

Rewriting Mauritius: Ananda Devi's postcolonial self-translation

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Rewriting Mauritius' Pasts: Ananda Devi's Postcolonial Self-Translation

Contemporary Mauritian fiction, like the society from which it springs, is a rich and complex mix of diverse linguistic and cultural influences. With no original, in-dwelling inhabitants, Mauritius's population is composed of the descendants of French colonial settlers, African and Malagasy slaves, Indian indentured labourers, Chinese traders and economic migrants from across the globe, with each successive wave of immigrants leaving its mark on the languages, cultures and customs of this small, postcolonial 'rainbow nation'. Mauritius has a history of dual colonisation—it was settled first by the French (from 1715 to 1810) and, later, by the British (from 1810 until independence in 1968)—and both former colonial languages continue to occupy important but discreet roles in modern-day Mauritius's multilingual reality, alongside the ubiquitously spoken Creole and a plethora of 'ancestral' languages. Language politics and ethnic identity are hotly contested and inextricably linked in a nation in which, as Patrick Eisenlhor contends, 'full membership (...) is performed through the cultivation of ancestral traditions with origins elsewhere' (Eisenlhor 2006, 5). Often occluded tensions and inequalities between the population's constituent ethnic groups—particularly between the majority Hindu Mauritians, descendants of Indian indentured labourers, and the minority, Creole community, descendants of African and Malagasy slaves—simmer beneath the surface of the official, multi-cultural rhetoric of 'unity in diversity.' Mauritian fiction, written predominantly in French,¹ already shares many characteristics with the practice of translation, as authors seek to negotiate the complex network of relations between the different languages and cultures of the island, and to convey this complexity to their many non-Mauritian readers. The translation—or, as in the particular case to be discussed here, the self-translation—of Mauritian fiction thus offers particularly fertile ground for an investigation of the many, overlapping and competing, transcultural influences at play in notions of the 'postcolonial.'

In previous studies of the francophone, Indo-Mauritian writer, Ananda Devi, I have focused on the intercultural strategies entailed both when writing her own fiction for a

¹ While English is the language of politics and the judiciary, French remains the dominant language of literature, culture and the media in Mauritius. There are also small but growing literatures, published with local presses, in Creole, Hindi and English.

predominantly metropolitan readership, and when translating another, Anglophone author's heteroglossic, postcolonial work into French (Waters 2008 & 2013). In the current article, I aim to continue this exploration of Devi's dual role as author and translator, by turning my attention to Devi's 2007 self-translation, from French into English, of her 2001 novel, *Pagli*. In both translational practice and publishing circumstances, as we shall explore Devi's *Pagli* richly illustrates Sara Kippur's assertion that self-translation—'the practice of writing and producing literature in two languages'—'offers an untapped and eminently rich resource' for investigating tensions between 'the local and the global, between the universal and the particular, between the national and the cosmopolitan (Kippur, 2015: 6).

The first of Devi's novels to be published by Gallimard, *Pagli* marked the author's rise to relative international prominence, often being read as representative of Mauritian literature and society more broadly. Set in a highly fictionalised, modern-day Mauritius, *Pagli* tells the tale of Indo-Mauritian Daya, the eponymous 'pagli' (meaning 'mad woman' in both Hindi and Mauritian Creole). Married against her will to the cousin who had raped her at the age of thirteen, Daya lives in her husband's pristine family home in the village of Terre Rouge, under the malevolent surveillance of the *mofines*, the upholders of patriarchal Hindu law. Rebell ing against her imposed role as traditional wife and daughter-in-law, Daya finds happiness in a love affair with Zil, a Creole (that is, Afro-Mauritian) fisherman. When the couple's adultery is discovered, the *mofines* lock Daya in a chicken coop, as a cyclone and a corresponding tide of inter-ethnic violence sweep across the island, and it is from this position of incarceration that Daya retrospectively recounts her story and imagines an alternative existence, free from societal constraints and racial prejudices. Centring as it does on the forbidden sexual relationship between a Mauritian woman, descended from Indian indentured labourers, and a Mauritian man, descended from African slaves, the narrative is haunted by the fraught and often silenced issues of Mauritius's traumatic historic past and its ethnically-divided present—issues which, as we shall examine, are brought to the fore in Devi's highly creative self-translation.

The translation into English of Devi's French-language novel, originally published in Paris in Gallimard's 'Continents Noirs' series, seems at first glance to reflect, in linguistic and publishing terms, Mauritius's history of dual French and British colonisation, and the

ongoing, hegemonic dominance of these two former colonial powers on the cultural production of the island today. Yet what is particularly interesting about the English-language version of *Pagli* is that it was published not with a British publisher, but with Delhi-based Rupa & Co., in their *Rupa France* series, co-edited with the Cultural Service of the Embassy of France in India. This series thus forms part of France's arguably neo-colonial ambition, as the series preface boasts, to make the 'treasures' of twentieth-century French literature 'accessible to all in the local market', albeit, paradoxically, through the medium of India's other, more dominant, post-colonial language, English. The location of the publication of Devi's self-translation thus geographically bypasses the former colonial centre of Great Britain, where one might more usually expect translations into English to be published, whilst nonetheless signalling, through choice of target language, the abiding post-colonial influence of Britain on its former imperial 'jewel in the crown', as on its former colonial outpost, Mauritius. The transcolonial trajectory that the novel follows—from Mauritius to India via France; and from French to English, with incursions of Creole and Hindi—symbolically reflects the complex and competing colonial histories, and post-colonial cultural legacies, of both the French and British in India and beyond. The publication of a novel by an Indo-Mauritian author with an Indian publishing house also, more locally, gestures towards the foundational connections established, under British rule, between India and Mauritius, and hence the enduring, post-colonial, diasporic links connecting their respective, current-day populations. Through its publication in India, Devi's self-translation symbolically follows, in reverse, the journeys taken by the Indian ancestors of the majority (68%) of Mauritius's present-day population, during the 'great experiment' of indentured labour—a history to which her source text alludes and to which, as we shall explore later, her Indian-published target text far more insistently and critically returns.²

Devi's French-language *Pagli* has been the subject of a relatively significant number of academic studies. In contrast, the English-language version has received little or no critical

² It is notable that Devi's English-language, Indian-published version of *Pagli* appeared in the very same year, 2007, as she co-signed the much-debated *Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français*, which called for the dismantling of the traditional binary distinctions between 'French' and 'francophone' literatures, and between (former) colonial centre and (post-)colonial margins. The transcolonial and postcolonial circumstances of *Pagli*'s English-language publication in many ways reflect Kippur's assertion that 'the practice of self-translation can be defined as an act of world literature' (11).

attention, no doubt largely as a result of Rupa's limited, uniquely sub-continental distribution and short print-run, and of the Eurocentric, monolingual reading habits of many critics.³ As a result, the rich interface, and fascinating divergences, between source and target texts have to date remained unexplored. This article aims to overcome this critical insight by analysing the strategies employed by Devi in her self-translation of *Pagli*, with a particular focus on the challenges posed by addressing a new, Anglophone Indian readership. We shall consider, first, Devi's own comments, in interview, on her experiences of self-translation: particularly regarding the perceived differences, in terms of stylistic tendencies and cultural knowledge, between French, 'English', and Indian audiences. We shall then examine how these highly subjective assumptions come to bear on Devi's self-translational practice, as reflected both in the excision of 'French' stylistic embellishments and, especially, the addition of extensive historical and cultural information. Some of these additions, as we shall explore, serve to contextualise, for Indian readers, the local uses of terms and traditions exported from the diasporic, Indo-Mauritian community's ancestral homeland. Other radical additions, however—particularly those relating to issues of slavery and anti-black racism—reveal a far more radical reengagement with the source text and culture, and a corresponding critique of the historical and contemporary ties between Mauritius and India. Such a radical and critical reengagement is only possible, I shall argue, because of the creative liberty and authority over one's own work afforded by the particular practice of self-translation.

In a 2011 interview, in which she explicitly discusses her experiences of translating *Pagli* into English, Devi makes an important distinction between her own stylistic tendencies when writing in French, as opposed to English:

³ In an overview of the translational strategies adopted by writers from the Indian Ocean region, Peter Hawkins does briefly refer to Devi's self-translation of *Pagli*, commenting on the perceived difficulty of rendering Devi's highly 'poetic and suggestive prose' in English. He goes on to state that 'the English version of *Pagli* does remain fairly close to its French original, with some stylistic embellishments particular to English substituting for stylistic flourishes more appropriate in French' (Hawkins 2013: 42-43). As we shall see, however, this presumption is not borne out by close reading of the French and English versions. Contrary to Hawkins' presumption, comparative analysis reveals significant deviations between the two versions—deviations which cannot all be explained on purely stylistic grounds.

I do tend to write very much in a poetic mode (...). For a long time I resisted that pull of poetry in my prose writing and then *Pagli* made the difference. (...) Towards the end it really becomes essentially a poetic book. But when I was rewriting it in English I realised that sometimes that lyricism doesn't work in English and you can't let it go that far, so I had to tone it down. (...) I just felt that in English it didn't sound quite right (Hawkins 2011: 12).

The contrast that Devi here establishes between her own 'toned down' style when writing in English, as compared to her characteristically more 'poetic' style in French—her favoured language of creative expression⁴—is extrapolated in the following, more general assertion:

I realise that writing in English, to generalise, the story is very important – you have to tell the story. Whereas in French writing the telling is the most important and I think in my books it's the telling that's almost more important (12).

Rather than reflecting solely on her personal, writerly response to two different languages, Devi here contentiously asserts an inherent, even essentialist, difference between French, which she sees as a more lyrical, stylistically-driven language, and the more sober, story-driven English language.

Such a stylistic distinction between the two languages can be detected as motivating many of the striking revisions that Devi makes to her own source text, when translating it into English. As the following, representative example illustrates, the second half of the English-language *Pagli*, in particular, is marked by repeated and extensive excisions of poetic embellishments—adjectives, imagery, word-play, subordinate clauses—which are superfluous, in purely narrative terms:

⁴ As Devi comments: 'The language that comes to me most readily when I want to create is French' (Devi & Waters 2013: 20).

Et la lumière: en moi, elle est un miracle multiplié, elle se transforme en éclats de cristal dans mon ventre, elle s'éparpille jusqu'au bout de mes membres, elle m'étincelle, elle me scintille, puis elle s'échappe en oiseaux fous de migrations et ce qu'elle fait de moi est inexprimable, quelque chose qui ne se veut de nom que celui de femme, celui-là et aucun autre, femme d'étoiles et de serments sortie de son existence étriquée comme le trenchant d'une lame. (115-16; italics added to indicate text that has been removed in the English translation)

Light: it disperses to the edges of my limbs, it sparkles me alive and escapes in the form of sky-crazy birds. What it does to me is indescribable. It transforms me into something that has no other name but mine, that and no other, an oath sharpened to a cutting edge by the starkness of life. (123)

The marked stylistic pruning that most strikingly characterises the later chapters of Devi's English-language *Pagli*—and which there is no scope to explore in any depth here—has the associated benefit of allowing the author room, particularly in the first part of the target text, to insert extensive sections of entirely new material. Much of this new material—scene-setting, description, characterisation (especially of female characters), psychological motivation and cause-and-effect relations—is, indeed, traditionally associated with a plot-driven, more realist form of narration and hence is consistent with Devi's expressed views on the general stylistic differences between French and English.

Yet, what also emerges in the same interview, albeit more briefly, is the author-translator's awareness of the specific challenges posed by addressing a new, Anglophone Indian audience. Devi comments: 'While I was translating *Pagli* into English, [...] suddenly I saw how Indian it was as a novel. I hadn't thought about it when I was writing it in French and it was published in French' (Hawkins 2001, 10). She then gives the following example of the kind of Indian cultural and linguistic knowledge that a more general 'English' reader would not possess: 'The title, *Pagli*, is strange in French; everybody asks what it means. But then in India, *Pagli* is such a common word, it's like calling a novel 'The Mad Woman'—nobody would ask you what does that mean?' (10). Far from being motivated by perceived stylistic differences, many of Devi's contextualising, narrative additions to the target text can, in fact, be seen as translational responses to the specific, linguistic and cultural knowledge of her new Indian readership. In order to compensate for the banality of the term *pagli* to Hindi readers, for instance, repeated references are made, throughout the target text, to the reasons why Daya's transgressive behaviour is seen as insane, within the strict patriarchal Hindu

Mauritian society of the novel. The scene in which Daya invites an untouchable beggar-woman into the marital home offers just one example of the target text's shift towards narrative explanation, contextualisation and rewriting, motivated by the novel's intended Indian readership. Relying in the source text on the perceived 'strangeness' of the Hindu caste system for its symbolic significance, this scene is extensively modified and expanded in the target text, in order to place far greater emphasis on the contrast between Daya's defiant openness to society's others, on the one hand, and her in-laws' rigid adherence to Hindu notions of caste, purity and propriety, on the other. The more active nature of English-language Daya's defiance is underlined by the repetition of the verb 'I want' and the corresponding shift from past, more descriptive, to present, more active tense in the following reworking of the source text:

Je lui ai servi à manger et à boire dans la meilleure vaisselle de la maison. Je lui ai versé du whisky dans le verre du chef de famille. J'ai pris un sari broché de mon armoire et je l'ai drapé sur ses épaules maigres (24-25).

I want her to be a princess for today. I want her to receive what no one has given her up to now. I want to be her, to taste her freedom on my tongue. I pour some whisky in a tumbler and hold it out to her. She takes it, sips it slowly and sips again, more voluptuously, she won't gulp it down, she knows better, she will savour it to the dregs because she knows it won't last. I know she is feeling its warmth now, as it courses down her body. In the meantime, I have fetched her some food, the vegetable curries they have prepared for the evening meal after their prayers, and I offer it to her. She gulps this down with her fingers, ignoring the spoon I have put in front of her, she can't resist the spicy flavours, she wants more, I bring more, soon the pans are empty. I am afraid she will ache from all this prayer food.

Afterwards, while she is resting on the sofa, I take out my wedding sari from the wardrobe and lay it out tenderly over her (20-21).

Daya's deliberate flouting of familial, religious and societal norms—the cause of her subsequent incarceration—is much more forcefully underlined throughout the more Indian-orientated target text: hence the translation of the neutral 'un sari' as the more culturally loaded and personal 'my wedding sari' and the addition of the description of the untouchable beggar's voluptuous eating, and thereby contamination, of the family's *prasada*. As well as addressing a general Anglophone reader's and publisher's perceived desire for story-telling,

the addition of such narrative elements thus also serves to explain to Indian readers the local, Mauritian significance of Hindu traditions imported from the ancestral homeland of the diasporic community depicted. Other Hindu customs that are expanded, in the target text, to emphasise their particular diasporic uses (and abuses) include: arranged (or forced) marriage; a hierarchical caste system; notions of food purity and *saatvi*; and strict gender roles, against all of which Daya defiantly rebels.

So far, we have examined how Devi's self-translational practices reflect both her (arguable) pronouncements about the general, stylistic differences between French and English, and, more specifically, about the 'Indian' content of her novel. Yet, as we shall now explore, some of the most radical, thematic and contextual, changes introduced in the translation—relating to questions of slavery and race—are not acknowledged at all in the above interview with Hawkins. In another interview, however, Devi does hint at a more thorough-going reworking of her source text, when she refers to the 'liberating, even exhilarating' experience of self-translation, as compared with the more constrained, faithful and 'dangerous', since parasitic, practice of translating another writer's work. Devi goes so far as to state that the English-language *Pagli* 'is more of a rewriting than a translation', so explicitly signalling the creative liberties that she takes with source text (Devi & Waters 2013: 122). In the final sections of this article, we shall now turn our attention to Devi's extensive additions, in her English-language rewriting of *Pagli*, of entirely new material relating to Mauritius' 'unsaid' history of slavery and to its equally taboo contemporary legacies. Devi's self-translation thus seeks belatedly to rewrite elements of Mauritius's past that have too often been glossed over, in communalist narratives foregrounding Indo-Mauritians' enduring diasporic links with India.

The most sustained self-translational rewritings of *Pagli* are evident in narrative additions which focus on issues of race and communalism in Mauritius, and on the roots of these in the island's long-suppressed, divisive history of slavery and indenture. Devi's translational rewriting of the history of indenture does not, as one might expect, focus primarily on the historic and diasporic links between Indo-Mauritians and the country of her Indian readers. Instead, it shifts the novel's and readers' attention to the catastrophic effects of Indian indenture upon the descendants of the African and Malagasy slaves who preceded

them. In a society dominated by Hindu Indo-Mauritians, a belatedly-acknowledged 'crisis of Creole identity' is linked to the fact that 'the contributions of their ancestors [are] absent from official Mauritian history' (Boswell 2006: 170). Anjali Prabu also evokes the 'inability of Mauritian society to come to terms with the issue of slavery,' and asks: 'How does the unnamed and unnameable, and therefore entirely contingent, "African" become a part of his/her history?' (Prabhu 2007: 52 & 69). Similarly, recognising the absence of references to slavery in public discourse, Vijaya Teelock and Ed Alpers argue that: 'Suppressing parts of our history only serves to delay further the process of reconciliation and increase the social fragmentation that is so apparent in Mauritius today' (Teelock & Alpers 1999: 9).

In literary discourse as well, as Srilata Ravi has compellingly demonstrated, the Mauritian novel of the pre- and post-independence years was dominated by the 'coolie romance': 'national narratives' which, in keeping with political discourse of the time, celebrated the success of the hard-working Indian rural labourer as an ideal symbol of 'Mauritianness', to the exclusion of other, non-Indian voices (Ravi 2007 & 2010). Nonetheless, since the 1990s—and particularly in the wake of the outbreak of largely inter-ethnic violence in 1999—the dominant 'coolie romance' has been replaced by a diversity of narratives which all vehemently reject the divisions and inequalities of Mauritius's community system, and call for new, more inclusive forms of locally-defined, national belonging. This shift towards a more inclusive, multi-ethnic form of Mauritianness can also be detected, I argue, in many of the most striking, revisionary changes between Devi's French-language *Pagli* of 2001 and the English-language, Indian-published version of 2007.

In a recent study of narratives of servitude in Mauritian fiction, Srilata Ravi argues that, far from denying Mauritius' widely occluded past, 'Ananda Devi's novels are replete with references to slave and indenture histories' (Ravi 2013: 52). Exploiting Ricoeur's understanding of memory as capacity, Ravi shows how, in the French-language version of *Pagli*, 'the remembering/forgetting of slavery/indenture [operates] through the recurrence of racial violence' (60). Yet Ravi's careful analysis of the subtle ways in which Devi confronts Mauritius's slave and indenture past is based on scant and allusive textual evidence. The references to slave and indenture in the French-language *Pagli* might well pass almost unnoticed by all but the most attentive readers. In the source text, there is a brief, passing reference to Mauritius's painful and divisive history, when Daya, imprisoned in the chicken

coop, reflects that: 'Terre Rouge est lourde d'histoires. [...] D'esclaves morts en certains lieux touchés à jamais par leur présence [...]. De travailleurs engagés qui ont donné leur vie à chercher ce qu'ils ne trouveront jamais: le repos', and she warns that: 'Tant que les gens n'auront pas compris et accepté cette histoire, tant qu'ils croiront que ces souffrances les séparent au lieu de les rassembler parce qu'elles ont été leur lieu de reconnaissance, la lave continuera de bouillonner et de rugir' (29). Interestingly, the latter sentence, warning of the dangers of failing to learn from the lessons of the past, is entirely removed from the English-language version of this passage – no doubt because, as we shall now explore, extensive additions elsewhere in the novel emphatically underline this now far more central message.

In the source text, the *mofines* are semi-supernatural figures who seek to maintain the purity of the Indo-Mauritian blood-line and preserve their ethnic community's diasporic traditions—traditions that Daya's behaviour threatens to undermine. The *mofines* seek to instill in Daya their own sense of collective identity by asserting that: 'Nous avons besoin du passé pour savoir qui nous sommes' (43). Yet the precise circumstances of this 'passé' are never overtly spelt out. Whilst the following extract evokes their common ancestors' origins elsewhere ('ailleurs'), as it does their labours and sacrifice, no explicit reference is made here either to India or to indenture, and none at all to slavery, the system of brutal, unfree labour that, after its abolition, indenture replaced:

Les rues des villages étaient autres car nous n'étions plus dans le temps. Elles m'avaient emmenée ailleurs, sur un chemin du passé où elles voulaient me montrer d'où nous étions venues. Elles m'ont fait voir le visage de mes parents puis celui de leurs parents, remontant ainsi les générations. Les traces se divisaient et bifurquaient à l'infini. J'étais venue de bien loin. Elles ont suivi du doigt les ambitions des ancêtres, elles ont brandi leurs mains marquées par les entailles de la canne à sucre, leur bouche assoiffée d'eau, leurs yeux aveuglés de soleil, leur sueur à l'odeur de sel. Elles ont tissé des liens entre ces gens venus d'ailleurs et moi. Voici ton lieu, voici ton père, voici ton éternité, voici le trésor qui a atterri brûlant entre tes mains. Si tu le laisses tomber à terre et subir les souillures de ton âme, ce sera comme si tu détruisais d'un seul coup tous leurs rêves, et leur lutte aura été vaincute. (42)

This passage's highly evocative references to Daya's ancestors' 'lutte', to their homeland 'bien loin' or to the injuries received in the sugarcane fields, remain veiled and allusive. In an interview given soon after the publication of the French *Pagli*, however, Devi explicitly highlights her contemporaneous concern with the two great 'crimes fondateurs' of indenture

and slavery, that she sees as defining Mauritius' unevenly remembered past and divided present:

[...] l'esclavage et l'engagisme indien sont des déchirures primordiales (des « crimes fondateurs » [...]) que notre histoire encore jeune ne nous a pas permis encore d'intérioriser et d'accepter d'un point de vue psychologique. La mémoire de l'esclavage a longtemps été reniée par les descendants d'esclaves [...]. L'opposition de l'esclavage et de l'engagisme se reflète également, même si c'est un non-dit, dans les relations sociales entre ces deux groupes aujourd'hui (Sultan 2001).

Like Teelock and Alpers, Devi here warns of the psychological and social dangers, for contemporary Mauritians, of continuing to suppress the crimes and traumas of the past. Whilst briefly and allusively 'remembering' the history of Daya's Indian forebears, the French *Pagli* nonetheless also continues to occlude the story of Mauritius's African, slave predecessors.

What is particularly striking in the English-language self-translation of *Pagli*, in contrast, is that this 'mémoire reniée' is explicitly acknowledged and confronted, in lengthy new passages which, expanding on the above source paragraph, depict the past traumas of both indenture and slavery. The most extensive of these additional passages, reproduced here in its entirety, illustrates the far-reaching way in which the source text is revisited and expanded, in order to foreground a narrative of Mauritius's dual, Indian *and* African, past:

The village streets looked different. We were outside time. I could not recognise anything. They followed an old pathway which led to identical ruins, two long, low, barn-like buildings with windows. I knew what they were. They were out of time and place, but one was where the first slaves had been kept, and the other was where the first Indian labourers had lived. There was an identical, piercing greyness inside them, an identical shroud of suffering. Some had been kept in shackles and stocks. Others had been stacked by the hundreds in the low hot boxes. The first had been brought here unwillingly. The second had been lured by absurd hopes. All had hoped for silent gods. They had all listened to the contempt of the masters, and had heard, too, the refusal and rejection of the land. There was no going back.

That was the instant condemnation. The island was a prison. For us to live here, all of them had to die painfully and with no dignity left except the one with which they faced death. The bitterness of their eyes hangs over the barns still like black tamarind seeds. They worked and died and stinted and died. Left something for their children to live on. Many slaves went back to the sea, right to the edge of land. Turning their backs on the fields, they chose to spend the rest of their life in contemplation of

the last barrier and of invisible lands which they would be the last to remember. Soon, they would be imaginary lands, and then, no man's lands, for nobody would claim them anymore.

As for the Indian labourers, they stayed on because they knew they could no longer look across the seas. They recreated their past here, on the island. It became their own, not a separation, but a remnant and a sad mimicry of the place they came from; for them, it never had an identity of its own. It was an illusion of a place.

The mofines showed them to me: the faces of my parents, and the faces of their parents and those of the generations before [...] (44-46; emphasis added).

The italicised sections at the start and end of this passage serve to indicate the points at which direct, fairly faithful translation of the source text is opened up by the insertion of entirely new material: material which, symbolically and literally, reads and writes between the lines of the highly allusive and one-sided French-language original. The three paragraphs of entirely new text seek to redress the imbalance, in both the fictional *mofines'* account of their ancestors' struggles, but also in real-life Mauritian public discourse, that has resulted from the predominant foregrounding of stories of 'coolie' labour and of Indo-Mauritians' diasporic attachment to their ancestral homeland, at the expense of other Afro-Mauritian narratives of brutal unfree labour and irreversible displacement. In Devi's English-language rewriting of *Pagli*, the publicly remembered and commemorated experience of indentured Indian labourers is belatedly compared and contrasted with the previously unspoken ('non-dit') story of African and Malagasy slaves, many of whose descendants continue to live on both the geographic and social margins today. In thus rewriting as well as translating her own source text, Devi highlights the two groups' common displacement, suffering and imprisonment on the island, but also addresses the very real differences between the brutal treatment of the unfree slaves and the lot of the free, if often duped, indentured labourers. Devi also tellingly emphasises and mocks the illusory efforts of the Indo-Mauritian diaspora to 'recreate their past' and a create 'sad mimicry' of their Indian homeland in Mauritius, rather than strive for a new and more inclusive sense of local, national belonging that would unite different ethnic groups within their shared island-home. In so doing, Devi implicitly lays the blame for the country's on-going communalist divisions squarely at the feet of the self-interested, Indo-Mauritian majority, embodied, in extreme fictional form, by the *mofines*.

Just as Mauritius's history of slavery and indenture is referred to only briefly and allusively in the original, French-language version of *Pagli*, so too is the central issue of race

and racism—the modern-day legacy of this divided history—only ever hinted at. The fundamental racial difference between Daya, an Indo-Mauritian Hindu, and Zil, an impoverished Creole fisherman, is indicated in references to the latter's 'cheveux bouclés et noirs, ses lèvres charnues' (93), to his Creole pronunciation of his name, to his profession as a fisherman, or in the epithet of 'îlois' that is applied to him. Yet, such allusions might well pass unnoticed by readers not already acquainted with Mauritius's ethnic and social hierarchies or with the local connotations of certain terms: thus, for instance, in Mauritius, 'Creole' denotes individuals of African or Malagasy descent and not, as in the francophone Caribbean, a more inclusive intercultural *métis* identity; since abolition, when many slaves left the plantations for the coast—as Devi indicates in the passage above—their descendants have continued to make up the majority of the island's fishermen; the term 'îlois' is pejoratively used, in Mauritius, to indicate an immigrant from the Chagos Islands or, as in Zil's case, from the island of Agalega, whose populations were/are almost entirely composed of the descendants of African slaves. The reader of Devi's French-language text is obliged to decipher such brief, scattered allusions, in order to deduce the ethnic difference between Daya and Zil and so to understand the reason for their perceived transgression of societal norms. In the English-language version, however, no such deductive 'reading between the lines' is required.

Thus, for instance, in the following quotation from the French source text, the opaque allusion to 'deux corps « étrangers »', is significantly expanded, when translated into English, to make the nature of their 'étrangeté', and of society's shocked reaction to their relationship, far more explicit. Hence,

Elles m'ont montré leur agonie, alors que deux corps « étrangers » s'accouplaient. Ce n'était pas beau à voir. Je ne comprenais pas qu'elles parlaient de nous. Nous n'étions pas laids comme le regard qu'elles posaient sur nous, ni maladroits comme ces corps gauches qui ne se connaissaient pas [...]. Nous nous emboîtions parfaitement l'un dans l'autre (42-43)

becomes, in the target text:

Then they showed me these silent old people grimacing and squirming as two 'strangers' made love. It was not pretty to look at. Dark brown, pale brown, biting at each other like puppy dogs, opening wide their legs to look into each other as if they did not know what they were. I did not understand that they were talking about us,

about you and me. We are not like that. We are not ugly like the eyes that look at us and condemn us, we are not 'strangers' discovering the strangeness of a 'different' body. We nest perfectly into each other. Our bodies have been sculpted to match. We are the cane and the sugar inside the cane. We do not wield the cutter that chops the straight stems at their base (46).

This scene, in which the 'strange' racial difference between 'light brown' Daya and 'dark brown' Zil is explicitly foregrounded, comes immediately after the section, discussed above, in which the island's previously suppressed slave and indentured pasts are also explicitly confronted. The reader of Devi's English-language *Pagli* is left in no doubt as to the cause-and-effect link that the author is thereby underlining between historical events and present-day racial prejudices. Devi's Indian readers may well already be cognisant of the 'great experiment' of indenture which, under the British Raj, led so many of their nineteenth-century forebears to cross the *kala pani* to Mauritius. They may also be aware of the strong diasporic ties that modern-day Indo-Mauritians maintain with their ancestral homeland. Yet Devi's translational rewriting also forces her Indian readers to confront the less well-known consequences, for other ethnic groups in Mauritius, of the massive social and power changes brought about by mass Indian immigration. Her rewriting brings to the fore the spectre of anti-black, anti-African racism which implicitly haunts the dominant rhetoric of Hindu, Indo-Mauritian *emplacement*. Given the common history of sugar plantation labour that brought both African slaves and Indian indentured labourers to Mauritius, it is interesting to note here Devi's suggestive addition of the imagery of sugarcane to symbolise Daya's and Zil's 'perfect' union—a union against which dominant narratives of Indo-Mauritian purity have so insistently militated.

Elsewhere, a similar foregrounding of the previously only implied racial dimension of Daya's perceived transgression is evident in the translation of the *mofines'* words, 'Tu es

parvenue à l'ultime frontière, [...] Ce qui sortira de tes reins portera un nom de corrosion' (43), as: 'Race is the final line, (...). Cross that line and what will come out of your womb will be a thing of shame and guilt' (47). In the French source text, the precise nature of the line that Daya is warned not to cross is not made explicit and so could be read, as many critics indeed have, as a reflection of the adulterous nature of her liaison, the 'corrosive' naming of any offspring thus being a result of his/her illegitimacy. In the English-language target text, however, there is no such ambiguity: the racial difference between Daya and Zil is shown to be the primary cause of the *mofines'* anger, with fear of racial contamination of the pure Hindu blood-line dictating their violent policing of Daya's behaviour.⁵ Despite—or arguably because of—the novel's explicit address to Mauritius's traumatic past and its racially divided present, the translated chapter finishes with a more positive addition to, and rewriting of, the original chapter's final line: 'Et je suis retournée pour voir une dernière fois le chemin où la lumière naissait' (44). A message of muted hope for the future is added in the English translation, reminiscent, in its emphasis on a now united people 'standing tall', of the closing stanzas of Aimé Césaire's iconic, anti-colonial poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*:

I looked back one last time to see the road where the light was being born. There were no slaves or bound labourers any more. There were a people, and it seemed to me that they were standing tall, but perhaps it was only an illusion of the shadows (48).

In Devi's self-translational rewriting of *Pagli*, the new focus on the long-suppressed and divisive history of Mauritius is matched by a far more virulent denunciation of the present-

⁵ The racial basis of the society's notions of identity and difference is also made explicit later in the English version of *Pagli* when the following, ambiguous reference to a drunkard's insulting comments about Daya—'Des mots qui font mal, venant de la bouche de l'Autre' (107)—are translated as the unequivocal and expanded: 'The words that spurt out are those of this island's hate for itself. The ancient, insulting words of race, of difference, of otherness' (115).

day racist legacy of this history, but also, more hopefully, by the identification of a growing, if fleeting, sense of social cohesion.

So why does Devi's English 'translation' of *Pagli* effect such an extensive and profound rewriting of the source text? One reason might well be linked, albeit more indirectly than as expressed by the author herself, to Devi's wish to adapt her novel to the perceived 'story-telling' tastes of its new intended readership. That is, in adopting a more narrative approach to her material, Devi's target text seeks to tell the story of the links between Indo-Mauritians and India, the history of Indian indenture being of common interest both parties. Rather than solely reflecting *stylistic* differences between source and target languages, however, Devi's rewriting of Mauritius's past seeks to debunk the self-serving and socially divisive *content* of previous tales of heroic struggle and re-grounding that characterise the 'coolie romance'. In rewriting her novel, the author is able more directly to expose the issue of ethnic 'communalism' that preoccupied her at the time. This preoccupation is evident in an interview, given mid-way between the publications of her two versions of *Pagli*, in which Devi asks: 'Ce que je dénonce? C'est l'éternelle emprise du "communalisme", c'est-à-dire des divisions d'ordre ethnique, dans cette société, avec son cortège de préjugés, de mépris, d'incompréhension, ou plutôt de refus de comprendre' (Devi 2003). Devi's self-translation thus offered her the opportunity, the authority and, importantly, the creative freedom to bring to the fore, and even revise, elements of her own source text that had previously remained latent, underexplored or in the background.

The striking, revisionary additions to Devi's novel also reflect a broader shift, in Mauritian political and public attitudes towards the past—and towards the previously taboo subject of slavery, in particular—that had come about in the few years dividing the publications of the French and English versions of *Pagli*, in 2001 and 2007 respectively. On 8 August 2004, as part of the United Nation's International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition,⁶ the Mauritian Parliament passed a motion that, for the first time, officially recognised slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity. In 2005, a

⁶ See: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/member-states/single-view/news/launch_of_international_year_commemorating_the_struggle_against_slavery_and_its_abolition-2/#.VaUpQv45Lcs. Accessed 14 July 2015.

Mauritian Slave Route Project was launched,⁷ involving academic and activist groups from across Mauritius's ethnic spectrum.⁸ The publication of the English-language *Pagli*, in 2007, was also symbolically flanked by the inauguration of Mauritius's two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Aapravasi Ghat, the detention centre that processed indentured labourers on their arrival in Mauritius, in 2006; and Le Morne Brabant, symbolic of maroon resistance and the fight against slavery, in 2008. Devi's self-translation of *Pagli* thus appeared at, and is a reflection of, a pivotal moment in Mauritius's official reconsideration of its multi-layered, hotly contested and unevenly remembered colonial past. Responding to these broader shifts in public attitude, and exploiting the timely opportunity and the creative freedom offered by self-translation, the striking changes introduced in the English-language version *Pagli* represent the author's attempts to confront, and thereby begin to overcome, the deep and enduring divisions caused by Mauritius's dual 'crimes fondateurs' of slavery and indenture. As our analysis of Ananda Devi's rewriting of both her own text and, with it, of Mauritius's past amply demonstrates, the author's 'liberating and exhilarating' self-translation destabilises and refutes the traditional binary opposition between 'original' creative writing and derivative translation. Devi's postcolonial, self-translational rewriting reveals the many ways in which style, knowledge and meaning shift with language and audience. For, as Devi's *Pagli* richly demonstrates, 'self-translation is not merely the transposition of a text between two languages; it is a complex and dynamic aesthetic practice that resonates throughout contemporary culture' (Kippur 2015: 26).

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⁷ For more information on the international Slave Route Project, see:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/the-slave-route/>. Accessed 14 July 2015.

⁸ These include, notably, the University of Mauritius, the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund and the Aapravasi Ghat Trust fund.

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