) other bodies of knowledge—but as expressions that simultaneously relate, incorporate, and permeate multiple ways of seeing, experiencing, and

knowing the world. In particular, I shall consider how the use of ‘fictional’ stories as well as the inscription of well-known elements of the local Creole folklore and heritage with the textbooks, foreground rhizomatic links and fluid representations that trouble linear or fixed representations of Creole identity. In doing so, I do want, however, to emphasize the paradoxical nature of this epistemological and methodological approach, that ultimately seeks to ‘de-essentialize’ Creole referents while still presupposing the existence of such referents. By speaking of the creolizing of the curriculum as a process of relation and entanglement, my intention is thus not to present it as a coherent, scripted, or linear process that consists in simply moving from essentialized representations of Creole culture and identity, to relational ones. Indeed, on the one hand, I argue that the textbooks’ recourse to narratives, folktales, and a local vocabulary (in *Kreol Morisien*) conceives of epistemologies and methodologies as “shared cultural forms, and new possibilities of communication” that are syncretic, plural, and collaborative. On the other hand, however, I want to highlight how the creolizing of the curriculum sheds light on the paradoxical dimensions of the textbooks’ epistemological and methodological approach that also implicitly involves a dependency on a ‘specific’ idea of Creole referents in Mauritius. In other words, I remain conscious that even when textbook designers strive to produce ‘non-essentialized’ representations of Creole referents, their work can never fully circumvent the technologies of representation that are already at work in the national curriculum framework. This is to say that while *Kreol Morisien* textbooks actively participate in the creolizing of the clearly delineated categories of the multicultural curriculum, this process is still contingent upon the prior institutionalization of these categories.

I have underscored the fact that, while Creole cultures across the world are as diverse as the geographical, historical, political, and linguistic landscapes they occupy, in Mauritius in

particular the term ‘Creole’ is predominantly associated with referents of mixed African and Malagasy ancestry, and often relates to a lower socioeconomic status. This said, as I focus in this section on the ways in which *Kreol Morisien* textbooks incorporate and engage with Creole epistemologies and creolizing methodologies, my goal is not to identify, relay, or establish a fixed repertoire of a so-called proper, expectable, or pre-determined ‘Creole content’ that would fit the separatist model of the multicultural curriculum. Rather, by discussing the representation of places, ethnic traits, and cultural heritage commonly associated with Creoles in Mauritius, I will consider how the narratives, folktales, and cultural expressions included in the textbooks perform epistemological linkages or *mises en relation* that underscore their rhizomatic potential. In other words, I am less interested here in establishing what is essentially Creole in the textbooks than in understanding how the textbooks situate and/or imagine Creole referents, epistemologies, and methodologies as spaces of entanglement and relation that gradually circumvent the compartmentalizing logics of the national curriculum framework. As such, although I remain cognizant of the presence of specific Creole referents in the textbook series—and of their symbolic function as a *sine qua non* of the ‘ancestral language’ framework—I contend that *Ki pase la?* does not merely attempt to codify or standardize particular modes of Creole expressions (*à la* Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant); rather, it reinvests the very dynamics of subversion, adaptation, and re-creation, that are at the heart of such expressions, and that destabilize the fixity of essentialized identities.

### ***Creolizing epistemologies***

At the time of its introduction in the curriculum, the formal teaching **of** *Kreol Morisien* and **in** *Kreol Morisien* raised a number of critical and epistemological questions about the forms of

knowledge (or ways of knowing) which the language was expected to foreground. Namely, some of the principal interrogations which guided curriculum developers and textbook designers were: How could the use of the language itself, as a medium of instruction, allow for the exploration of forms of knowledges and epistemologies that have long been excluded from the curriculum? What kind of content would the textbooks feature? What kind of narratives would they produce about the local environment; the history of the country, its Creole heritage and cultural practices? What were the long-hushed experiences and modes of expression which the use of the language would finally admit in a classroom? What vision of the world, and way of being-in-the-world could finally be conveyed through the teaching of the language and in the language? Ultimately, what was *Kreol Morisien* meant to add to the curriculum, and how to achieve this goal? The introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in school did not only entail an appraisal of the linguistic possibilities offered by the teaching of the language; it also gave lieu to profound interrogations about how to engage with notions of place, culture, and identity in ways that do not reduce Creole referents to mere folklore.

In their essay titled “Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations”, political scientist Françoise Vergès and literary scholar Carpanin Marimoutou emphasize the critical relevance and significance of ‘knowing through and from’ the local (insular) place—in opposition to merely ‘thinking through and from’—when approaching the creolized and creolizing dynamics of the Mascarene region. In their discussion, they argue that Creole islands have long been conceived as passive and peripheral places, devoid of the capacity to produce knowledge. Yet, to ‘know through and from’ the local perspective of an island such as La Réunion or Mauritius is “to care for it as regards its place in the Indian Ocean; the reassessment of its local practices and modes of expression; and of the reclaiming of its territory” (Vergès & Marimoutou, 2012, p. 3) In the

next pages, I shall use Vergès' and Marimoutou's argument as a guiding principle for examining the Creole/creolized epistemologies foregrounded by *Kreol Morisien* textbooks. In particular, I shall consider how *Ki pase la?* conceives of Creole spaces, cultural heritage, and practices of orality, in ways that do not reduce them to a mere folkloric category of the multicultural nation, but that rather inscribes them into a complex "network of meetings and exchanges" that speak to the entanglement of multiple histories, genealogies, narratives, and cultural practices within the creolized fabric of the island.

### **Creole landscapes as *entour*.**

In his *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant argues that, in the creolized spaces of the Antilles, history is memorialized not only through discourse, but also through landscapes: "Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history" (Glissant, 1999, p. 11, my emphasis). In the absence of a long-standing written tradition, landscapes and oral practices indeed help to remember the past, while rivers and sea winds, tales and stories act as keepers of memory. This, I would argue, also applies to Mauritius and the Mascarene Archipelago more broadly, where mountains and ravines, gorges and lakes, with their legends and myths, speak to the unwritten history of the islands that is largely inscribed in their natural environment. According to Glissant, however, the meaning of landscapes is not simply given, it has to be explored and "traced". This is why in his *Poetics of Relation* (2010), he later replaced the word "landscape" (*paysage*) with the French word *entour*, as a means of expressing his philosophical vision of the environment comprising "human, and nonhuman animals, vegetation, rocks, lavas, and 'nature' and 'culture'". The latter terms lose meaning since they exist in a continuum, not in a system of opposition" (Loichot, 2020, p. 28). As such, *entour* points to the

imbrication of natural environment, human experiences, and historical surroundings; and captures Creole landscapes not as passive decors of history but as active keepers of knowledge, culture, and memory.

Glissant's notion of *entour* provides a valuable entry point to the kind of epistemological approach adopted in *Ki pase la?* as regards the representation of places. In several volumes of the series, for instance, spaces and landscapes are not regarded as mere backgrounds; rather, they are part of a broader "continuum" that directly references the links between the visible surroundings through which Vanessa and Leo travel, the more invisible memories of slaves and their descendants in Mauritius, and the many other histories with which these memories actually intersect. But because the knowledge contained in these landscapes is not always given, the pedagogical approach used by textbook designers to trace their meaning "on the underside" is worth discussing. It is indeed from this particular perspective—that echoes the importance of "knowing through and from" the place—that they engage with the complexity of the spatial and geographical *entour* of the island, and ultimately depart from the idea of Creole places as folklore to actually foreground them as sites of knowledge and experience. For the sake of my discussion here, I shall thus consider a couple of examples of this approach as they translate in the representation of a local *entour* in the textbooks.

While they originate in the space of the classroom, the 'adventures' of Vanessa and Leo—whose age usually coincide with the age of the pupils—take them to a variety of places which are part of their immediate Creole environment, before displaying a regional and planetary reach. For instance, the two children discover the animals and vegetation that inhabit the island, as they explore natural landscapes such as the sugarcane fields, the Pieter Both Mountain, the caves of Roches Noires, or the Gorges of Black River. And because the meaning of all these sites

intertwines with the historical and cultural legacy of slaves and their descendants, they embody forms of knowledge which Glissant sought to capture with the idea of *entour*. Most notably, the cover of the Grade 7 textbook (see Figure 11) proudly features the Morne Brabant Cultural Landscape, an iconic mountain hideaway for runaway slaves located on the southwestern coast of the island. With the Aapravasi Ghat (an immigration depot established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the British colonial administration), the Morne Brabant is today one of the island’s two UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Sites. As such, it commemorates the lost lives of men and women who were “the backbone of the island’s colonial economy” and whose “labor and culture shaped the modern nation” (Lionnet, 2015b, p. 302).



Figure 11: Cover of *Kreol Morisien* Grade 7 textbook featuring the Morne Brabant Cultural Landscape (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2018d)



Throughout their many adventures, Vanessa and Leo also join other protagonists who teach them how to describe and identify the animals, plants, and fruits that are indigenous to the island. For example, in one of the stories featured in the Grade 3 textbook (“*Dan Pei Dodo*”/“In Dodo Land”), they get close to a river and encounter the “*pwason kouler larkansiel*” [rainbow-colored fish], the “*fler flotan*” [floating flower or nenuphar] and the “*lezar ver ki ena tas rouz*” [the green gecko with red spots]. In particular, they meet with Tikoulou—a well-known fictional character created by Henry Koombes—who “*reprizant tou bann zanfan Repiblik Moris. So liniver se bann zil Losean Indien. Tikoulou extra kontan kamarad, solidarite ek lanatir*” [represents all the children of the Mauritian republic. His universe comprises the islands of the Indian Ocean. Tikoulou loves friends, solidarity, and nature] (Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017b, p. 23). While I shall speak more at length about the character of Tikoulou later in this chapter, I will simply mention here that, within the imaginary world of the textbooks, the protagonist often acts as a guide, who introduces the two children to the wonders, mysteries, and secrets of the island’s *entour*. He does so by use of a descriptive vocabulary that does not always rely on so-called scientific terms or fixed classifications, but that enacts a decolonial approach that recenters the local ways of knowing and naming.



Figure 12: Leo, Tikoulou, and Vanessa in their quest for the dodo  
(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017b, p. 12)

In the story titled “*Dan Pei Dodo*”, Tikoulou takes Vanessa and Leo on a quest for the dodo—a famous endemic bird which could not fly because of its small wings, and which later became extinct after it was eaten by the Dutch settlers (see Figure 12). While the dodo’s appearance is only evidenced today by visual representations (paintings and drawings), written accounts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or even in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, the textbook explores more specifically how the bird’s memory inhabits the landscapes of the island. It is worth mentioning however that, if this quest for the lost dodo leads the three protagonists to the caves of Roches Noires, located in the Northeast of the island, what they ultimately learn from the rocks and the echoes of the caves is not just the story of the Mauritian bird, but that of the island itself. As they observe the drawings on the walls of the cave (an underground space which recalls Glissant’s idea of “tracing” history from the underside), the children realize that one of the drawings, in the shape of the island, actually overlaps and merges with that of the dodo (see

Figure 13). From this moment, the story of their quest for the dodo becomes a clear allegory of the exploration of the island’s history through its natural environment.



Figure 13: Leo, Tikoulou, Vanessa in the caves of Roches Noires  
(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2014, pp. 84–85)

On the one hand, this episode is quite characteristic of the way in which *Ki pase la?* approaches Creole landscapes, meanings, and epistemologies more broadly. On the other, it also illustrates how the overlapping and intertwining of histories (be they oral, written, or visual; imagined or real; human and non-human) is memorialized in the island’s *entour*; foregrounding what Memory Studies critic Michael Rothberg describes as “multidirectional memory”, i.e. a kind of memory that branches out rhizomatically and that is “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing” (Rothberg, 2009, p. 3). For example, if the caves of Roches Noires specifically point to the history of runaway slaves, they also extend to the many stories, legends, and myths of coolies and pirates who apparently used these caves to hide treasures. And while this entanglement of stories aptly captures the multilayered history of the Creole island—

with its legacy of conquest by successive imperial powers—it also challenges the compartmentalization of memory which the model of the multicultural nation tends to favor, opting instead for an approach to memory that is interactive, dynamic, and transcultural.

Ultimately, the exploration of the caves and the search for the hidden treasures of the island enable the three protagonists to travel through both space and time. For instance, once they exit the other side of the caves, they accidentally go back in time and find themselves in an indefinite past. There, Vanessa, Leo, and Tikoulou encounter Alber, a free man of color whose grandfather ran away from a pirate ship and helped maroon slaves hide in the caves of Roches Noires. Alber possesses a treasure map and, along with him, the three children embark on a quest to find the hidden treasure of Olivier Levasseur, a famous French pirate nicknamed ‘*La Buse*’, allegedly known for hiding one of the biggest treasures of pirate history in the whereabouts of the Mascarene Archipelago. At this point of Vanessa and Leo’s adventures, what started out as a quest for the lost dodo becomes a rhizomatic or multidirectional trajectory that ultimately connects the three Creole islands of the Mascarenes (Mauritius, La Réunion, and Rodrigues) whose histories, in the textbooks, constantly echo each other.

Through their visits to natural sites and iconic landscapes such as the volcanoes and the *cirques* in La Réunion, or Trou d’argent and Caverne Patate in Rodrigues, the protagonists access a deep layer of knowledge, as well as the often invisible meaning of the broader Creole *entour*, which is not merely captured in descriptive or scientific terms, but which also incorporates elements of the local belief systems, folklore, and magical realism. To come back to this idea of continuum which I discussed earlier, their exploration of the islands is thus not strictly geographical or historical. Rather, it gives them access to a wide-array of linguistic and cultural referents which point to the diversity of Creole experiences in the region itself, and

which comprise dynamic practices such as accents and prosody, foodways and music, lifestyle and occupations, that are constantly informed by ways of knowing and being that have long been excluded from the curriculum. Ultimately, even as they reference Mauritius as a Creole island, the trajectories of Vanessa, Leo, and Tikoulou do not foreground a fixed, stable, or merely abstract definition of ‘Creole’; rather they express the kind of creolizing epistemologies which the decentering of gaze, and the attention to the “networks of meetings and exchanges” theorized by Vergès and Marimoutou allow one to appreciate.

### **Orality and Creole intangible cultural heritage.**

Since its emergence within the plantation system in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Kreol Morisien*—just like most Creole languages in different parts of the world—has been a receptacle of the complex intertwining of multiple imaginaries, knowledges, and belief systems, as a result of the (violent) encounter between enslaved communities and other racial or cultural groups, including White settlers, indentured servants, and other free colored people (Vaughan, 2005). Indeed, because they were forbidden, for the most part, from openly performing or transmitting important aspects of their languages, cultures, religions, and social habits of origin, enslaved Africans and their descendants relied on creative and performative tactics which ensured that their memories and cultural identity would survive—if only through indirect, symbolic, or aesthetic forms—by referencing (or dissimulating) them in popular stories or musical practices, passed on from one generation to the other (Baron & Cara, 2011; Burton, 1997). This being said, while *Kreol Morisien* has allowed Afro-descendants in particular to subversively adapt and transmit aspects of their own cultural heritage, the long-standing orality of the language also bears witness to the historical contribution of various racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups who have also invested the

language with their own vocabularies, imaginaries, and visions of the world, since its very emergence. As such, the oral practice of *Kreol Morisien* today results from a creolizing process that speaks to the complex encounter among various European, African, and Asian languages. This is what has ultimately turned the language into a *lingua franca* that reflects the broader transcultural dynamics at work in the island.

According to UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2018, p. 5), intangible cultural heritage refers to "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills [...] that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 5). Transmitted from generation to generation, this heritage "is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 5). Because of their dynamic and transcultural dimension, the intangible cultural heritage contained in oral stories and songs performed in *Kreol Morisien* is strongly characterized by instability, fluidity, adaptation, and re-appropriation. Indeed, as it is impossible to fix completely, this orality in Mauritius still constitutes a significant repertoire for thinking through questions of Creole epistemologies and their importance in nurturing a sense of identity and belonging, of history and becoming.

Because of the long-standing exclusion of *Kreol Morisien* from schools, the complex body of knowledge contained in Creole stories and songs has been largely overlooked, despised, and rejected in formal education. In other words, what these oral practices foreground as core elements of Creole intangible cultural heritage in Mauritius (expressive cultures, ways of being-in-the world; relationship to time, space, and the environment; beliefs and cosmologies) was not even deemed proper knowledge (see chapter 4). With the 2012 introduction of the language in

the curriculum, it is clear that—as regards issues of reparation and empowerment—textbook designers were expected to address this long-standing abjection of Creole culture, identity, and heritage in the education system, but from an Afrocentric perspective (see chapter 5). And while, on the one hand, the historical legacy of the multicultural curriculum necessarily called for the rehabilitation of certain cultural practices identified as ‘typically (Afro-)Creole’ in the textbooks, I would argue that, on the other hand, these representations also testify of an inclusive and open-ended approach to the rich intangible heritage of Creoles in Mauritius.

For the sake of my argument, I shall consider how two such practices—namely storytelling and *sega* music—, are presented as specifically Creole in the textbooks, but in ways that are neither fixed, nor merely folkloric. This being said, it is probably fair to assume that, because of their long-standing mode of oral transmission, the written ‘transcription’ of these two cultural practices, and their incorporation within a curriculum that is largely scriptocentrist—entail an inevitable process of adaptation. Indeed, the ‘didactization’ of the local Creole cultural heritage, maintained almost exclusively through the oral practice of *Kreol Morisien*, raises critical questions about the ways in which the curriculum itself generates new meanings, representations, and new understandings of Creole cultural heritage. In other words, because of its purpose as an educational technology, curriculum design often entails forms of codification, prescription, and standardization that are quite antithetic to the dynamics of fluidity and creativity that are largely characteristic of oral practices. This being said, I would argue that the ‘adaptation’ of both the language and its ‘content’ for school purposes nevertheless participates in the broader tensions and dynamics of the creolizing of the curriculum itself, that ultimately opens a space for unscripted *résultantes*.

The inclusion of stories, folktales, *sirandann*, and *sega* music in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks speaks to the rich oral heritage of the language. It also bears witness to the idea that much of the knowledge, imaginaries, worldviews, and ways of being expressed in *Kreol Morisien* have long been performed, nurtured, and transmitted—both in time and space—through oral practices. Indeed, the practice of orality in *Kreol Morisien* comes across as a distinctive feature of *Ki pase la?*<sup>96</sup>. For instance, several volumes of the series incorporate famous Creole folktales such as the story of Tizan—a fictional child-figure, well-known to many Creole cultures—, and the legend of the Pieter Both<sup>97</sup>. In particular, the Grades 2 and 3 textbooks emphasize the central role played by local storytellers such as Fanfan—who “*bien konn rakont zistwar*” [masters the art of storytelling]—both in preserving the traditional knowledge of the people, and in interpreting the contemporary world around us. Indeed, according to the textbooks, a storyteller “*ena enn gran limazinasion. Li observ so lantouraz ek lanatir, apre li invant bann zistwar. Souvan bann zistwar-la reflekte larealite*” [has a rich imagination. From observing his surroundings and nature, he invents stories that often reflect reality]. Moreover, *Ki pase la?* gives a strong visibility to some of the popular *sirandann* of Mauritius—an oral genre, close to the Caribbean *tim-tim* or riddle. A question-and-answer ritual game, the *sirandann* is an art practiced in *Kreol Morisien* since the days of slavery. Long considered a key aspect of the Creole *laveye* [evening gatherings] it directly references the humoristic, mischievous, and/or irreverent ways through which slaves and their descendants managed to pass on their vision of the world from one generation to the other (Lohka, n.d.).

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<sup>96</sup> The title of the series itself is taken from a popular Creole rhyme, which features a succession of questions and answers about the local reality of children.

<sup>97</sup> This is the enigmatic story of a milkman who accidentally encounters fairies on the Pieter Both mountain, and who vows to keep their existence secret. Unable to keep his promise, he is ultimately punished and transformed into a big stone which now hangs atop of the mountain. A Creole adaptation of an Indo-Mauritian tale, the legend of the Pieter Both illustrates how the practice of orality and storytelling in the textbook is not necessarily presented as an extension of African orality only.



As oral modes of expression, folktales and *sirandann* are yet far from being fixed (or from strictly referencing Afro-Malagasy imaginaries). Rather, as they ensure the transmission of cultural heritage and ways of knowing that reference the space of the Creole island, they are constantly reappropriated by newer generations to better fit their realities and transcultural experiences. This process of re-appropriation is quite visible in the textbooks' approach to orality. In the Grade 3 textbook, for example, the trajectory of Vanessa and Leo crosses paths with that of the well-known Tizan. As the 'modern' realm of the two children intertwines with the more 'traditional' world of the mischievous Creole character, their entangled stories gradually inform and transform each other, enhancing a kind of narrative detour and creation of new knowledge which are very much in line with principles of creolization. At the time of their initial encounter, the two protagonists intervene in one of the best-known adventures of Tizan ("*Tizan gato kanet*") by saving the young boy from the evil witch who had kidnapped him in the original tale. In return, the 'folkloric' character introduces Vanessa and Leo to a new set of adventures and subsequently transforms their relationship with their *entour*.

Speaking of the ways in which the textbooks incorporate oral practices of storytelling as a means of emphasizing creolizing epistemologies and modes of being and knowing, it is worth mentioning that, in the traditional Creole folktale, the character of Tizan is not defined by Western conceptions of childhood, as an age that connotes innocence, lack of independence, or reliance on adults' knowledge (Chelin, 2014). Neither is the protagonist necessarily engaged in a teleological trajectory that is meant to prepare him for adulthood, and that is quite characteristic of literary genres like the *bildungsroman*. Subsequently, in *Ki pase la?*, Tizan is not represented as the typical school kid, like Vanessa or Leo. In one of the activities from the Grade 5 textbook, he is rather portrayed as a poor writer, and pupils are asked to correct his spelling mistakes

(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017c, p. 11). Tizan often comes across as a disobedient and irreverent child, who disregards his mother's instructions and always finds ways of escaping and playing instead of staying at home. In contrast with other schooled children, Tizan is thus depicted as a free spirit who constantly wanders around, i.e. on the streets, on a *gato kanet* tree (which he grows by planting one of his favorite candies), or at sea (he owns a pirogue and knows the best fishing spots). But while he is not the 'model educated child', his embodied knowledge of the world and the environment—of the species of the sea, the direction of the wind, the rhythm of trees—is both unique and astounding. As he takes Vanessa and Leo along with him on his adventures, he thus offers them—and the pupils of the *Kreol Morisien* classroom—countless opportunities for engaging with forms of creolized knowledges that have long been considered too folkloric, traditional, or insignificant to be included in the curriculum.

In addition to storytelling and folktales, *Ki pase la?* further incorporates and adapts elements of the Creole intangible heritage by foregrounding the dynamic role of traditional music and instruments in maintaining and transmitting similar modes of knowing. In a chapter of the Grade 3 textbook titled "*Lamizik*" [music], for instance, Vanessa and Leo play *sega* during the Music Day celebrations held at their school. A musical genre that is particular to the Creole islands of the Southwest Indian Ocean, *sega* is said to have originated among the enslaved population of Mauritius before spreading to Rodrigues, La Réunion, and the Seychelles. Traditionally performed in *Kreol Morisien*, it has since been one of the main vehicles through which the oral vernacular was performed, maintained, and transmitted. In 2014, the traditional Creole *sega* of Mauritius was officially recognized by UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This recognition speaks to its profound impact on the creolized experience of Mauritius and on its unique cultural fabric.

A leading figure in the preservation of traditional *sega* music (locally known as *sega tipik*), the non-governmental organization ABAIM underscores the historical correlation between the emergence and enrichment of *Kreol Morisien* and that of *sega*, as oral modes of expression. Attributing a similar role to the storyteller and the *sega* singer as regards their cultural and historical significance vis-à-vis the language, ABAIM further argues that:

Under the slavery system, *sega* music and Kreol language were important for individuals to have the right and power to speak, to transmit their feelings/experiences. This music has carried the language as a transporter, but has particularly kept the language vivid in its oral form. Even before the creation of instruments, the importance of vocal recounting is reflected in the structure of the music, which starts with a low tempo mode for recounting. A good ‘*sega tipik*’ singer is above all a good story teller, like Nelzir Ventre or Fanfan. Or a good orator [...] Or even a great folkloric observer.

(ABAIM, 2016, p. 26)

Likewise, *Ki pase la?* acknowledges the similarities between the storyteller and the *sega* singer (or between folktales and *sega* music) by emphasizing their role as keepers of memory and guardians of oral modes of knowing. This comes to saying that, in the textbooks, the practice of *sega* is depicted as one that provides access to a rich body of meanings, practices, and *savoir-faire* that continue to shape Creole experiences in Mauritius. In doing so, and in foregrounding the practice of *sega* as one that is specific to the Creole culture of the island, *Ki pase la?* inevitably responds to the long-standing marginalization of oral practices in Mauritian education, and consequently draws from the representational techniques of the curriculum to ensure their visibility. I would argue, however, that in its pedagogical approach, *Ki pase la?* remains cautious

not to represent *sega* as mere entertainment or folklore. Rather, despite its historical exclusion from formal schooling, *sega* is represented in the textbook series as a dynamic and inclusive source of knowledge, memories, and experiences, that has consistently enriched *Kreol Morisien* speakers—regardless of their ethnic group—and their complex ways of apprehending and relating to their history and environment.

Going back to the chapter dedicated to the Music Day celebrations in the Grade 3 textbook, it is thus no coincidence that following their encounter with a group of *sega* singers called “Ti Marmit”—the title of another traditional folk song for children—Vanessa and Leo decide to learn to play *ravann*, a traditional drum which features as one of the staple instruments of *sega* music, along with *bob* [bobre], *triyang* [triangle], and *maravann*. During their subsequent meeting with late *sega* performer and *ravann* maker Michel Legris, they also discover the rich history and delicate process behind the invention and fabrication of the *ravann*. Created in the context of forced labor system, the *ravann* is made of a circular piece of wood called a *tour*. On one side of the *tour*, a stretched stiffened goat skin is attached, creating two different surfaces—one inside and one outside—which can be used while playing.



Figure 14: Footage from *Lame la Kone* showing a traditional *ravann* (Heise, 2014)

Released in 2014, ABAIM's and Diana Heise's documentary film "*Lame-la kone/The Hand that Knows*" describes the sophisticated skills (including geometry) and complex *savoir-faire* behind the fabrication and practice of the *ravann*. Comparing the *ravann* to a "fountain of knowledge", ABAIM further contends that this knowledge relates to a "mode of life" that foregrounds specific ecological principles:

when we consider the manner in which the Ravann was constructed in the past, we can notice that there is a knowledge base that comes from the profound relationship between people and the fabric of the natural world. This relationship reflects a mode of life. A Ravann would take at least two months to produce. / Each material used in the fabrication of the Ravann relates to the knowledge base of the people at that time and reflects their daily life. Examples of such include

the wood from a gum tree, the ashes from the fire, the aloe leaf cords, the tamarin berry glue, the animal itself. In many cases, these materials form part of an ecological mindset, as these resources would have just been thrown away.

(ABAIM, 2016, p. 36)

ABAIM's description of the *ravann* insists on its connection with an "ecological mindset" nurtured, not through formal learning, but through a particular "relationship between people and the natural world" that "reflects a particular mode of life". Like with Glissant's idea of *entour*, this "relationship" foregrounds a relational vision of the environment, whereby humans and non-humans are part of a broader continuum, rather than in opposition. In other words, according to ABAIM, the traditional way in which the *ravann* is fabricated indicates a way of being, and of doing in the world that speaks to a different rapport with the surrounding world—a rapport that expresses itself in the "daily life" and creative practices of ordinary people. As such, what the practice of the *ravann* ultimately foregrounds is an attention to the "knowledge base" which derives from such practices, rather than from the so-called 'rational' knowledge usually prioritized in formal(ized) learning. As a matter of fact, Legris himself confessed that he only attended Grade 1 in school; yet his dexterity and expert practice of the *ravann* speak to his profound knowledge of the musical legacy of slavery, and its creolized expressions in Mauritius. And while I insist here on the cultural significance of such modes of knowing that do not depend on formal learning, I would also argue that their presence in *Ki pase la?*, further underscores their relevance to the decolonizing and creolizing of the curriculum.

### *Creolizing textualities as a relational method*

Until recently, writing in *Kreol Morisien* was not a common activity in the country; and whilst most Mauritians would speak the language in their everyday life, only a handful knew how to read and write in *Kreol Morisien*, thanks namely to the work of non-governmental associations such as *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer* (LPT) and Playgroup, or initiatives from churches and Suni Madrassas, that encouraged the development of basic literacy skills in the mother tongue. In fact, despite past attempts to codify the spelling and grammar of *Kreol Morisien*<sup>98</sup>, state-endorsed reports that standardized the written practice of the language were only released by the *Akademi Kreol Morisien* in 2011 (Carpooran, 2011b). This is to say that, at the time of its official introduction in the curriculum in 2012, this practice had just been standardized; and, because only a few local Mauritian authors had previously published creative pieces in that language, children's literature in *Kreol Morisien* was still scarce.

In response to this scarcity of a written corpus in the public domain, *Kreol Morisien* textbooks feature a rich body of texts meant to facilitate the development of literacy in young learners. As discussed in the previous section, many of these texts pay tribute to the abundant oral tradition of the language, highlighting the critical importance of orality, storytelling, and *sega* music in the transmission of creolized imaginaries, worldviews, and ways of knowing since the colonial period. This being said, I would argue that the stories and written corpus featured in *Ki pase la?* move beyond the mere transcription of the traditional folklore and oral expressions commonly associated with *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles or mixed slaves' descendants in Mauritius. Rather, the methodological approach foregrounded in the

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<sup>98</sup> Among various writing systems that were experimented since the 1970 one can find a number of attempts by Virahsawmy (1967-998), Philip Baker, *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer* the Catholic Church (see Hookoomsing, 2004).

textbooks insists on the fluidity, adaptability, and malleability of so-called Creole folklore, even as it transposes the knowledges and worldviews contained in oral stories into a written form.

By privileging textualities and written narratives that perform multidirectional links and express rhizomatic imaginaries, what the textbooks namely propose is a creolized corpus that insists on the cultural value of *Kreol Morisien* beyond its traditional usage and ancestral dimension. Indeed, on the one hand, the corpus of written texts in the schoolbooks simultaneously draws from and points to the local Creole folklore, without necessarily reducing this folklore to something that is fixed, passéist, and relevant to only one ethnic group. On the other hand, the written stories of the textbooks also reference the more contemporary practices of the language, as well as its current role, significance, and possibilities in today's society. This combination of the language's rich traditional folklore and of the contemporary repertoire of multilingual *Kreol Morisien* learners—regardless of their ethnic group—ultimately challenges the strict ethnocultural definition of *Kreol Morisien* as yet just another ancestral language of the multicultural curriculum.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the rhizomatic principles at work in Glissant's notion of Relation, whose triple modality is to link, relay, and relate. In response to the scarcity of written texts designed for children in *Kreol Morisien*, I am suggesting therefore that *Ki pase la?* explores a variety of strategies that enact similar principles as a way of underscoring the plural dimensions and multiple possibilities of the language as both oral and written, traditional and contemporary. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I shall discuss two such strategies in particular, namely as they speak to the inclusive, eclectic, and collaborative methodology that produced the written corpus in the textbooks, and that ultimately participates in a creolizing of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum.



The first strategy is a double-edged approach which foregrounds the idea that the creation of a contemporary corpus is inseparable from the re-actualization of traditional (oral) stories. In other words, if textbook designers indeed transcribed, adapted, and translated existing texts, I argue that the value of such practices is further underscored by their constant *mises en relation* (linking) with a body of original and contemporary texts written for the textbooks by established writers. As for the second strategy, it includes practices of intertextuality—such as pastiche, appropriation, rewriting, and *mise en abyme*—which results in the constant overlapping of discourses, knowledges, imaginaries, and histories in the written corpus assembled by textbook designers. Indeed, in the pages of *Ki pase la?*, new stories often relay and relate to earlier ones, resulting in creolized imaginaries where chronological boundaries, geographical frontiers, and cultural delimitations are disrupted and challenged. By envisioning the creation of a written corpus, not as a monolithic, linear or unilateral endeavor, but rather as a plural, syncretic and collaborative project, I suggest that the stories and narratives included in *Ki pase la?* offer further access to the creolizing dynamics at work in the *Kreol Morisien* textbooks.

### **Re-actualization, adaptation, and creation.**

At the time of its conception in 2012, *Ki pase la? Bann lavantir Vanessa ek Leo* was not designed as a stand-alone textbook. Rather, it was originally conceived as a series of volumes linked together chronologically by an ensemble of successive stories (or adventures). In the beginning of the Grade 2 textbook, for instance, the two protagonists are roughly aged 6 years old. As they resume the school year at Helvetia Government School—a fictional institution—Vanessa and Leo thus share the same age as the pupils who are reading about their adventures. This means that the children of the classroom could identify with Vanessa and Leo, and fully

partake in their adventures—both inside and outside the classroom—as they grew up together. Within the series, the chronological sequencing framing the two children’s adventures therefore seems to operate as a guiding principle and a common thread from a given volume to the next one.

It is however worth underscoring that, on top of this linear progression, the authors of *Ki pase la?* also conceived of Vanessa and Leo’s adventures as open-ended moments that frequently branch out to multiple other stories. As they bring together a diversity of narratives that are both past and present, traditional and contemporary, fictional and real, several of their adventures come close to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a threshold, i.e. “a door, a becoming between two [or more] multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 249). In spite of their apparent linearity, these adventures are thus not organized teleologically; rather, what they allow us to access is a multiplicity of contexts, genres, practices, and temporalities that results in a constant creolizing of imaginaries. Considering how a written corpus was established in *Ki pase la?*, I would argue that this relational dimension of Vanessa and Leo’s adventures is in fact generated by a combination of both re-actualizing practices—such as the (re)transcription, adaptation, and translation of existing (folkloric) texts—and the creation of new texts.

Starting from the adventures of Vanessa and Leo, the various volumes of the series provide primary school children with unprecedented access to a rich body of traditional writings, well-known stories, and popular songs drawn from the local literary *patrimoine*. As a matter of fact, excerpts from renowned texts include: François Chrestien’s *Les Essais d’un bobre africain* (1820), the first book to be ever published in any Creole language; Charles Baissac’s “Zistoire Yèv av Couroupa” [The story of the hare and the snail], published in his 1888 *Le Folk-Lore de l’île Maurice* [*The Folklore of Mauritius*]; and Misié Lézize dé Ségré’s 1939 “Louloup are

*licien*” [The wolf and the dog]. While these texts were written long before the official standardization of *Kreol Morisien*, their inclusion in the Grade 5 textbook speaks to the multiple ways in which pupils are reminded of the long—and yet often unsuspected—history of writing in *Kreol Morisien*. It is indeed quite interesting to consider that written literature in Creole dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, i.e. several decades before French was even imposed as the language of the French republican school, which only became free in 1881 under the Jules Ferry Laws. In addition to these canonical pieces, the textbooks likewise give visibility to folktales such as “*Zistwar Sat ek Tig*” by Fanfan (Grade 2), or popular songs like “*Gaby*” by *sega* singer Bam Cuttayan (Grade 4), that also predate the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum. By transcribing these texts in the official spelling of the language, the authors of *Ki pase la?* do not simply insist on the historical tradition of creative, expressive, and performative practices in the language, they also underscore the relevance and legacy of such practices in the more contemporary usage of *Kreol Morisien*.

To this re-actualization of older oral and written resources in *Kreol Morisien*, *Ki pase la?* also resorts to the translation and adaptation of several other well-known stories, tales, and fables originally created in international languages such as French and English. These include texts like “*Tourtrel ek founi*” (Grade 1), adapted from 17<sup>th</sup> century French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine’s “*La colombe et la fourmie*”; and “*Set frer tang*”, from Ed Young’s award winning *Seven Blind Mice*. It is a fairly common practice to translate and adapt texts before including them in textbooks designed for (young) children. This said, I would still contend that, in the case of the *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, such practices are part of a broader methodology of Relation that not only derives ‘new’ texts from existing ones, but that also acknowledges how stories are “open” to multiple cultural traditions; how they travel, how they are transformed, appropriated, and

creolized. In the Grade 2 textbook, for instance, the story of “Farata Man” recalls that of “The Gingerbread man”, the famous American folktale of a runaway gingerbread, who tries to escape from his pursuers but who is ultimately eaten by a fox. In the version from the *Kreol Morisien* textbook, the gingerbread is replaced by a *farata*—a much appreciated local crepe of Indian origin—and the fox is replaced by a dog. However, at the bottom of the text, one can read the following:

*Readapte depi “Farata Man” par Marylin Raman (MIE Literacy Project, 2012) depi enn premie adaptasion “Gingerbread Man” par Nita Rughoonundun-Chellapermal (“Le petit bonhomme de massepain”, Enhancement Project, Grad III)*

[A re-adaptation of “Farata Man” by Marylin Raman (MIE Literacy Project, 2012) from an original adaptation of “Gingerbread Man” by Nita Rughoonundun-Chellapermal (“Le petit bonhomme de massepain”, Enhancement Project, Grad III)]

This quote clearly indicates that the “Farata Man” of the *Kreol Morisien* textbook is a re-adaptation of an adaptation; and subsequently points to the fact that folktales and stories are often produced by creolizing dynamics. As shown by comparative literature scholar Françoise Lionnet (Lionnet, 2013b), while Mauritian writers such as Lézize dé Ségré or Dev Virahsawmy have notably translated and adapted fables by La Fontaine, La Fontaine himself wrote several of his famous texts by translating and adapting Greek fabulist and storyteller Aesop. By revealing the geographical, historical, and cultural trajectories of narratives and meanings, the relational practices at work in *Ki pase la?* ultimately indicate that the creation of new texts somehow always relates to a broader history of travelling imaginaries, stories, and languages. If indeed

Vanessa and Leo's adventures serve as "thresholds" to multiple bodies of texts, these are not confined to a linear conception of time; nor are they limited to only 'one' cultural tradition, as traditionally prescribed by the ancestral language framework of the Mauritian curriculum.

Rather, they illustrate the broader processes of relation, adaptation, and reciprocal transformation, that enable the emergence of creolized cultures, imaginaries, and worldviews.

Speaking of the creation of new texts as a practice that participates in both the extension and expansion of a shared literary network, it is worth pointing out that the "adventures of Vanessa and Leo" were further conceived by the authors of the series as a collaborative endeavor that would not only re-actualize an existing literary corpus, but that would also partake in the elaboration of an emerging children's literature in *Kreol Morisien* (Natchoo, 2018).

Consequently, during the conception phase of *Ki pase la?*, a call for contributions was circulated by the textbooks' panel to a number of emerging and established writers, describing the purpose and significance of the series, and inviting them to join the efforts in enlarging the body of written texts in *Kreol Morisien*. Several authors responded to the call, sending original contributions that enriched the textbooks in significant ways. On the one hand, award-winning novelists such as Ananda Devi and Amal Sewtohol submitted short stories that referenced the local imaginary and environment of Mauritius; its villages and giant turtles ("Zoli landrwa", in the Grade 2 textbook), its iconic "payanke" [tropicbird] and legendary Dodo ("Enn text lor zwazo", in the Grade 5 textbook). On the other hand, novelist Carl de Souza and local activist Marsel Poinen further enriched the entangled worlds of *Ki pase la?* by writing some of the very adventures of Vanessa and Leo, which they also infused with their own literary imagination.

By conceiving of this overall 'assemblage' of written texts in *Ki pase la?* as a collective and collaborative project of corpus formation that involves strategies of re-actualization,

adaptation, and creation, the authors of the series implicitly acknowledge how similar processes and practices of *mise en relation* have long contributed to the emergence, development, and transmission of creolized expressions, including languages, cultures, and imaginaries more broadly. Through the interweaving of textual expressions—that all point to the rich possibilities of using *Kreol Morisien* both as an oral and written language—their methodological approach to textbook design thus expresses a subtle critique of the normalizing techniques of the multicultural curriculum, that tend to naturalize cultural separatism and abject expressions of creolization. What this methodological approach explores instead are the more unscripted *résultantes* of a creolizing process, and the kind of relational principles that continue to subtend the practice of the language beyond taxonomies of ethnic, racial, and cultural divisions.

### **Intertextuality as a practice of Relation.**

As attested by many of the examples aforementioned, the liminality contained in Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of "threshold" provides invaluable analytical standpoints for approaching some of Vanessa and Leo's adventures as open doors, or relays, leading to a multiplicity of other stories, tales, legends, and songs in *Kreol Morisien*. This being said, the constant interaction between the two sets of texts—i.e. those that directly relate to the two protagonists, and those that do not—also operates within a broader framework of exchange and reciprocal impact that may not be reduced to a unique principle. In the fictional and relational realm of *Ki pase la?*, Vanessa and Leo's adventures are not merely designed as thresholds or spaces of transition between imaginary worlds; they are also conceived as points of entanglement of multiple stories, in ways that ultimately creolize the contours of delineated narratives, and complicate attempts to think of stories as fixed entities with clearly identified beginnings and ends. Namely, in the

textbook series, this interpenetration of imaginaries and narratives is reflected by a particular discursive and poetic strategy: intertextuality.

In literary theory, ‘intertextuality’ commonly refers to a narrative practice and methodology of incorporation and loaning, rewriting and pastiche, that create echo chambers and singular spaces of dialogues between different texts and genres (whether oral, written, or visual). But in the world of *Ki pase la?* more specifically, I would argue that intertextual practices do not merely serve an aesthetic or narrative purpose; indeed, as I shall discuss in the remaining pages of this chapter, they have at least two other functions. First, they partake in a network of support that nurtures the production and circulation of children’s literature in *Kreol Morisien*. Second, they speak to the creolizing dynamics at work in the textbooks and incite renewed conceptualizations of Mauritian imaginaries as regional, transnational, and creolized instead of simply local, national, and multicultural. In other words, the intertextual imaginaries at work in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks move beyond the compartmentalized logics of the ‘ancestral language framework’ and the geopolitical space of the multicultural nation, to instead think of ‘Creole’ and ‘Mauritian’ as terms that may not be completely reduced to *a priori* conceptions of ethnicity and nation, as endorsed by the state. More specifically, by building connections across a broader geography that includes multiple insular and continental spaces of the Indian Ocean region, the intertextual strategies of *Ki pase la?* suggest that the terms ‘Creole’ and ‘Mauritian’ can be approached relationally and beyond the limitations of the ethnonationalist discourse. As such, they participate in the creolizing of narratives included in the textbooks.

Just as they had reached out to a number of established writers during the conception phase of *Ki pase la?*, the series’ designers also invited local authors and publishers to collaborate on the project by featuring some of their own original characters—who, by then, were familiar to

the Mauritian public, in general, and Mauritian children, in particular—within Vanessa and Leo’s adventures. However, what differentiates this intertextual method from the kind of relaying strategies which I discussed earlier, is the distinct collaborative work which this initiative generated. For instance, visual artist Henry Koombes and his publisher Pascale Siew, were invited during the conception phase of the project to incorporate characters and images from their well-known picture book series *Tikoulou* into the world of Vanessa and Leo. The invitation was met with so much enthusiasm that, the same year, the first volume of *Tikoulou*—previously published in French and English—was translated into *Kreol Morisien* by Lindsey Collen and released under the title *Tikoulou dan Pei Dodo* [Tikoulou in Dodo Land]. In the meantime, Koombes and Siew had also agreed to the project and—in addition to his central role in what now adds up to seventeen picture books—*Tikoulou* became a recognizable figure of the *Kreol Morisien* textbooks. After all, given his age and cultural background, the young Afro-Creole character fitted the project quite perfectly: he was already much appreciated by Mauritian children and had come to embody the spirit of the younger generation within the Mauritian republic, and the Indian Ocean more broadly:

*Tikoukou se enn ti-garson ki finn viv plizier lavantir dan Moris, Rodrig, Larenion, Sesel, Madagascar, Lenn [...] se enn ti garson ki reprezant tou bann zanfan Repiblik Moris. [...] Ena plizier liv zistwar lor bann lavantir Tikoulou avek so bann kamarad [...] Aster-la, li ena de nouvo kamarad (Vanessa ek Leo) pou ed li dan so bann lavantir. [...] Eski twa ou si to pou donn enn koudme dan so bann lezot lavantir?*

[Tikoulou is a young boy involved in many adventures in Mauritius, Rodrigues, La Réunion, Seychelles, Madagascar, and India [...] he represents all the children of the Mauritian Republic.



[...] Several books recount the adventures of Tikoulou and his friends [...] Now he has two new friends (Vanessa and Leo) to help him in his adventures. Would you like to help him as well?]

(Mauritius Institute of Education, 2017b, p. 23)

Drawn from the *Kreol Morisien* Grade 3 textbook, this quote illustrates at least three important aspects of the relational methodology of *Ki pase la?* which speaks to its open-ended and dynamic approach to the representation of (Afro-)Creole identity and culture, in opposition to the more scripted guidelines of the ancestral language framework. First, it introduces Tikoulou as a child of the Mauritian republic, i.e. not just of the main island (Mauritius) but of a constellation of islands scattered in the Indian Ocean, including Rodrigues, Agalega, and the Chagos archipelago. In addition, even though he was born on a small island, the protagonist is represented as an ‘explorer’, eager to navigate the southwest region of the Indian Ocean (La Réunion, Seychelles, Madagascar) and the world more broadly (India and China). In an article where she develops the concept of “creolizing explorations”, literary critic Marie Paillard (2018) argues, for instance, that the character of the ‘Creole explorers’—to whom I associate Tikoulou—challenges colonial tropes of exploration as mere conquest. Indeed, narratives of exploration in Western tradition often portray White European explorers as superior heroic figures. But here, the (Afro-)Creole protagonist is not represented in the same terms: the purpose of his exploration is not to ‘discover’, ‘conquer’, or ‘colonize’ the places he visits; neither does his perspective as a ‘Creole explorer’ describe them as passive. Rather, as he navigates the southwestern region of the Indian Ocean, he becomes more conscious of the intertwined history of these multiple geographies, and of their shared colonial legacy. As such, his identity as a Mauritian is not restricted by the contours of the island, but it is further nurtured by the kind of regional and planetary reach which his adventures allow him to imagine. Finally, the textbooks

also present Tikoulou’s adventures as a collaborative process that requires the contribution, and willful participation of many. This attachment to principles of encounter, relation, and inclusivity is namely emphasized by the final question of the quote, that invites children-learners of *Kreol Morisien* to also take part in Tikoulou’s adventures, as a way of imagining new definitions of Mauritian citizenry.

While the collaborative approach of the authors of *Ki pase la?* has provided ample support to the promotion and expansion of children’s literature in *Kreol Morisien*, it is clear that the notable presence of Tikoulou (and of many other pre-existing fictional characters<sup>99</sup>) in the textbooks in turn reinforces the creolized and creolizing dynamics at work in the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum. To borrow from Vergès’ and Marimoutou’s terminology, I would thus argue that the relational methods of the textbooks provide children with the necessary “moorings” or *amarres* within local contexts and practices, for them to also rethink their place within global networks of movement and exchange that stretch to the neighboring islands of the Indian ocean region, and to continental spaces of Africa, Europe, and Asia. Ultimately, because the teaching and learning of *Kreol Morisien* is not exclusively tethered to the model of the multicultural nation, it offers multiple instances for thinking about the ongoing effects of transnational, transethnic, and translinguistic dynamics.

To some degree, the creolizing approach of *Ki pase la?*—which regularly insists on the importance for young Creole and Mauritian children to think beyond the political and ethnocultural frontiers of the nation—recalls some of the principles of circulation, encounter, and transcultural awareness that are also at work in cosmopolitan education. Indeed, as argued by Lionnet (2013a), “[b]y definition, creolization, like cosmopolitanism presupposes patterns of

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<sup>99</sup> Characters such as Pekoy and Bonnfam lamer from Playgroup, as well as Lilet and Gaspar from Brigitte Masson and Evan Sohun also appear in *Ki pase la?*

movement and degrees of mixing”; as such, both cosmopolitanism and creolization express a distance from the national norm—whether in contexts where the nation is imagined as homogenous or in those where it is imagined as heterogeneous. This said, following Lionnet’s argument that cosmopolitanism and creolization lie “at a similar distance from the national norm but on the plus and minus sides of it, respectively”, I would argue that while cosmopolitanism is an Enlightenment notion that centers the Western subject as the source of knowledge about the world, the creolizing process decenters dominant worldviews and looks at global dynamics from ‘below’, i.e. from the subjective perspective of racialized groups long considered as passive, marginalized, and lacking cultural sophistication.

In addition, if the implementation of cosmopolitan values in national curriculum frameworks are often promoted by local politics, states, and international organizations, in contradistinction, discourses of creolization in Mauritius are largely seen as a threat to the stability of the multicultural nation (see chapter 4). In other words, because the creolizing of the curriculum operates from the margins and happens at the level of pedagogical materials and methodological practices—rather than at the level of state-endorsed policies—it is often seen as the deviant, paradoxical, and ambivalent manifestation of unscripted dynamics or forms of difference. Moreover, the creolizing of the curriculum does not imply the centering of a (Creole) subject as the source of knowledge about the world. And while it does not completely preclude pre-established definitions of ethnic and national identities, it still envisions the moving subject as one who can relate to an enlarged, albeit fragmented geography (or Creole sphere), and who can create new meanings about oneself, the nation, and the world, beyond the (neo)colonial representations naturalized in the multicultural curriculum. And since this exploration does not involve any clear path or telos, the creolizing of the curriculum is a process that is open to

unexpected and unpredictable *résultantes* that may not be traced in advance, but that nevertheless continue to shape the becoming(s) of Creoles.

## CHAPTER 7: LERLA... MO TOM ISI

### CONCLUSION

*La, mo truv mwa—mo truv mo latet antuka—  
pe trangle sey koz enn lot lan-  
la-  
lang, langaz.*

*Wadire enn rev reprime depi sipa kan  
sorti enn ku*

*Wadire kit be-  
ge-gey-ge-man-gan-la.*

*Ti-a krwar enn problem personel pu mwa sa,  
sa kosmar-la.*

*Zanfan Lenor sipa zanfan Lwes  
plor so sor lor so des pu sak fot Franshe  
li komet.*

*Zanfan Lesid zanfan Les parey  
zanfan Sant, zanfan Rodrig, zanfan vilaz,  
zanfan fobur, zanfan dankan,  
zanfan lavil, zanfan lakot, parey*

*Mis, li, li dibut la,  
tap-tap so plim, remark sak fot to fer—  
enn par enn—lerla pik to nom  
la, la divan zot tu, lao lor tablo*

*“Get sa !” li soupire, “Tann sa!” li exklame.*

*Lerla li pran to plim  
li met li atraver to labus, brid dan lagel,  
deryer to ledan, depas to labus de kote,  
pu ki to oblize prononshe  
to  
she-je-wi-she-je-la*

*Lalang maye lipie maye lespri maye  
Laont li enn tas delwil ki fane, li fane  
ziska sak silab to prop non al gate*

*To return lakaz  
Latet bese, de lebra tonbe*

*“Lalang Grefe” by Lindsey Collen (2008)*

How does a language like *Kreol Morisien*, that has long been denied, abjected, and excluded by the formal education system of the multilingual republic, make its way into the national curriculum framework? How does it become a school language in the first place—not strictly in linguistic and pedagogical terms—but in the eyes of the postcolonial state; of the various local ethnic communities that constitute the multicultural nation; and of the people who have maintained the practice of this *lingua franca* by using it to communicate with each other and by transmitting it from one generation to the other? In short, how does the ‘making’ and the institutionalization of *Kreol Morisien*, whether as an ancestral language, a school subject, or an object of knowledge, relate to historical processes, as much as to ethnocultural imaginaries, political calculus, and to the long-standing struggle of (Afro-)Creoles and mixed slaves’ descendants for recognition, equity, and epistemic justice? My interest in all these questions is what initially led to the beginning of this dissertation project several years ago. But long before I even applied for a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D., these interrogations have surfaced in my own experience, although in different forms and at different times, since childhood.

As a multilingual Creole child from Mauritius, I did not have the opportunity to learn about or in *Kreol Morisien* at school. What I witnessed instead, during my early years in primary school, were young kids being reprimanded and punished by their instructors for speaking their first language in the classroom. And in return for a single mistake made in French or English—the only two languages of our education system that ultimately determined academic success—we were often mocked by our peers or humiliated by our headmasters. In fact, in the school environment, like in life in general, many of us—adults and children, teachers and learners—had internalized the idea that our language was not exactly a language; that it was an illegitimate mode of communication, ‘unfit’ for the acquisition of any form of valuable scientific knowledge;

and that we could only be ashamed of using it in a classroom. Today still, despite its official recognition in the curriculum, *Kreol Morisien* is considered by many as a language of inferiority and lack of intelligence.

In the poem “*Lalang Grefe*” [“Grafted tongue”]—which I use as the epigraph to this conclusion—Mauritian author and language activist Lindsey Collen expresses the violence of this ongoing prejudice against *Kreol Morisien* and its speakers within the local education system. As it sheds light on the psychological violence and trauma inflicted on generations of children who—regardless of their geographical or ethnic origin in Mauritius—were forced to learn French in school, with the teacher’s pen locked up their mouth, between their teeth, like a bridle in a horse’s mouth, Collen’s poem reminds us of the long-standing alienation of *Kreol Morisien* speakers by the school system. An alienation that not only resulted in generations of children spoiling (“*gate*”) the pronunciation of their own names, because of the ways in which their tongue (“*lalang*”) was tamed; but one that also engendered a feeling of shame, inadequacy, and inevitable failure for these same children.

Because I grew up in a bilingual home, I made my way through the various stages of the local education system speaking French whenever ‘necessary’. But, as a result of what I observed as a schoolchild, I also became aware very early of at least two forms of discrimination related to the practice of *Kreol Morisien*. First, those who used the language in classrooms, instead of French or English, were largely disadvantaged and discriminated against, because it was not considered ‘proper’. Indeed, because *Kreol Morisien* was perceived as vulgar, colloquial, inferior, and inappropriate for spaces of knowledge transmission, learners who expressed themselves fluently in French or English were often viewed as more intelligent, more capable, and better educated. From the onset therefore, the prestige associated with the linguistic

practices of multilingual learners gave them access to opportunities which ‘monolingual’ *Kreol Morisien* speakers did not share.

The second form of discrimination that was blatant to me, as a primary school child, had to do with the teaching of ancestral languages. Indeed, from the age of five, I knew that my ‘non-Creole’ friends could formally learn an ancestral language—whether Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, or Mandarin—and learn about ‘their’ respective cultural heritage, cuisines, religions, music, festivities, and diasporic histories. But as a Creole child, I remember feeling like I did not belong to any of these classes, because I could not fully or legitimately identify with any of the discrete ethnic groups that were recognized by the ancestral language framework. In reality, for many Creole children like me, the fact that we could not claim one specific cultural heritage and one ancestral homeland—at least out of those officially recognized as acceptable by the school system—the ‘loss’ of our ‘ancestral culture’ and the inability to claim some form of ‘ethnic purity’ had made us even more illegitimate or simply unfit for a multicultural curriculum.

A couple of decades later—i.e. one year prior to the official introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the national curriculum framework—I however decided to apply for the first academic position ever advertised in the language at the Mauritius Institute of Education. In this capacity, I directly participated in the training of the first cohort of primary school teachers recruited to teach the language. I was also tasked with designing some of the first textbooks in *Kreol Morisien*, following the official guidelines of the *Addendum to the National Curriculum Framework*. In the meantime, I became even more interested in understanding the historical, political, and cultural conditions and processes that partake in the ‘making’ of a school subject in general, and of an ancestral language in particular. In other words, because I was deprived from formally learning *Kreol Morisien* at school myself, at a time when the presence of all the other



languages of the school system was almost completely naturalized by the multicultural curriculum and its ancestral politics, I began to ask myself some critical questions about what led to the institutionalization of the language, on what terms, and to what end. More specifically, I began to reflect on the significance, limitations, and broader implications of teaching *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles, rather than as a first language of literacy, a medium of instruction, or a national language. Ultimately, this dissertation tries to capture some of the key components of this reflection.

As shown by the various sections of this dissertation, the long-awaited introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum lies at the intersection of various ethnocultural, political, institutional, and pedagogical realms. And as underscored by the *Addendum*, this ‘late’ adoption of the language in schools is to a large extent the result of a long history of militancy and advocacy, that brings to the fore the overlapping of multiple agendas—whether for its recognition as a mother tongue, for its establishment as a national language, or for obtaining historical reparation and social justice vis-à-vis the Afro-Creole community of the island. In this sense, it is worth emphasizing that, despite the tenacious prejudices that often present *Kreol Morisien* as a dialect or a second-class language that lacks grammatical sophistication or that is unfit for elite purposes, what ultimately ‘made’ the language one that ‘fits’ the Mauritian curriculum was not so much the standardization of its various linguistic components (pronunciation, spelling, grammar, etc.)—which in fact was accelerated by the political decision to introduce the language in schools—but rather its ethnopolitical significance and the fact that it was effectively represented, reconfigured, and claimed as the ancestral language of a particular ethnic community of the multicultural nation.

In an attempt to understand the context, dynamics, and modalities of this process, this dissertation historicized the ‘making’ of this ethno-political significance of *Kreol Morisien* as the main justification behind its 2012 introduction in Mauritian schools. By problematizing the ethnonationalist discourse of the Mauritian state, following its access to independence in the second half of the twentieth century, chapter 4 in particular examined how the local Creole people, language, and culture have long been abjected by the multicultural curriculum and by its underlying ancestral politics; both because of the association of the term ‘Creole’ with the idea of a cultural ‘deficit’ resulting from slavery, and because of its links to ideas of *métissage*, hybridity, and ‘impurity’. By historicizing this abjection of ‘Creole’, this chapter subsequently discussed how the notion of creolization itself is perceived as a threat to the stability of the national curriculum, which in the local education system serves to naturalize, maintain, and reproduce fixed definitions of ancestral cultures and ethnocultural identities.

By alluding to the *malaise* of the Creole community in Mauritius, and to the emergence of an (Afro-)Creole identity movement in the late 1990s and 2000s, chapter 5 in turn historicized how the local Creole people responded to this institutional abjection through postures that strategically promote ethnic essentialism, as a means of forcing state recognition in their favor. By examining in particular how languages have historically acquired an ancestral status’ in the multicultural curriculum of the postcolonial nation, this chapter demonstrated how the gradual essentialization and reclaiming of the term ‘Creole’ for speaking about African heritage and Afro-diasporic cultures, is what ultimately led to the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles in the *NCF*. But by engaging with the obvious tensions at the heart of this reconfiguration of ‘Creole’ as ‘Afro-Mauritian’, the chapter also raised critical questions about the differences between an Afro-Creole component of the curriculum and what I call the

creolizing of the curriculum. More specifically, by showing how the terms of the institutionalization of *Kreol Morisien* tends to subscribe to the compartmentalized logics of the ethnonationalist discourse and to the scripted guidelines of the multicultural curriculum, the chapter proposed that the multidimensional and overlapping functions of *Kreol Morisien* as a language that is both ancestral and national ultimately generate a fundamental paradox in the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the curriculum that will manifest itself through an ensemble of unscripted *résultantes*.

Indeed, as argued in chapter 6, in spite of the clear guidelines of the multicultural curriculum—and in spite of the strategic reconfiguration of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of the (Afro-)Creole community—the term ‘Creole’ in Mauritius continues to encompass cultural identities, practices, histories, and experiences that are both specific and open. As such, while it certainly references elements of African cultural heritage in the curriculum, the representation of so-called Creole characters, practices, narratives, and ways of knowing in *Kreol Morisien* textbooks remains open to those processes of relation, adaptation, and transformation that point to the ongoing interaction between racial, cultural, historical, and epistemological categories. This comes to saying that, while state institutions in Mauritius continue to strategize with ethnic separatism and ancestral politics, what characterizes the idea of ‘Creole’ in Mauritius is as much a vertical and genealogical link to Africa as it is a variety of horizontal and rhizomatic connections. And, as I argued in chapter 6, these (subtle) connections are what ultimately disrupt the racial, cultural, and historical divides inherited from colonial taxonomies; and unsettle the compartmentalized logics of the national curriculum framework. In other words, the irreducibility of Creole or creolized referents to clearly delineated definitions in

the textbooks puts into question the broader ways in which ethnic and cultural identities themselves are approached as discrete, fixed, and stable by the curriculum.

As I conclude this dissertation, I want to reiterate however that my interest in the unscripted *résultantes* that emerge from the tensions and paradoxes of the *Kreol Morisien* curriculum—and which I approach as the manifestations of a broader creolizing process—does not subscribe to an *a priori* engagement with creolization as something that should be merely celebrated. In other words, my discussion of the ambiguities, ambivalence, opacities, and relationalities at work in the curriculum, does not presuppose that the creolizing of the curriculum is an all-positive process; neither do I approach it, however, as a negative phenomenon that threatens the stability of the curriculum and that should consequently be neutralized. Rather, I view the creolizing of the curriculum as an inevitable, albeit unpredictable process that speaks to the irreducibility of ethnocultural identities, and to the profoundly relational nature of ethnocultural experiences, that are yet still represented as incompatible or mutually exclusive categories within the framework of the multicultural nation.

Indeed, what characterizes the cultural dynamics of Creole contexts such as Mauritius is the *longue durée* history of interaction among racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, that has constantly put to test the validity of colonial divides and taxonomies. This is to say that processes and embodied manifestations of creolization have long revealed the limits of the colonial calculus. By drawing from these colonial taxonomies, the ethnocultural categories of the multicultural curriculum have, in contradistinction, served as an educational technology used by the state for naturalizing representations of cultural identities as discrete, fixed, and stable. However, the creolizing of the curriculum speaks to the limits of this institutional calculus, by generating ambiguities, paradoxes, and unscripted *mises en relation*. As such, it points to forms

of cultural entanglement and practices of relation which curriculum design, as an educational technology, strives to disentangle and neutralize.

Of course, one could always argue that, because the main purpose of the curriculum is to standardize and/or naturalize specific representations—whether as mainstream, marginal, or deviant—in order to better control them; the practice of curriculum design could also potentially co-opt ambiguities and ambivalences, just as paradoxes and rhizomatic connections, in ways that present Creole practices, identities, and experiences as open-ended, but through similar procedures of standardization and principles of codification. And while I acknowledge that this kind of standardization of ‘the’ Creole experience is probably what subtends theorizations and descriptions of Creole identities *à la* Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, my use of the term ‘creolizing’ insists on the irreducibility and unpredictability of cultural dynamics, which is to say that there is always something that may not be fully captured, described, or predicted. In other words, my approach to the creolizing of the curriculum accounts for those dynamics and *résultantes* that are often seen as deviant, undesirable, or fundamentally incompatible with official curricular guidelines, but that remain at work in discursive, pedagogical, and instructional practices.

In addition, even if my use of the term ‘creolizing’ implies a form of *dépassement*—i.e. a conceptual space that continues to envision the existence and becoming of (Afro-)Creoles and of the other ethnocultural groups of Mauritius beyond the limits of the state’s ethnonationalist discourse—I would argue that this *dépassement* still presupposes the predominance of a multicultural model and of a taxonomic discourse that promote ancestral ties, cultural purity, and ethnic separatism. Thus, as I speak of the creolizing of the curriculum, my goal is not to suggest that it constitutes a scripted process of resistance that will ultimately neutralize the cultural

essentialisms at work in the Mauritian curriculum. To do so would be to overlook how the practices of marginalization, discrimination, and psychological violence which I described earlier are still ongoing in the education system. Rather, my theoretical approach to the creolizing of the curriculum acknowledges the inequalities, hierarchies, and power differentials at work in the multicultural discourse, and how these power differentials are maintained through particular representations. In other words, in articulating my idea of the creolizing of the curriculum, I do not look at the historical abjection and the more recent adoption of ‘Creole’ in the education system as something that can be separated from the broader ethnocultural politics of the multicultural nation, which pervades the representation, identification, and recognition of all the ethnocultural groups of the island.

A case in point, in the aftermath of the language’s introduction in the national curriculum, the recent years have witnessed a renewed interest and a return of the advocacy—from a number of intellectuals, activists, and organizations—for the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* as one of the official languages of the Mauritian parliament, on the basis of its wide-spread use as the main *lingua franca* of the country. But, as discussed in chapter 4, if the nationalization of *Kreol Morisien* and its official recognition in parliament is a proposition that dates back to the independence period, it has also consistently been met with the same kind of resistance that has kept the language away from the education system until 2012. Following my discussion of the ‘making’ of *Kreol Morisien* as an optional school subject and an ancestral language in the national curriculum, it is thus worth noting that the recognition and institutionalization of *Kreol Morisien* as a language in its own rights is only partially achieved. Indeed, as I have underscored in several sections of this dissertation, in addition to its ethnocultural value as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles, *Kreol Morisien* is also a trans-ethnic language *par excellence*. But

despite the fact that it has been taught in schools for almost nine years now—and although its presence in the curriculum points to some of the limits of the multicultural discourse—*Kreol Morisien* remains largely abjected from the institutional spaces of the multicultural state, namely because of its association with Creoles in Mauritius.

Indeed, the paradox attached to *Kreol Morisien* as a language that is both ancestral and national—both specific to an ethnic group, and transethnic at the same time—raises the following question: how does the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* as the ancestral language of Creoles in the curriculum affect its recognition as the language of all Mauritians more broadly? In other words, now that *Kreol Morisien* is explicitly taught as the ancestral language of Creoles, will its potential adoption as a medium of instruction or a language of communication in state institutions be seen as a symbolic advantage granted to Creoles, and therefore as a threat to the stability of the multicultural nation?

Opposing the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in parliament, Sutyhudeo Tengur, a leading member of the Government Hindi Teachers Union (GHTU), writes the following in an open letter to the Prime Minister, titled “*Pourquoi non au ‘créole’ au parlement?*” [Why one has to say no to ‘Creole’ in Parliament]:

*Si l'État cède aux pressions communales pour imposer le 'créole' au parlement, ce serait la gaffe monumentale politique par excellence [...] Ce n'est pas un dictionnaire avec des définitions approximatives et de certains mots et expressions qui pourront servir d'arguments pour que le 'créole' soit imposé au parlement. [...] De toute façon, le créole mauricien n'est qu'un dialecte dérivé du français avec des mots d'hindi de chinois de tamoule et de bhojpuri et que l'on qualifiait naguère de 'lingua franca'. Donc une langue bâtarde issue d'un mélange de traditions et cultures diverses. [...] Même si le kréol morisien est enseigné au niveau primaire, il y a une*

*grande réticence de la part des parents pour encourager leurs enfants apprendre [sic] ce dialecte qui ne mènera nulle part. / Si le créole - non structuré jusqu'ici - devrait être accepté comme langue au Parlement, pourquoi pas introduire d'autres langues ancestrales reconues [sic] et enseignées jusqu'au niveau universitaires [sic] dont le bhojpuri, l'hindi, l'ourdou, le marathi, le telugu, le tamoule, le mandarin ou encore l'arabe.*

[If the state were to surrender to the ethnic pressures for imposing 'Creole' in parliament, it would be a monumental political mistake [...] It's not a dictionary with approximate definitions of some words and expressions that will justify the imposition of Creole in parliament. [...] In all cases, *Kreol Morisien* is but a dialect derived from French with words from Hindi, Chinese, Tamil, and Bhojpuri, described not so long ago as a 'lingua franca'. It is therefore an illegitimate language, that results from the mixing of different traditions and cultures. [...] Even if *Kreol Morisien* is taught in primary schools, many parents hesitate to encourage their kids to learn this dialect that will lead them nowhere. If Creole—which remains unstructured so far—was to be accepted as a language of parliament, why not then introduce other ancestral languages that are already recognized and taught at university level, such as Bhojpuri, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Mandarin, or even Arabic.]

(S. Tengur, negotiator GHTU, November 3, 2020)

Published in November 2020 in a local daily newspaper, Tengur's open letter, as well as the reasons summarizing his objection to the adoption of *Kreol Morisien* in parliament, are quite illustrative of the sociopolitical malaise and ethnocultural anxieties that continue to surround the gradual recognition of *Kreol Morisien* within the institutions of the multicultural state more broadly. Indeed, some of the arguments brought forward in the letter for opposing the use of *Kreol Morisien* in parliament—when it is in effect the language of a majority of Mauritians—are



similar to those that have long been used to undermine the introduction of the language in the education system. First is the wide-spread prejudice that *Kreol Morisien* is still but a “dialect”, an “illegitimate language” whose inferior status may not be that simply challenged by the publication of a dictionary and of scientific research. Second is the idea that the teaching and learning of *Kreol Morisien* in primary schools should not be used as a basis for advocating for a greater practice of the language in the broader social, political, or ethnocultural spheres of the country, since it is but a dialect that “leads [...] nowhere”. Third is the strategic reduction of *Kreol Morisien* to its official status as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles, to the extent that any further institutional recognition granted to the language is perceived by many—including by Government teachers’ unions—as a political move that ultimately undermines the value of the “other ancestral languages” and subsequently threatens the stability of the ethnonationalist model.

This is to say that, despite the formal introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in the multicultural and multilingual curriculum of the country, its institutional incorporation within the ancestral language framework—i.e. as a school subject that is mutually exclusive with the other optional languages of the curriculum—extends the long-existing logics of ethnocultural separatism imposed by the colonial regime, and maintained up to this day by the postcolonial state. In other words, while it has successfully enabled the recognition of the language in schools, the essentialization of *Kreol Morisien* along ethnic lines does not necessarily put to test the divisions and taxonomies of the multicultural model and its subsequent abjection of ways of being and knowing that reference racial, cultural, linguistic, or religious mixing. Rather, by arguing that *Kreol Morisien* is but “an illegitimate language, that results from the mixing of different traditions and cultures”, Tengur’s letter seems to suggest that, for many, *Kreol Morisien* is

tolerated in schools, not because of its linguistic and pedagogical value, but because of its ethnocultural significance as the ancestral language of (Afro-)Creoles. This ongoing resistance vis-à-vis the official recognition of *Kreol Morisien* in a country where the language is used by more than 90% of the population, is an obvious manifestation of the paradoxes generated when the official discourse of ethnic separatism overlooks the many forms of exchanges, relation, and creolization also at work in a so-called multicultural society.

By speaking of the creolizing of the curriculum in the final analytical chapter of this dissertation, my goal was thus to understand how these paradoxes emerge and play out in the work of curriculum design, knowing that as an educational technology, the multicultural curriculum itself is largely responsible for validating, transmitting, and naturalizing particular definitions of Creole that align with the discourse of the rainbow nation. For that reason, my discussion of this creolizing of the curriculum was careful not to suggest that the presence of ambiguous, ambivalent, and relational representations of ethnocultural identities, practices, and expressions in the textbooks ultimately resolve the existing tensions and violences of the multicultural discourse. Rather, by underscoring the multidimensional representations of ‘Creole’ that still escape the initial calculus of the multicultural curriculum within *Kreol Morisien* textbooks, I argue that this creolizing process ultimately points to expressions of Creole becomings, beyond the kind of essentialist representations relayed in Tengur’s letter. As such, even if this creolizing of the curriculum does not imply a complete reversal of the multicultural discourse, it continues to offer new ways for thinking about the relationship between ethnicity, culture, heritage, and language beyond the legacy of colonialism. Indeed, by envisioning ways of being and knowing that unsettle the clear divisions of the multicultural model, the creolizing of the curriculum points to modes of becoming that not only affect Creoles but all the ethnocultural

groups of the island. And while this dissertation is among the very first of its kind to be completely dedicated to the study of the historical, political, and ethnocultural dimensions of the introduction of *Kreol Morisien* in schools, my hope is that, as the situation keeps on evolving, this work will be followed by many more that will continue to speak to the challenges of imagining and storying a better *vivre-ensemble*...

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## APPENDICES

**APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL**

May 1, 2017

Marty Natchoo  
n.natchoo@ku.edu

Dear Marty Natchoo:

On 5/1/2017, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Summer 2018 pre-dissertation Pilot Study Creolizing the Curriculum: Teaching Creole Languages in Postcolonial Islands
Investigator:	Marty Natchoo
IRB ID:	STUDY00140950
Funding:	Name: University of Kansas
Grant ID:	
Documents Reviewed:	• Pre-dissertation travel grant, • Natchoo Consent Form Summer 2018.doc, • Natchoo - KU Human Research Protocol

The IRB approved the study on 5/1/2017.

1. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
2. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

Continuing review is not required for this project, however you are required to report any significant changes to the protocol prior to altering the project.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:  
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,



**Research**

Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA  
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

Date: June 12, 2019

TO: Marty Natchoo, (n.natchoo@ku.edu)

FROM: Alyssa Haase, IRB Administrator (785-864-7385, [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu))

RE: **Approval of Modification**

The IRB reviewed the submission referenced below on 6/12/2019. The IRB approved the protocol, effective 6/12/2019.

<b>IRB Action: APPROVED</b>		<b>Effective date: 6/12/2019</b>	<b>Expiration Date : 6/11/2024</b>
STUDY DETAILS			
Investigator:	<a href="#">Marty Natchoo</a>		
IRB ID:	STUDY00140950		
Title of Study:	Summer 2018 pre-dissertation Pilot Study Creolizing the Curriculum: Teaching Creole Languages in Postcolonial Islands		
Funding ID:	Name: University of Kansas		
REVIEW INFORMATION			
Review Type:	Modification		
Review Date:	6/12/2019		
Documents Reviewed:	• Natchoo Consent Form Summer 2019.doc, • Natchoo - KU Human Research Protocol		
Exemption Determination:	• (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation		
Additional Information:			

**KEY PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES.** Consult our website for additional information.

- Approved Consent Form:** You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the “Documents” tab, “Final” column, in eCompliance. Participants must be given a copy of the form.
- Continuing Review and Study Closure:** You are required to provide a project update to HRPP before the above expiration date through the submission of a Continuing Review. Please [close your study](#) at completion.
- Modifications:** Modifications to the study may affect Exempt status and must be submitted for review and approval before implementing changes. For more information on the types of modifications that require IRB review and approval, [visit our website](#).
- Add Study Team Member:** [Complete a study team modification](#) if you need to add investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take [the online tutorial](#) prior to being approved to work on the project.
- Data Security:** [University data security and handling requirements](#) apply to your project.
- Submit a Report of New Information (RNI):** If a subject is injured in the course of the research procedure or there is a breach of participant information, an RNI must be submitted immediately. Potential non-compliance may also be reported through the RNI process.
- Consent Records:** When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.
- Study Records** must be kept a minimum of three years after the completion of the research. Funding agencies may have retention requirements that exceed three years.



**Addendum to  
National Curriculum  
Framework**



**KREOL  
MORISIEN**



**Standards 1-6**



*Addendum to  
National Curriculum Framework*

**KREOL MORISIEN**

*Standards I-VI*

**Dokiman elabore par:**

Nita RUGHOONUNDUN-CHELLAPERMA (kordinasion)  
*Associate Professor*  
*Responsab Yunit Kreol, Mauritius Institute of Education*

Emmanuel Bruno JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
*Lecturer*  
*Yunit Kreol Morisien, Mauritius Institute of Education*

Remersiman a bann dimounn swivan ki finn partisip dan bann konsiltasion otour sa dokiman-la: Alain Ah-Vee (*Ledikasion Pou Travayer / AKM*), Maroussia Bouvery (*Group ABAIM*), Christiane Cap d'Or (*Komision Ledikasion, Rodrigues*), Cherieanne Carta (*ICJM*), Arnaud Carpooran (*Liniversite Moris / AKM*), M. S. Choolun (*GTU*), Lindsey Collen (*LPT*), Marjorie Desveaux, Jimmy Harmon (*ICGM / AKM*), Pushpa Lallah (*Playgroup / AKM*), Brijlal Lodhur, Alain Munian (*Terre de Paix*), Danielle Palmyre (*ICJM*) Jean-Marie Richard (*Groupman Ark-an-siel / AKM*), Alain Romaine (*Seminer Inter-Diosezin, Losean Indien / AKM*), M. V. Cynthia SEERAV, Valérie Wong (*APLKKM / ICJM*)

Remersiman ou si a tou bann mamb Akamedi Kreol Morisien (*AKM*), ek an partikiler a so sekreter, Menon Munien.



## ADDENDUM TO NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

### KREOL MORISIEN

#### **1. *Introdiksjon***

Enn *curriculum* nasional, li boukou plis ki enn dokiman-kad ki etabli bann orientasion prinsipal enn sistem edikatif; an realite, li enons filozofi ledikasion ki enn pei ou enn sosiete rod met an plas atraver lekòl, an tan ki enn institisyon, avek lobzektif final amenn bann zanfan vinn bann sitwayin apar-antier dan enn lespas nasional ek kiltirel presi. Li esprim rol vital ki sa pei-la donn ledikasion an tan ki enn dispozitif ki pou striktir ek model lasosiete. Par konsekan, enn *curriculum*, li non selman trouv so lasours dan manier ki enn Leta definir ek reprezant limem, me li ousi reflet neseriman proze sosial ki sa Leta-la finn adopte, e ki pou kontribie direkteman dan fason ki li pou devlop limem dan lavenir, atraver devlopman diver konpetans ki fer lobze bann laprantisaz skoler. Se sa bann mem konpetans-la ki determinn lansengman bann size ek bann konteni zeneral, transversal (siantifik, lingwistik, kiltirel, *etc.*) ek disiplinier ki ena dan program ek *syllabus* lekòl.

Dans Moris, dokiman *National Curriculum Framework*, ki finn rann piblik ek efektif an 2009, finn non selman mark enn moman ek enn lavansman inportan dan nou sistem edikatif; li finn ousi esprim dezir Leta pou presiz ban diferan lobzektif ledikasion atraver lelaborasion enn zouti konple, koeran ek kler, ki orient ek gid bann diferan demars edikatif dan Moris. Dan enn premie tan, sa *curriculum*-la pa finn modifie lalis size (“*subject-grid*”) ki lekòl propoze, bien ki li finn permet introdwir klas *Information Technology* pou amenn bann zanfan devlop enn konpreansion ek enn litalizasion de-baz bann zouti informatik. Nou kone toutfwa ki enn sistem edikatif, li enn strikir dinamik, presizeman parski li bizin akomod ek reponn enn sertin nonb demann ek defi sosial ek nasional. Dan sa lozik-la, enn *curriculum* li ousi li enn obze dinamik. Se dayer seki explik ek zistifie enn sanzman alafwa konsekan ek istorik dan *National Curriculum Framework* anviger apartir 2012: lintrodiksjon lang Kreol Morisien dan lekòl. Sa desizyon-la an lien avek evolision nou pei ki finn abord enn lot letap so lexisans ek so devlopman kan li finn rant dan enn

periyod post-kolonial. Donk, li ena boukou rezonans ek implikasyon pou nou sosyete parski sa lang-la, li non selman enn realite dan fonksionman lansanb lakominote ek dan lavi sak individi, me li ousi ena enn porte nasional inkontestab.

Par ayer, li neser prezise ki, dans so lesans mem, enn *curriculum*, se enn zouti esansiel planifikasyon pedagogik. Li permet sitie ek evalie bann implikasyon pedagogik ki antour swa ek metodoloji lansengman bann diferan size dan lekol. Li ousi tenir an kont prosesis laprantisaz ek devlopman kognitif bann zanfan. Par konsekan, pa kapav rezim enn *curriculum* a enn deba politik, sosiolojik, (milti)kiltirel ou psikolojik, me li sitie li dan interseksyon sa bann diferan diskour-la. Enn *curriculum*, li ousi inklir enn par reflexion kognitif, pedagogik ek didaktik. Li ane fe formil enn reflexion lor seki bann size reprezante dan proze edikatif ki pe met an plas, an mem tan ki li pran kont lidantite ek profil bann aprenan et spesifisite bann konteni laprantisaz. Par konsekan, kan nou pe koz Kreol Morisien isi, nou pe koz enn nouvo size ki pe rant dan lekol, wi, me nou pe ousi koz lang maternel enn gran nonb aprenan ki pe azout li avek enn palet lezot langaz ek lezot size. Sa fenomenn-la modifie fondamantalman rapor ki bann zelev devlope avek lekol ek bann konteni laprantisaz.

Li donk neser ki nou rapel, dan sa dokiman-la, bann rezon lintrodiksyon Kreol Morisien dan lekol primer ek ki nou reflesi lor so implikasyon pou bann zelev ek zot laprantisaz, avan ki nou etabli so silabus pou lansengman. Pou fer sa, nou pou konsider plizier diferan perspektiv ki zistifie ek/ou explik valer ek porte sa lamenzan-la:

- a. perspektiv **psikolojik ek afektif**, ki soulign linportans *transform lekol primer an enn lanvironman akeyan, sin ek ekilibre* pou tou nou zelev ;
- b. perspektiv **istorik ek antropolojik**, ki rekonet *lexistans kominote kreol dan Leta-nasion Moris ek so drwa a bann dibien sinbolik ek kiltirel* kouma “langaz ancestral”;
- c. perspektiv **drwa lingwistik**, ki insiste lor *rekonesans ziridik drwa bann individi ek bann group pou ena ek servi zot langaz dan bann linstans Leta* ;
- d. perspektiv **politik**, ki defann bann lobzektif *konstriksyon enn nasion ek devlopman enn konsians sitwayin* ;

- e. perspektiv **sosio-ekonomik ek kestion zistis sosial**, ki met an-avan *rekonesans ek valorizasion kiltir popiler*, ki souvan marzinalize dan sistem edikatif (notaman dan bann pei ansienman kolonize) o-profi enn elit sosial ;
- f. perspektiv **kognitif**, ki defann *linportans lang maternel bann aprenan, kouma enn zouti esansiel ek indisponsab dan bann laprantisak skoler ek dan tou proses devlopman kognitif*.

### ***2.1. Perspektiv psikolojik ek afektif: Kreol Morisien, enn pon ant lakaz ek lekol***

Lantre dan lekol konstitie enn moman delika ek inportan dan lavi tou zanfan. An-fet, gran mazorite bann zanfan fier ek kontan pou vinn lekol, mem si zot pankor plennman konsian ki savedir ; se enn letap ki amenn anmemtan eksitasion, antisipasion, me parfwa ousi apreansion. Bann premie pa enn zanfan dan lekol, zot donk krisial pou laswit so skolarite ek pou so adaptasion dan lanvironnman skoler, kot so rol ek so plas pa parey kouma dan so lanvironnman familial. Kan enn zanfan rant lekol, so lavi sanze: li konfronte avek enn nouvo lespas, avek bann nouvo norm sosial, avek enn nouvo definision limem antan ki zelev, fas avek bann lezot zelev ek fas avek enn group adilt (profeser, met dekol, *etc.*). Par konsekan, **lekol redefini sitiasion enn zanfan** ek reorganiz so bann reper afektif, relasionel, sosial, *etc.* Sa peryod instabilite ek adaptasion la, li inevitab e li plizoumwinn long depandan bann zanfan; li ousi enn peryod bien delika ek frazil. Lekol, se enn lemond ki diferan depi lakaz, ek tranzision ki enn zanfan bizin fer ant sa de lespas-la konport bann risk ki zanfan-la pa santi li dan so plas. Se pou sa rezon-la ki lakey bann zanfan dan lekol ena enn valer krisial: li inportan met zot alez ek fer zot santi ki zot dan zot plas la. Se enn moman ki bizin planifie avek atansyon ek swin.

Or, enn bann mwayin pou asir sa lakey-la, se etabli **enn pon ant lakaz ek lekol atraver langaz** ki bann zanfan deza pe koze dan zot fami. An-efe, Kreol Morisien li premie lang sosyalizasion laplipar bann zanfan morisien. Se langaz dan ki zot viv ek se langaz ki zot servi pou konstrir zot bann interaksyon, dekrir zot lanvironnman ek rakont zot lexperyans: se zot prinsipal zouti pou konpran zot lantouraz ek rant an kontak avek li. Donk, li lezitim ek inportan ki bann zanfan

retrouv ek itiliz sa langaz-la dan lespas lekòl, non pa avek laper ou enn santiman inferyorite, me avek liberte ek konviksion ki langaz ki zot servi valorize par lekòl. Kan enn zanfan pe kapav servi, explwat ek explor so lang maternel, se lansanb bann experyans et bann reper ki sa langaz-la veikile dan so lavi ek dan so bann interaksion, ki li pou kapav amenn avek li dan lekòl. Prezans Kreol Morisien dan lanvironnman skoler pou ou si permet ki bann zanfan ki plis intimide pou vinn lekòl ek pas tou zot lazourne la, santi zot bien akeyi. Sa premie santiman-la kapital pou ki zanfan-la fer lekòl konfians ek fer limem konfians pou li vinn enn bon zelev. A lon term, li ou si kapital pou so lafami ek pou nou pei, parski souvan, se bann premie interaksion ant enn zanfan ek lekòl ki determinn so adaptasion dan sa sistem la.

Prezans Kreol Morisien dan lekòl, li pou ou si **diminie risk ki nou sistem ledikasion** – kot lansengman ek laprantisaz fer ofisielman an Angle – **vinn enn lespas alienasion ou marzinalizasion** akòz bann fenomenn diskriminasion lingwistik. O-kontrer, li pou konsolid dimansion inklizif ek demokratik dan ledikasion, seki pou permet lekòl met tou zanfan lor enn mem pie degalite. An-efe, lakey enn zanfan dan so lanvironnman skoler atraver mem langaz ki li servi lakaz prokir zanfan-la enn santiman sekirite ek fasilite miz-an-plas bann stratezi reperaz et adaptasion esansiel pour ki bann zanfan devlop enn rapor sin ek efikas avek lekòl. Or, si lekòl pa etabli sa pon-la avek lakaz, li pran risk ki bann zanfan pertirbe ek pa santi zot pare pou bann laprantisaz. Enn zanfan ki pa bien akeyi dan lekòl kapav santi li kouman enn etranze dan sa lanvironnman-la, ek sa santiman-la kapav afekte manier ki li get limem an tan ki zelev ek aprenan. Or, Kreol Morisien antan ki premie lang sosyalizasion nou bann zanfan ena sa potansiel pou asir enn pasaz pozitif ant lakaz ek lekòl ek, an konsekans, prezerv lekilib psiko-afektif bann zanfan dan zot nouvo lanvironnman skoler.

## ***2.2 Perspektiv istorik ek antropozik: Kreol Morisien, enn langaz ansestral ek enn dibien sinbolik***

Priz-an-kont Kreol Morisien dan *curriculum* nasional, se enn mezir ki ena enn linpak lor sitiasion, reprezantasyon ek rol langaz dan lekòl. Nou kone ki dan sik primer, ena de lang ki

obligatwar – Angle ek Franse – me ki lekòl, li ou si propoz plizier lang opsyonel: Arab, Hindi, Mandarin, Marathi, Ourdou, Tamil, Telegou. Prezans otan lang dan lekòl, li enn bann rises ek spesifisite nou sistem ledikasyon, enn spesifisite ki indisosyab avek profil ek realite lingwistik nou sosyete miltikiltirel ek miltiling. An-efe, tou bann lang opsyonel – ek osi enn lang obligatwar – ki nou retrouve dan lekòl ena enn lien direk avek listwar nou pei ek listwar bann diferan group etnik e kiltirel ki form nasyon morisien zordi. Nou pei Moris retrouv li dan lakrwaze bann kontinan e se dan sa lespas-la ki plizier popilasyon migran finn zwenn ek finn rekonstitie sertain zot bann reper kiltirel, anmemtan ki zot finn konstrir enn nouvo nasyon. Atraver listwar donk, sak group finn anrиси lespas morisien avek so bann leksyon kiltirel, so bann pratik kominoter, so langaz, *etc.* Seki fer lintere tou sa bann dibien sinbolik ki finn konserve ek proteze pandan otan lane, se ki, dan enn sosyete miltikiltirel, zot ena enn doub fonksion: zot **konstitie bann eleman idantiter** pou bann diferan group kiltirel ek **fer parti leritaz ki listwar finn leg** nou pei atraver sa bann group-la; zot ou si **angaze dan enn proses metisaz** ki fer bann nouvo form ekspresyon kiltirel ki prop a Moris pran nesans.

Se pou sa rezon-la ki bann lang dan lekòl ranpli plis ki enn fonksion sosyalizasyon. Zot ou si inklir, dan enn fason ou enn lot, enn dimansyon idantiter bien for, ki zistifie par lefet ki zot ena stati **swa lang ansestral, swa lang-leritaz, swa lang kominoter ou vernakiler**. An-fet, dan Moris, bann lang, se bann **dibien sinbolik** ki ena enn valer antropozik alafwa inportan ek delika, non selman dan manier ki bann diferan group konstitie zot antan ki kominote kiltirel, me ou si dan manier ki zot integre zot dan lespas nasional. Or, labsans ofisiel Kreol Morisien dan program edikatif ek *curriculum* nasional, notaman apre lindepandans ou depi lintroduksion bann lang oriental dan lekòl, finn reprezant pandan boukou lane enn anomali nou sistem ek enn linzistis vizavi bann dimoun ki idantifie zot avek sa langaz-la dan so dimansyon ansestral ek/ou kominoter. Nou pei koz isi spesifikman lakominote kreol dan Moris, ki desandan esklav ek ki finn plizoumwin metise depi peryod kolonizasyon ziska zordi. Nou pa bliye, an-efe, ki Moris enn ansien sosyete plantasyon ki finn konstrir lor enn model sosyal yerarsik, ek ki finn gard bann tras bien pregnan so pase kolonial, dan manier ki li finn devlope ekonomikman ek sosyalman par exanp. Or, atraver listwar nou pei, nou konstata ki kominote bann desandan esklav finn pandan lontan res a lekar sa devlopman-la; zordi li pa fasil pou bann dimoun sa kominote-la pou

konstrir zot enn plas, enn rol ek enn limaz valorizan dan nou sosiete. Pourtan, li vital ki zot resi fer li, mem si sa sanzman ver enn sosiete ki pli zis ek pli ekitab implik enn proze sosial inportan. Bann inisiativ kouma *Equal Opportunity Bill* ou *Truth and Justice Commission* fer parti sa proze-la. **Legalite ant tou bann kominote dan Moris pa enn kestion opsyon me enn kestion drwa imin.**

Lekite ek lazistis sosial dan enn pei pas ousi par rekonesans bann diferan group ki existe ek par rekonesans zot evolision ek zot kontribision dan sosiete kot zot viv. Or, nou kone ki bann langaz kreol, de manier zeneral, finn pran nesans dan bann sosiete esklavazis, dan bann kontex kot langaz bann esklav ti finn konfiske ek zot finn oblize invant enn nouvo langaz pou kominike avek bann kolon ek ant zot mem. Langaz Kreol Morisien, li pa enn eksepsyon : li finn pran nesans pandan peryod lesklavaz dan Moris ek se bann desandan esklav ki finn asir transmision ek prezervasion sa langaz-la, antan ki lang ansestral ek kominoter, avan ki Kreol vinn enn lang veikiler ant bann diferan kominote dan pei, ek enn sinbol linite nasional. Par konsekan, li lezitim ki lakominote kreol idantifie li avek langaz Kreol Morisien, lor plan kiltirel ek etnik. Dayer, introdiksyon langaz Kreol Morisien dan lekol, li laboutisman langazman kontini ki sartin individu ek asosiasyon sosio-kiltirel finn ena avek enn lobzektif reklamasyon ek reparasyon. Or, lekol ena enn gran rol pou li zwe dan realizasyon sa proze sosial la. E zordi, se ousi dan sa lozik rekonesans ek reparasyon la ki Kreol Morisien pe rant dan lekol antan ki **“langaz ansestral” “at par with other ancestral languages.”** Sa desizyon-la permet onor demann kominote kreol ki revandik langaz Kreol Morisien kouma so “langaz ansestral” parski se zot aryer gran-dimounn ek zot zanfann ki finn invant ek gradielman koumans koz sa langaz-la. Deryer rekonesans Kreol Morisien, ena rekonesans sinbolik lapor kominote kreol dan konstruksyon nou nasion. Istorikman ek antropozikman, **langaz Kreol Morisien, li enn dibien kiltirel inegale ek inegalab ki bann esklav ek zot zanfann finn donn sa pei-la** ek so popilasyon.

Dan sa sans-la, introdiksyon Kreol Morisien dan lekol pa vinn neserman remet an kestion plas bann diferan langaz deza prezan dan *curriculum*, me li retabli enn lekilib ant lansengman bann size-langaz, zot reprezantasyon ek zot fonksyon dan lasosiete. Kreol Morisien pe anfin gagn enn

plas lezitim dan lekòl, antan ki enn lang opsyonèl, akote sa wit lezot lang opsyonèl ki lekòl ofer ek ki bann fami kapav swazir pou zot zanfan.

Anfin, nou ousi bizin dir ki introdiskion langaz Kreol Morisien dan lekòl li enn bon pa ver proteksion diversite lingwistik.

### ***2.3 Perspektiv drwa lingwistik: Kreol Morisien, enn kestion drwa egal***

Konstitisyon Moris afirm legalite tou individi ki finn ne lor teritwar nasional morisien e/ou ki sitwayin nou pei, san okenn diskriminasyon ou distinksyon lor baz ras, kast, lopinion politik, kouler lapo, ledikasyon ek nivo sosyal, sex, *etc.* Sa drwa konstitisyonèl-la, li repran enn bon nomb eleman ki trouv dan deziem lartik Deklarasyon bann Drwa Imin ki finn formile an 1948. An-efe, antan ki manb *United Nations*, Repiblik Moris enn aderan Sart bann Drwa Imin; par konsekan, li finn pran enn langazman inportan vizavi lakominote internasyonal pou respekte bann kloz sa sarta-la. Or, drwa ek lakse avek langaz, li fer parti bann drwa imin fondamantal; selman, bann realite politik, sosiolojik, ekonomik, kiltirel, *etc.* pa touzour akord mem rekonesans bann diferan langaz ki prezan lor enn mem teritwar. Toulezour, atraver lemond, sertain kominote lingwistik retrouv zot marzinalize ek defavorize par bann institisyon akòz zot pa ena liberte servi zot langaz pou gagn akse sertain servis esansyel kouman ledikasyon, lasante ou lazistis ou pou zot evolue dan sertain domenn, kouman domenn profesyonèl, sosyal, siantifik, *etc.*) Se pou sa rezon-la preziman ki, an 1996, bann eksper lor kestion drwa lingwistik finn zwenn dan Barselonn, pou elabor dokiman Deklarasyon bann Drwa Lingwistik, ki zordi enn dokiman referans an seki konsern zestion, devlopman, prezervasyon ek lakse bann langaz atraver lemond.

Tou individi imin ena drwa langaz antan ki enn fakilte pou koze ek kominike avek so lanvironnman. Tou individi imin ena ousi drwa ena so lang pou li, ki permet li evolue ek sosyalize dan so kominote lingwistik. Deziem lartik Deklarasyon bann Drwa lingwistik stipile ki **rekonesans kominote lingwistik enn dimoun konstitie enn drwa inalienab ki bizin kapav exerse dan tou sitiasyon.** Se lafami antan ki institisyon sosyal ki responsab pou donn sak zanfan

enn lang – ki nou apel lang maternel – ek permet li devlop sa langaz dan so lakaz ek dan so lantouraz direk. E, dapre Deklarasion bann Drwa Lingwistik, sa zanfan-la ena drwa koz ek servi so prop langaz an prive ek an piblik. Bilingwism ek multilingwism, setadir kapasite pou servi plis ki enn langaz, mem si li sertennman enn lavantaz ek enn rises pou tou zanfan, li pa responsabilite lafami : li plito responsabilite lekol pou devlop sa konpetans-la. Selman, lekol bizin fer li dan respe drwa lingwistik bann zanfan, setadir dan priz-an-kont zot lang maternel, ki enn zouti esansiel pou bann laprantisaz.

Prezans langaz Kreol Morisien dan lekol, li enn drwa pou tou lokiter sa lang-la. An-efe, lartik 8 Deklarasion bann Drwa Lingwistik dir ki tou kominote lingwistik ena drwa organiz ek zer bann resours ki pou permet li non selman garanti litalizasion so langaz dan tou bann domenn sosial, me ou si asir transmision sa langaz-la. Or, pandan lontan, Kreol Morisien pa finn ena enn plas ofisiel dan lekol alor ki li langaz ki mazorite Morisien koze; sa fenomenn-la ti konstitie enn form diskriminasion kont lansanb sa kominote lingwistik-la, seki klerman enn transgresion Deklarasion bann Drwa Lingwistik. An-efe, dapre lartik 23 sa Deklarasion-la, ledikasion bizin ed favoriz enn lib expresion lingwistik ek kiltirel bann diferan kominote lingwistik ki ena lor enn teritwar; li bizin ou si kontribie dan mintien ek devlopman langaz ki bann kominote lingwistik lor sa teritwar-la koze. An-fet, ledikasion bizin o-servis diversite kiltirel ek lingwistik. Par ayer, lartik 25 sa mem Deklarasion-la klerman stipile ki tou kominote lingwistik ena drwa gagn akse bann resours ek materyel nesese pou atenn enn degre ki swetab pou bann lang pou tou nivo lansengnman ki ena lor so teritwar: ansegnan forme, metod pedagozik apropiye, maniel, finansman, lespas ek lekipman, mwayin teknik tradisionel ek teknolojik depwint. An-som, an matier ledikasion, tou kominote lingwistik ena drwa gagn enn lansengnman ki pou permet tou so bann manb akerir enn metriz total so prop lang de sort ki zot kapav itiliz li dan tou domenn aktivite.

An 1951, bann exper UNESCO ti zwenn pou enn Konferans dan Pari lor kestion langaz ki bizin servi dan ledikasion kot zot ti afirme ki langaz maternel reprezant meyer medium linstriksion. An 1953, UNESCO, pandan enn deziem konferans dan Pari touzour, ti reitere ki bann zanfan ki resevwar ledikasion dan enn lang ki pa zot lang maternel fer fas boukou difikilte dan lekol. An-



efe se atraver sa langaz-la ki bann zafan dekouver ek apropiye zot lanvironnman kiltirel; li ousi fasilite devlopman literesi ek laprantisaz bann diferan size; anplis touse li permet zisteman etabli enn pon ant lakaz ek lekòl. Deza sa lepòk-la, UNESCO ti rekomand ki servi, otan ki posib, langaz lakaz (lang natif) bann zanfan pou linstriksion ek pou devlopman konpetans literesi. Sa rapòr-la ti ousi refit bann obzeksion ki ankor servi zordi-zour kont bann lang natif dan lekòl: setadir ki se bann lang ki pena gramè, ou bien ki zanfan deza konn servi zot, ou ankor ki laprantisaz lang maternel li enn obstak pou laprantisaz bann lang segond. Rapòr-la o-kontrer soulign le-fet ki tou langaz ena enn gramè – ekri ou non –, e ki bann zanfan ena boukou pou zot aprann lor zot prop langaz kan zot ariv lekòl. Si lekòl pa rekonet drwa enn zanfan pou li ena so lang maternel, ek si li pa met an plas bann dispozitif ki permet zanfan-la servi sa lang-la pou li metriz langaz-la pli bien ek pou li antreprann bann lezot laprantisaz skoler, li pe konfiske prinsipal zouti ki sa zanfan-la ena pou li panse ek pou li konpran ek apropiye li bann konteni program skoler. Dan enn lepòk kot pe met boukou laksan lor lekite ek legalite bann sans, nou kone ki bann zanfan ki koz inikman Kreol Morisien kan zot ariv lekòl defavorize dan zot parkour skoler ousi lontan ki zot lang maternel pena enn plas ofisiel dan *Curriculum*. Li inportan alor ki lekòl ed pou retabli enn zistis sosyal dan sa sans-la ousi.

Nou pa bliye ki Moris signater Konvansyon Drwa bann Zanfan ki finn ratifie an 1989. Ek la ousi, sa instriman devlopman mondial-la rebran dan enn manier ferm drwa bann zanfan pou grandi ek devlope dan langaz zot lafami ek zot kominote. Konvansyon-la deklare ousi ki tou zanfan ena drwa benefisye ledikasyon e ki sak zanfan ena drwa benefisye ledikasyon dan so langaz. (Not: Bien evidaman, sa bann kloz-la valab dan enn pei akondision ki pei-la ena kapasite donn sa bann drwa-la. Ena boukou pei Lafrik par exanp kot koz telman boukou langaz ki li pa paret posib pran bann dispozision pou ki sak zanfan al lekòl ek aprann dan so langaz. Dan nou pei mem, sa kloz-la pa ankor prezante pou vinn enn realite, mem a mwayin term.) Finn ena ousi enn seri rankont ek konsiltasyon dan kad gouvènans mondial depi Konferans Mondial lor Ledikasyon pou Tou Dimounn an 1990 dan Jomtien, Tayland, pou ankouraz ek pilot devlopman, nivo ek kalite lavi ek lape dirab dan lemond par ledikasyon. Dan ka Moris, gouvènman finn donn limem obzektif atenn ledikasyon iniversel dan bann dele ki finn deside dan sa bann forum-la, setadir ziska lane 2015.

#### ***2.4 Perspektiv politik: Kreol Morisien enn lang nasional ek enn lang sitwayin***

Tou sa bann konsiderasion-la permet nou abord enn lot dimansion langaz Kreol Morisien, kan nou get depi pre so stati, so fonksion ek so litizasion dan Moris: dimansion politik et kestion konstriksion pou enn lidantite nasional. Kan nou revinn lor bann epizod listwar Moris ek ki nou konsider manier ki bann langaz finn evolue ek trouv zot plas dan bann diferan interaksion alafwa sosial ek kiltirel, nou pa kapav ignore zordi ki langaz Kreol Morisien, ki alabaz ti enn langaz kominoter vernakiler asosie a group bann desandan esklav, finn ousi vinn enn langaz transkominoter, donk veikiler; e ki zordi, se sa langaz-la preziseman ki garanti ek permet bann interaksion kotidien ant bann individi ki vinn depi bann diferan konpozant ki fer parti nasion morisien. Se dan sa sans-la preziseman ki nou dir ki langaz Kreol Morisien li ena omwin de prinsipal fonksion sosio-idantiter : li ena valer langaz ansestral pou kominote kreol dan Moris (*cf.* perspektiv istorik ek antropozik), ek li ousi posed enn dimansion federater ki bien inportan pou tou Morisien, independaman de zot kominote. Sa de fonksion-la pa kontradiktwar, zot pa neserman konplemanter non pli, me zot koresponn avek de realite bien tanzib ek bien inportan dan bann reprezantasion ek dan lutilizasion ki bann lokiter langaz Kreol Morisien adopte.

Kreol Morisien permet exprim enn lidantite nasional ek enn lapartenans avek sa lidantite-la, alafwa lokalman ek internasionalman. Se ousi pou sa rezon-la ki li telman inportan ki lekol kapav ansengn sa lang-la. An-efe, nou pa bliye ki lekol, antan ki enn institision leta, bizin permet realiz enn *curriculum* nasional, donk enn proze sosial ki konsern konstriksion lanasion. Tou Morisien zordi koz Kreol Morisien ek idantifie zot avek sa langaz-la dan laplipar bann sitiasion lavi toulezour. Bien evidaman, multilingwism li ousi enn realite dan Moris (boukou Morisien koz plis ki enn langaz ki zot finn aprann ek ki zot servi dan diferan sitiasion ek pou diferan rezon), selman dan sa peizaz lingwistik kompleks ek inik ki nou retrouve isi, tou bann langaz pena mem valer ek mem fonksion sosial ek idantiter. An-fet, bann diferan langaz ena tandans swiv enn repartision fonksionel diglosik. Selman, langaz Kreol Morisien ena enn plas bien partikilie dan sa konfigirasion-la parski li premie langaz laplipar dimounn ; andotmo, savedir ki laplipar

Morisien dabor aprann koz Kreol Morisien, avan zot aprann enn lot langaz – otreman-di, souvan, si enn Morisien koz enn sel langaz, sa langaz-la se Kreol Morisien.

An-fet levolisyon langaz Kreol Morisien atraver listwar, li reprezantatif manier ki nou pei finn konn enn fenomenn kreolizasyon ek finn gradielman permet bann diferan kiltir ek kominote trouv zot plas dan enn sel lespas nasional, ki definir li mem dan larankont ek dan ladiversite, e non dan konpartimantaz ek klwazonnman kiltirel. Amezir bann lane finn pase, langaz Kreol Morisien finn anrasi dan frotman ek interaksion avek bann lezot lang, ek zordi se lansanb realite ek lidantite morisien ki sa langaz-la exprime. Se koumsa ki Kreol Morisien finn vinn enn langaz transkominoter ek transkiltirel. Dan sa sans-la ousi, li finn vinn sinbol enn lidantite nasional postkolonial. **Kreol Morisien, se sel langaz ki tou Morisien koze e ki inik** a nou pei: se langaz Repiblik Moris, antan ki enn antite politik. Biensir, ena lezot pei kot koz enn langaz Kreol me li pa mem Kreol ki Kreol Morisien. Kreol Morisien, li donk enn term zenerik pou design Kreol lil Moris, Kreol lil Rodrig, Kreol lil Chagos ek Kreol lil Agalega ek Sin Brandon. Li fer referans nou **langaz nasional**, langaz ki reini ek feder tout lapopilasyon. Sa fer ki kan pe met langaz Kreol dan lekol, se pa zis enn langaz opsyonel ou ansestral ki pe rant dan lekol; se nou **lang nasional ki pe fer so premie pa ofisiel dan nou curriculum**.

Li evidan ousi, dan sa perspektiv-la, ki lansengnman Kreol Morisien dan lekol inklir enn dimansyon sitwayin ki permet sistem ledikasyon dan Moris met an-avan bann valer fondamantal ki konstitie fondasyon enn pei demokratik ek defann legalite bann oportinite, bann drwa, ek lakse a bann diferan servis sosial. An-efe, ledikasyon tini enn plas inportan dan zefor enn pei pou mintenir demokrasi ek fer sak dimounn benefisie sa. Kreol Morisien, se nou langaz nasional, ek laprantisaz sa langaz-la dan lekol pou permet bann zelev non selman devlop enn metriz langaz-la ek apropiye limem bann konteni kiltirel ki li veikile, me ousi devlop enn konsians sitwayin ek enn santiman apartenans dan nasion morisien.

## ***2.5 Perspektiv sosio-ekonomik ek kestion zistis sosial: Kreol Morisien enn lang popiler***

Lekol zwe enn gran rol dan fason ki enn Leta zer bann kestion ki lie avek problem inegalite ek stratifikasion sosial. An-efe, se enn linstitision ki kapav swa fabrik, mintenir ek perpetie bann inegalite – atraver enn *curriculum* ki verouy lakse lekol ek la-resit skoler –, swa remet an kestion bann dispozitif elitis ek retabli enn zistis sosial ki donn tou zanfan posibilite aksed, dann enn dimansion ekitab, ledikasion ek la-resit skoler. Dan enn repiblik demokratik kouma Moris, li esansiel ki tou dimounn ek tou group sosial benefisie plennman ledikasion ek devlopman. Sa, se enn bann defi mazer lekol, an partikile dan enn peryod kot sistem ekonomik mondial pe sibir bann konsekans devlopman kapitalism kot lekar sosio-ekonomik pe vinn deplizanpli inportan, ek bann linegalite pe aksantie, olie ki zot rezoud. An-efe, Mouvman Ledikasion pou Tou Dimounn, (*Education For All* (EFA), *Education Pour Tous* (EPT)), ki finn lanse Jomtien, an Tayland, pandan Konferans Mondial Ledikasion, an 1990, rekonet ek afirme ki ledikasion, se prinsipal instriman a nou dispozision pou konbat povrete ek inegalite dan devlopman. Dan nou pei notaman, finn met anplas enn program pou diminie ek prevenir lamizer (*Alleviation of Poverty Project*). Bann inisiativ parey, zot neseserman inplik bann amenazman o-nivo *curriculum* skoler ousi. Se la ki introdikasion Kreol Morisien dan lekol zwe enn rol inportan dan perspektiv sosio-ekonomik ek dan bann kestion zistis sosial. Tou bann dimounn ki interese avek listwar nou ledikasion ou avek so lefikasite kone ki kestion langaz dan lekol fer deba depi lontan. Angle ek Franse, zot de langaz ki aprann dan enn manier iniversel, savedir ki tou zanfan aprann zot. Avan sa, ti ena lekol ki ti pe fonksionn dan toule de langaz, kouman lekol Jean Lebrun ki ti pe akeyir sirtou bann “gens de couleur”; ti ousi ena lekol ki ti pe fonksionn zis an Franse (lekol bann kolon Franse) e ti ena lekol ki ti pe fonksionn dan langaz kominoter bann zanfan ; sa bann langaz kominoter la ti “*medium of instruction*” dan sa bann lekol-la ; tou travay, tou devwar, tou explikasion, lavi dan lekol net ti pe deroul dan bann langaz kouma ourdou, goujerati ou tamoul, ki bann travayer Indien ti finn amenn avek zot. Me bien rapidman, finn met enn regleman ki exize ki Angle vinn langaz ofisiel dan lekol ek ki Franse ansegne ousi, me kouma “*a taught subject*”, e non kouman “*medium of instruction*”; kant-a bann lekol ki ti pe ansengn dan enn langaz indien, zot vinn bann “*Anglo-Indian schools*”.

Depi lindepandans, finn ena plizier rapor ki Leta finn komandite lor problem performans negatif lekòl dan Moris ek seki bizin ou kapav fer pou koriz sa (*cf.* F. Richard: 1975; V. Glover: 1983; R. Ramdoyal: 1990), me pa finn ena okenn sanzman veritab dan *curriculum* langaz depi sa ek dan pedagozi ki servi pou ansengn bann langaz malgre tou zefor ki finn fer. Azordi, desizion met Kreol Morisien dan lekòl pe azir kouman enn mezir **rekonesans lidantite lingwistik gran mazorite zelev**, seki pou fer zot santi zot an sekirite dan zot lidantite; **sa desizion-la pou ou si reabilit bann zanfan zot drwa lingwistik pou grandi, devlope, ek aprann bann konesans dan zot langaz**. An-efe, Kreol Morisien pa pe rant dan lekòl kouman enn langaz ki zis tolere – kouman ti leka ziska ler – me kouman enn langaz ki ansegne plenman kouma enn size, avek so profeser, so program, so liv, *etc.* Tou sa bann signal-la pou ede pou ki bann obstak psikolojik aplani e ki bann zanfan plis kapav abòrd ek antreprann bann aprantisaz skoler. An-efe, labsans Kreol Morisien dan lekòl ziska prezan ti konstitie enn form diskriminasion vizavi tou bann zanfan ki koz Kreol Morisien kot zot, ek sa ti pe favoriz devlopman enn lelit skoler, ek par extansion, sosial. Lintrodiksyon Kreol Morisien dan *curriculum* nasional pou o-kontrer permet akeyi tou zanfan dan lekòl, indepandan de zot lapartenans sosial, ek donn zot bann sans pli egal pou antreprann bann laprantisaz skoler. Sa desizion-la toutfwa, li pa enn inpozision ni enn obligasyon. Bann paran pou kapav swazir si zot zanfan pou fer Kreol Morisien lekòl ou pa.

Lintrodiksyon Kreol Morisien dan lekòl, se ou si lintrodiksyon enn langaz popiler dan lesplas skoler seki, pou nou sistem edikatif, konstitie enn letap bien inportan dan demokratizasyon ledikasyon. An-som, sa desizion-la signifie ki lekòl akeyir *tou* zanfan e ki kiltir popiler li ou si ena so plas dan bann laprantisaz. Nou kone, an-efe, ki langaz li prinsipal mod transmisyon bann mod-de-vi (“*patterns of living*”); prezans Kreol Morisien dan lekòl pou permet reabilit lexperyans ek manier-de-viv tou bann zanfan dan klas, ek sa pou permet zot exprim zot lidantite, zot krwayans, zot fason panse, ek zot bann valer. Sa, li ankor pli inportan dan enn pei ansiennman kolonize, kot langaz bann ansien pwisans kolonial (Angle ek Franse) touzour konsidere kouma bann lang-de-prestiz. Kreol Morisien, antan ki enn langaz popiler, dan lekòl, permet devlop enn formil edikatif ki pli adapte pou nou realite sosial; anmemtan li permet asir, a-lon-term, ki bann zanfan pran enn meyer depar dan lekòl ek dan bann laprantisaz.

## ***2.6 Perspektiv pedagogik ek kognitif: Kreol Morisien enn zouti esansiel pou bann laprantisaz***

Langaz ena enn plas santral ek zwe enn rol kapital dan enn sistem edikatif. An-efe se par langaz ki nou kominike, se atraver langaz ki nou vinn enn individi dan enn sosiete, ki nou konpran ek transmet bann konsepsyon ek bann lide, ki nou aprann lir ekrir ek enn kantite lezot kitsoz, ki nou pans demin ek rapel yer; se atraver langaz ki nou mobiliz nou lintelizans ek devlop li, ki nou aprann reflesi lor bann sitiasion. Langaz enn zouti formidab. Li permet nou koze, li permet nou panse, li permet nou azir. Li bien inportan realize ki ziska ler nou lekol finn nek montre bann langaz ki zanfan pa konn koze. Or-donk, kan Kreol Morisien pe rant dan lekol, se lang maternel bann zanfan ki pe introdri. Sa oule dir ki bann zanfan pa bizin aprann li kouman zot bizin aprann Angle ou Franse. Zot deza konn dir ek fer boukou kitsoz dan sa langaz-la. Se langaz dan ki zot viv ek interazir avek dimounn dan zot lantouraz. Dan sa ka-la, kifer bizin montre li? Se kestion ki boukou dimounn poze.

Kan ansengn enn lang maternel dan enn sistem edikatif – seki fer dan tou pei ki avanse dan lemond – li ansegn pou ki zelev devlop davantaz zot kapasite esanze ek kominike avek lezot dimounn, dan enn gran varyete sitiasion, pou enn diversite rezon. An lang maternel, li pa aprann kouma dezign bann kitsoz, li toutswit fer “*quality learning*”. Li aprann bann konvansyon ki bizin respekte kan pe koze dan enn group dan kad enn klas: res trankil kan enn lot zelev pe koze; ekout seki li pe dir; dir enn kitsoz apre an retour; li aprann diriz realizasion enn travay ki li pe fer avek enn ou plizier lezot kamarad; explike ki manier li finn prosede pou fer enn travay; *etc.* Me lavantaz aprann enn langaz maternel, li pa aret la. Enn langaz, li enn zouti ki oper avek bann sinbol ek bann sign pou ki nou prodwir bann lide ek travay lor bann panse-la dan nou latet. Langaz li enn zouti pwisan pou devlop memwar ek lintelizans, ogmant konesans, kapasite rezon, *etc.* **Devlop langaz maternel dan lekol, se devlop kapasite intelektiel bann zanfan,** aprann zot servi bann metod pou diferan sitiasion ek domenn konesans. Se kifer UNESCO, Lorganizasion Nasion Zini pou Ledikasion, rekomann ki bann pei ki kapav fer li, donn bann zanfan ledikasion dan zot lang maternel. Isi dan Moris, nou pa finn ariv stad donn ledikasion

bann zanfan dan zot langaz, me li enn gran progre ki pe fer kan pe prevwar enn klas Kreol Morisien ki ninport ki zelev, dan ninport ki lekòl, pou kapav swiv. Dan sa klas-la, zot pa pou bizin aprann bann mo swa bann konzigezon verb, bann striktir fraz tousa, (zot pou dekouver ki zot deza konn tousa-la, pou Kreol Morisien); zot pou aprann koze, ekoute pou fer zot lintelizans travay ek devlop zot kreativite. Pou lemoman, olie zot servi zot kapasite pou reflesi lor seki zot pe konpran ek anvè dir, zot fini zot kapasite konsantrasyon lor sey kapte enn-de mo ek devine apartir la seki pe dir zot; e kant-a koze, zot trouv sa bien konplike. Lintelizans boukou zanfan res setif, parski zot pa ena kapasite pou koze ek reflesi dan Angle ou dan Franse; dan klas Kreol Morisien, zot pou santi enn liberte pou koze, argimante, panse, imazine... Nou pa bliye nonpli lot dimansyon ki interesan ek potansielman profitab pou tou zanfan, se ki klas Kreol Morisien, li pou enn klas kot pou ankouraz bann zanfan pran laparòl, koze. Si zot rod zot bann paròl ek paret pe gagn difikilte, li pa pou akòz langaz me parski zot pou pe reflesi, ek reflesi, panse, pou bann zanfan sa laz-la, li deza vèdir panse dan langaz, avèk bann mo. An kler sèvedir ki klas Kreol Morisien pou ed bann zanfan devlop enn latitud reflexif ki pou fer zot devlop zot lintelizans. Sa pou kapav konbat lekskizyon, enn ekskizyon edikatif ki souvan vinn enn ekskizyon sosyal. **Klas Kreol Morisien pou asosie sekirite lingwistik ek “cognitive empowerment”** gras-a litalizasyon lang maternel; sa pou permet nou lekòl al vè enn nouvo paradigme aprann par konpreansyon ek rezonman.

Enn domèn laprantisaz ki nou viz pou ameliore avèk nouvo politik langaz dan lekòl ki pe vini, **se literesi**. Lefèt ki zanfan-la aprann lir ek ekri an Kreol Morisien ek ki insi li aplik prinsip “enn son - enn let”, pou ed li transfer sa konpreansyon ek sa konesans-la dan bann lezot langaz dan ki li importan ki li vinn “literate”. An Angleter, dan bann lane 70, ti finn enan enn propozisyon bien serye ki ti fer pou ki bann zanfan aprann lir ek ekri Angle dan enn version pli “sistematik” ek simplifè, ki ti baze notaman lor sa prinsip korespondans grafi-foni-la. Kreol Morisien, parski li enn langaz ki ase nouvo par rapor a bann langaz ki ena enn gran patrimwonn ekri, ena **enn pli gran transparans** ant so kod oral ek so kod ekri. Sa pou definitivman ed bann zanfan ki fer sa langaz-la vinn bann lekter e bann skriptè konpetan. E enn fwa ki zot finn asimil prinsip-la ek akerir sa “*skill*”-la, li pou pli fasil pou zot transfer ou zeneraliz prinsip-la dan bann lezot lang. Antretan klas Kreol Morisien pou ed bann zanfan ki pe aprann lir an Kreol Morisien fer bien dan

bann lezot size lekòl. Dan sa sans-la, klas Kreol, mem dans so formil aktiel, pou deza permet fer lesek skoler rekile.

Lintrodiksyon Kreol Morisien dan lekòl pa sanz *curriculum* santral, avek so de lang obligatwar ek so bann “core subjects”. An revans, li riske sanz fondamantalman rapòr ki tou dimounn dan lekòl – zelev, profeser, metdekòl, *etc.* – ena avek Kreol Morisien kouma enn langaz ki ena enn valè ek merit enn plas onorab ek santral dan bann sfer formasyon ek ledikasyon. Sa nouvo rapòr-la, nou kapav espere, pou dinamiz lansengman ek laprantisaz tou size dan lekòl. Pandan Konferans Jomtien, finn souligne ki se lekòl primer ki donn laplipar dimounn bann baz esansiel pou ki zot kapav kontinie aprann ek form zot tout long zot lavi. Finn met laksan sirtou lor bann zouti esansiel kouma alfabetizasyon ek ekspresyon oral ki permet bann lezot aprantisaz ek donk reprezant fondasyon ou baz ledikasyon.

Li enn fe ki bann zanfan fer fas bann difikilte konpreasyon ek konseptyalizasyon dan bann size kouma matematik ou sians parski zot pa kapav reflesi dan langaz dan ki pe demann zot fer sa. Ek mem kan profeser explik an Kreol Morisien, li pa finn forme pou fer li ek langaz-la pa finn ekipe pou li servi dan sa fonksyon-la. Alor mem si Kreol Morisien pa pe vinn “*medium of instruction*”, klas Kreol Morisien pou **enn lespas kot bann zanfan pou kapav koz ek partaz** lor seki zot aprann dan lezot size, dir seki zot finn kontan, seki zot finn konpran e trouv fasil ou seki okontrer zot trouv difisil e pa bien kontan ou konpran. Sa, li pou enn kitsoz inik ki ena enn gran valè. **Kan enn zelev koumans koz lor seki li finn aprann ou pe aprann**, lor kouma fer enn devwar, tousa-la, li pe **devlop so kapasite metakognitif** ek sa kapasite-la pou fer li vinn pli intelizan pou aprann. Dan sa sans-la, klas Kreol Morisien pou ed fer lekòl ranpli so rol pli bien ek donn tou zanfan bann mwayin pou reisi bann aprantisaz ki inportan ek ki pou servi zot tout long zot lavi. Nou lekòl pe fer enn pa an avan pou ed fer “*Education for All*” ek “*Equal Opportunity Bill*” finn enn realite.

Pou konklir, Kreol Morisien, langaz ansestral kominote kreol, ki finn vinn langaz nasional tout lakominote morisienn, pe rant dan lekòl kouman enn lang opsyonel. Sa, se enn premie pa ki nou sistem edikatif pe fer pou **asir enn meyer ekite tou zanfan**. Anmemtan, sa pou aport nou



boukou pou observe, seye, reflesi ek planifie devan. An-efe dan sink sis z-an, nou pou kapav fer enn premie bilan, evalie ki sa pou finn raport nou bann zanfan ek pran bann desizion an konsekans :

- Eski pou bizin mintenir Kreol Morisien kouma enn lang opsionel ou eski nou pou bizin anvisaz ansengn li kouma enn lang maternel ki tou zanfan pou aprann?
- Eski, alaswit inklizion formel Kreol Morisien dan nou sistem edikatif, nou pa pou bizin repans totalman nou model *curriculum* ek pedagozi lansengnman pou skolarite primer ek preprimer?
- Eski li pou vinn “*medium of instruction*” pou sertenn size (pou enn parti skolarite primer)? Selon ki formil ek dan ki perspektiv?
- Dan ki mezir eski lansengnman Kreol Morisien kapav ed pou konstrir enn santiman for dapartenans a nou pei Moris, e konstrir bann valer ki pou simant nasion morisien?

Ena bien lezot kestion me li tro boner pou ki nou aret nou lor la pou lemoman. Anou sinpleman antisipe ki lintrodikzion Kreol Morisien dan lekol pou fer baryer emosionel pou aprann silabus lekol tonbe, ek pou donn mwayin zanfan devlop literesi ek zot kapasite pou reflesi. Sa, li deza enn enn bien zoli program. E nou pa bliye ki kan lekol reisi enn kitsoz, se enn gin pou lavi net, pou so bann zelev.

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# GOVERNMENT HINDI TEACHERS UNION

## Lettre ouverte au Premier Ministre

### Pourquoi non au « créole » au Parlement ?

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Si l'Etat cède aux pressions communales pour imposer le « créole » comme une langue au Parlement, ce serait la gaffe monumentale politique par excellence que le présent régime listera sur ses accomplissements pendant son mandat. Et en 2024, lors des prochaines élections générales, les politiciens du pouvoir devront justifier cette décision pour acquérir la confiance de l'électorat rurale. Mais heureusement, on n'en est pas encore là.

Feu SSR, disait dans toute sa sagesse : « na pa touche la langue ek religion ». Et il avait raison avec sa sagesse habituelle. On accepte ou on n'accepte pas telle langue ou telle culture, selon ses convictions. Et l'île Maurice étant encore une démocratie vivante, n'importe quel quidam à l'instar des certains agitateurs manipulés peuvent venir réclamer la tête de ceci ou cela. C'est bien. Mais de là venir faire pression sur le gouvernement pour imposer un dialecte qui attend être défini comme une langue structurée, il y a la distance entre la coupe et les lèvres.

Ce n'est pas un dictionnaire avec des définitions approximatives de certains mots et expressions qui pourront servir d'arguments pour que le « créole » soit imposé au parlement. Il n'y aucune justification pour l'emploi de ce mode d'expression au Parlement. Il y a tout un exercice approfondi à faire quant aux définitions des mots utilisés au parlement, et qui sont acceptables ou non au parlement ( parliamentary ou unparliamentary ?). Tout cela reste à définir.

De toute façon, le créole mauricien n'est qu'un dialecte dérivé du français avec des mots d'hindi, de chinois de tamoule et de bhojpuri et que l'on qualifiait naguère de « lingua franca ». Donc une langue batarde issue d'un mélange de traditions et cultures diverses. C'est là l'origine de la naissance de ce mode d'expression. Même si le kréol morisien est enseigné au niveau primaire, il y a une grande réticence de la part des parents pour encourager leurs enfants apprendre ce dialecte qui ne mènera nulle part.

Si le créole – non structuré jusqu'ici - devrait être accepté comme langue au Parlement, pourquoi pas introduire d'autres langues ancestrales reconnues et enseignées jusqu'au niveau universitaires dont le bhojpuri, l'hindi, l'ourdou, le

marathi, le télégou, le tamoule, le mandarin ou encore l'arabe.

Si la pression d'imposer ce dialecte au Parlement vient de certaines institutions religieuses, l'Etat se doit de méfier de ces manœuvres car il y a un très grand risque politique à l'avenir.

Les membres de la GHTU ont déjà enclenché une campagne pour conscientiser la population du pays et surtout rurale sur le danger que cette introduction de créole au Parlement représente pour l'avenir culturel du pays et surtout l'abêtissement de la population !!! Attention au retour de la manivelle...

Suttyhudeo Tengur  
Négociateur GHTU  
3 novembre 2020

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