Introduction

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.256

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Introduction

The Problem of Belonging in Mauritius

Belonging – a sense of attachment to, and identification with, a place or people – is a particularly fraught issue in the small, postcolonial island nation of Mauritius. Although belonging is always a highly fluid and subjective concept, there are several interrelated, locally specific factors that make belonging especially contentious in modern-day Mauritius. These include, but are not limited to: the diverse, multi-ethnic composition of its population; the absence of an indigenous, precolonial culture; the island's history of double (French and British) colonisation; its relatively recent transition to independence (in 1968); and its official, ethnically delineated, multicultural model of 'unity in diversity'. The usual purportedly 'natural' bases for the postulation of a cohesive sense of collective, national belonging – indigenousness, ethnic homogeneity, shared origins, history, language and culture – do not therefore readily apply in the young, multi-ethnic, immigrant nation of Mauritius. To an even greater degree than in other contexts, notions of belonging are intertwined and often conflated with questions of nation, community and ethnic identity – all of which are particularly divisive and contested in contemporary Mauritius. This book will examine how the universal longing to belong – often expressed as a *problem* of belonging – is articulated, and how alternative forms of affective belonging are imagined, in a representative selection of recent fiction from Mauritius. My aim is to explore the diverse *fictions* of belonging evoked in the novels: both in the sense that Mauritian fiction is centrally concerned with issues of belonging and exclusion; and in the sense that the notion of belonging is always a highly performative and imaginative act of fiction.

Historical overview

With no original, in-dwelling inhabitants, Mauritian society is made up entirely of the descendants of immigrants – mainly from France, Africa, Madagascar, the Indian subcontinent and China – who were brought to the island at different times over the past three centuries by the brutal transnational flows of slavery, indenture, imperialism, global capitalism and economic migration. As a result, as Mauritian academic Kumari Issur points out, 'à Maurice, nous connaissons la difficulté de définir une identité nationale. La nécessité de toujours qualifier le Mauricien par Indo-, Sino-, Franco-, etc. nous révèle bien l'absence de cristallisation d'une identité homogène'.[1] Of course, belonging, whether individual or collective, need not be expressed at the level of the nation, as Mauritius's dominant, ethnically demarcated 'community system' amply illustrates. Just as Mauritius's early inhabitants arrived in successive waves from different countries, so too do the constituent communities of its contemporary population frequently define their respective, internally constructed senses of belonging in terms of attachment to ancestral homelands outside its national borders. As anthropologist Thomas Eriksen argues, rather than seeking to define a collective and inclusive sense of belonging to a shared island nation, contemporary Mauritius is 'a society where ethnicity is the most important criterion for ordering the social world'.[2] As a result, paradoxically, as Patrick Eisenlohr observes, 'full membership in the Mauritian nation is performed through the cultivation of […] ancestral traditions with origins elsewhere'.[3]

The economically privileged Franco-Mauritian minority (approximately 2% of the population), predominantly the descendants of the first settlers and slave owners, have always maintained their elite social status in Mauritius through the cultivation of linguistic, religious and cultural links with their ancestral homeland of France.[4] The Creole (or

[1]   Kumari Issur, 'Nationalisme, transnationalisme et postnationalisme dans *Made in Mauritius* d'Amal Sewtohul', *Loxias-Colloques* (2013), n. pag., http://revel.unice.fr/symposia/actel/index.html?id=449 (accessed 22 July 2016).

[2]   Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-building and Compromise in Mauritius* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p. 122.

[3]   Patrick Eisenlohr, *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 5.

[4]   For an anthropological study of this privileged minority today, see: Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite: Power and Anxiety in the Face of Change* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

Afro-Mauritian) population (27%),[5] descendants of enslaved Africans and Malagasy, on the other hand, are unable to claim any social capital or a sense of belonging by means of links with their irreparably lost ancestral homelands. From the very early establishment of Île de France (as Mauritius was called from 1715 to 1810), French slave owners deliberately separated slaves of the same ethnic group, thus forcibly severing any linguistic, cultural, religious or kinship ties. Forced to convert to Catholicism and to communicate in the *lingua franca*, French-based Kreol,[6] any continued connection with African ancestral homelands was irreversibly broken from the outset – a situation which, compounded by enduring social and geographic marginalisation, has contributed to a much-debated *malaise* amongst the current Creole population.[7] Paradoxically, as Peghini notes, this lack of ancestral roots elsewhere is often claimed by Creoles as the basis of a stronger, local sense of belonging to Mauritius than that of other, diasporic ethnic groups: 'il n'est pas rare d'entendre les Créoles affirmer

5   Contrary to its usage in other postcolonial contexts, the term 'Creole' in Mauritius denotes dark-skinned Mauritians of African or Malagasy origin who are descendants of slaves. The term 'Afro-Mauritian' is used very rarely, if ever. Enduring colonial-era social classifications and prejudices underlie the use of the term 'Creole' to refer, as Eriksen notes, 'not only to slave ancestry and cultural impurity, but to low class. […] 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'. As a result, paradoxically, 'some of the individuals who would seem the very embodiments of cultural creolization from an analytical perspective – genetically mixed, culturally familiar with several traditions and frequently rejoicing in the cultural "mosaic" of Mauritius – are not defined as Creoles locally'. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Tu dimunn pu vini kreol: The Mauritian Creole and the Concept of Creolization', http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Creoles.html (accessed 12 July 2015).

6   I shall adopt this form of spelling, first introduced by Philip Baker, to designate the language, and to distinguish it from the term 'Creole', used to denote people of African or mixed-African descent. Baker, *Kreol: A Description of Mauritian Creole* (London: Hurst, 1972).

7   See on this subject: Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006). For a discussion of the historical roots of the *malaise créole*, see Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005). For an insightful study of the heterogeneity of the so-called 'Creole' group and the historic reasons for their lack of social organisation, see also: Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indian Labourers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

qu'ils sont les seuls véritables Mauriciens, au vu de leur attachement à la terre natale et de leur difficulté à retracer leurs origines'.[8]

In contrast, since their early arrival in Mauritius, Indo-Mauritians – and particularly Hindu Mauritians – have been able to assert a strong sense of collective ethnic belonging by maintaining diasporic links with mother India. The ancestors of today's Indo-Mauritian majority (48% Hindu, 17% Muslim) were mostly brought to Mauritius from different regions of India, following the abolition of slavery in 1838, to work as indentured labourers on the island's expanding sugar plantations. Not only did these Indian immigrants rapidly come to constitute the demographic majority, far outnumbering the pre-established Franco-Mauritian and Creole populations, but under the British colonial administration they were also permitted to form cohesive familial and communal groups and to maintain the linguistic, religious and cultural practices of their land of departure.[9] In contrast to the earlier, forcibly assimilated, poorly organised, heterogeneous Creole community, Indo-Mauritians were, for all the undoubted hardships that they endured, able to 'make the world of the ancestors part of their place in a Mauritian nation'[10] from the outset – a situation that was further aided, during the so-called *grand morcellement* of the late nineteenth century, by their subsequent accession to land ownership.[11] Originally a response to the trauma of displacement and an attempt to resist cultural assimilation, the cultivation of diasporic ancestral traditions (and hence also of ethnic purity) has since become a powerful means by which the Hindu-Mauritian majority has been able to gain and maintain power and social status within post-independence Mauritius.[12]

8   Julie Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle: le multiculturalisme à l'île Maurice* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2017), p. 57.

9   Hindu Mauritians even invented a myth wherein the lake of Grand Bassin, the site of the largest annual Hindu festival outside India, is said to contain water from the holy River Ganges.

10   Eisenlohr, *Little India*, p. 271.

11   During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the price of sugar cane began to fall, vast swathes of agricultural land were divided up and sold to the former indentured labourers who had worked it, so creating the basis of a landowning Indo-Mauritian planter class. See, on this subject, Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indian Labourers*.

12   This diasporic, ethnic form of collective belonging is one that has also been successfully adopted by Sino-Mauritians and Muslim Mauritians, to the further detriment of the already marginalised Creole community.

At the turn of the new millennium, the political scientist William Miles was perplexed that there was still 'no overriding sense of national unity' in Mauritius.[13] In this context, it is worth stressing that Mauritius has only officially been a 'nation' since 1968, when it gained independence from Great Britain, and a republic since 1992. Before that, the island was a British colony for over 150 years (1810–1968) and, earlier still, a French settler colony, from 1715. Prior to independence, Mauritians were therefore officially regarded as colonial subjects, rather than as citizens with a distinct collective identity. Questions of what it meant to be 'Mauritian', of how the resident population might assert a sense of collective belonging to their island home, or of what shape an 'overriding sense of national unity' might take, were therefore previously largely moot.

When considering the possible reasons for the apparent absence of a unified sense of nationhood in post-independence Mauritius, it is also worth noting that independence itself was not an aspiration of all Mauritians: nearly half of the population (44%), including most Franco-Mauritians, Creoles and Muslims, voted against independence, fearing that it would lead to the 'Indianisation' of the island by the Hindu-Mauritian majority and so to their own further marginalisation. In the period leading up to independence, Mauritius was beset by widespread, interethnic violence (between Hindus and Creoles, and between Creoles and Muslims) and large numbers of Franco-Mauritians and middle-class Creoles emigrated (mainly to South Africa and Australia): conditions that did not bode well for multi-ethnic harmony or national unity.

As Julie Peghini explores in her probing, interdisciplinary study of multiculturalism in Mauritius,[14] during the years leading up to and immediately following independence, politicians[15] and writers sought to define and promote a locally grounded, unifying culture – *le mauricianisme* – as the basis for the new Mauritian nation. Common, unifying features expounded as characteristic of *mauricianisme* included a common commitment, regardless of ethnicity, to the construction of the Mauritian nation; an attachment to the natural geography of the

13   William F.S. Miles, 'The Mauritius Enigma', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1999), pp. 91–104 (p. 103).

14   Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle*.

15   Notably, the left-wing, anti-communalist Mouvement militant mauricien of Paul Bérenger and Dev Virahsawmy.

shared island space; and the recognition of the *lingua franca*, Kreol, as the national language. Such unifying national aspirations proved fraught and short-lived. Resistance among Hindu Mauritians to what was perceived as a form of assimilation was strong: in 1983, the airing on national television of the Mauritian national anthem in Kreol provoked uproar, with acrimonious accusations of 'anti-Hindu' bias. Compounded by schisms in the ruling MMM party and widespread disillusionment with seemingly intractable ethnic divisions, official attempts to promote an inclusive, local sense of *mauricianisme* lost ground thereafter, in favour of a multicultural model of 'unity in diversity', based on 'divide and rule' practices inherited from the British, that still prevails today.

Successive, post-independence governments have sought to prevent a resurgence of the violent interethnic disorder that marked the pre-independence years, by recognising and defending the interests of the island's many constituent ethnic groups. Specific mechanisms for managing Mauritius's ethnic and religious diversity include the much-debated 'Best Loser System', designed to ensure that all ethnic groups are represented in parliament;[16] the teaching of so-called ancestral languages and cultures at all levels of the education system;[17] and the

16   Whilst Mauritius's political system is broadly modelled on the British Westminster system, an additional mechanism of positive discrimination – the 'Best Loser System' – was introduced at independence, to ensure that all ethnic constituencies are represented in the Legislative Assembly. Whilst 62 out of the 70 seats are fully elected, the 'Best Loser System' ensures that the remaining eight seats are allotted, as far as possible, according to party and ethnic membership. As a result, political candidates are required by law to declare their ethnic allegiance on their nomination form. Critics of this system argue that it entrenches ethnic divisions and that it prevents candidates from defining themselves more inclusively as simply 'Mauritian'. In 2012, the anti-communalist party, Rezistans ek Alternativ, took their objections to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights, which found in their favour, arguing that obligatory disclosure of community affiliation constitutes a violation of candidates' human rights. See the numerous articles on the subject that appeared in *Le Mauricien* and *Le Week-End* in early September 2012.

17   As Eisenlohr argues in *Little India*, it is highly doubtful whether the so-called 'ancestral' languages taught and promoted in Mauritius today were in fact spoken by many Indo-Mauritians' immigrant ancestors. Even in India, Hindi – the most commonly taught 'ancestral' language in Mauritius – is an artificial and largely unspoken twentieth-century construct, the official language of central government rather than of daily communication. Similarly, classical Arabic is taught and

creation of numerous national holidays, cultural centres and commemo-
rative monuments, promoting the discrete histories and cultures of
specific ethnic groups.[18] As a result, Mauritius's post-independence
political model has been based largely on practices of compromise,
tolerance and coexistence – what Peghini terms 'une politique culturelle
du "do not touch"'[19] – rather than on homogeneity, cohesion or
integration. The national slogan of 'unity in diversity' thus represents
an attempt to provide an overarching and unifying national structure to
the coexistence, on a communal level, of diverse, internally constructed
and potentially competing ethnic identities.

claimed as the ancestral language of many of the island's Muslims, even though
their ancestors mostly came from Northern India, where they would probably
have spoken Urdu or other regional languages, rather than from the Middle East
– where, in any case, classical Arabic is not a vernacular language. Rather than
embodying a residual 'memory' of real ancestral languages, Hindi and Arabic are
instead crucial to the performance of ethnic allegiances which confer social status
in contemporary, diasporic Mauritius. In 2004, the Mauritian education ministry
entrusted linguists at the University of Mauritius and the Mauritius Institute of
Education with the task of devising a standardised form of Kreol orthography,
with a view to phasing in teaching of the language from primary school level.
Since 2012, Kreol – the vernacular language of all Mauritians, but also the default
ancestral language of most Creoles – is now permitted as the medium of instruction
in Mauritian primary schools, although it is not taught as an 'ancestral language'
with the same associated prestige as French, Hindi, Arabic or Mandarin.

18 Whilst National Day (on 12 March) and Labour Day are the only national
holidays explicitly appealing to all Mauritians, other national holidays are targeted
at specific ethnic constituencies: Thaipoosam Cavadee, Abolition of Slavery Day,
Chinese Spring Festival, Maha Shivaratree, Ougudi, Eid al-Fitr, Ganesh Chaturthi,
All Saints Day, the Arrival of Indentured Labourers Day, Divali and Christmas.
Communalist cultural centres include, to name but the most prominent: the Indira
Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Mauritius
Tamil Cultural Centre, the Mauritius Chinese Centre, the Islamic Cultural Centre,
the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, L'Institut Français de Maurice,
L'Alliance Française, the Mauritian Marathi Mandali Federation, the Vedic
Cultural Centre and the Ming Tek Centre.

19 This is the title of the third chapter of Peghini's book, which explores the
ways in which an image of 'unity in diversity' has been strategically promoted both
externally, to attract tourists and foreign investors, and internally, to bolster the
political, social and economic ascendance of the Hindu-Mauritian majority. As
Peghini's title suggests, 'la clé du voûte du système mauricien a été le compromis,
et non l'unité que le "mauricianisme" avait tenté de prôner' (Peghini, *Île rêvée, île
réelle*, p. 98).

As Eriksen notes, 'the concept "unity in diversity" represents a contradiction in terms for many Mauritians'.[20] In rather different tone, Françoise Lionnet is right to remind us, in response to Miles and following Ernest Renan,[21] that '"national unity" need not mean "uniformity"' and that nationalism is a '*willed* affirmation of solidarity in spite of linguistic, racial or religious differences'.[22] Yet it is also evident that such an affirmation of solidarity is not claimed as the common project or the 'will' of all sections of the population. The practical manifestations of the rhetoric of Mauritius's official multicultural model have often tended to compound ethnic differences, rather than affirm solidarity across or beyond ethnic boundaries. As Peghini caustically underlines, Mauritius's communalist system, based on the constitutional categories established in the lead-up to independence – Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian and 'General Population'[23] – in

20   An example of just such a 'contradiction in terms' is offered by the 'composite cultural shows' that are a staple of the annual National Day, on 12 March, to celebrate both Mauritius's independence from the British (in 1968) and the nation's accession to the status of republic (in 1992). Staged in local venues across the country, these shows comprise performances of music, dance, poetry or theatre by members of each of the country's different ethnic groups. Eriksen gives the following description of one performance that he witnessed: 'The show included two Sino-Mauritian entries, two Tamil contributions and one Telegu, one European song, three performances representative of the Creoles, three each by Muslims and Marathis, and four entries in Hindi or Bhojpuri. The programme was printed in English, and the opening and ending speeches were given in Kreol' (Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 145). Whilst the official aim of such performances is to promote a vision of Mauritian unity emerging from its diversity, it is debatable whether such a unified organic whole persuasively emerges from these many, very different, composite parts.

21   Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882).

22   Françoise Lionnet, 'Mauritius in/and Global Culture: Politics, Literature, Visual Arts', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4 (2010), pp. 371–400 (p. 375).

23   The Mauritian constitution recognises four ethnic 'communities': Hindus, Muslims, Sino-Mauritians and the 'General Population'. The last category includes 'every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or other of those three categories' and hence includes Franco-Mauritians, the diverse 'Creole' group and anyone else who does not easily fit the other categories. As Peghini remarks, 'General Population' is the label given to 'la catégorie "fourre-tout" […] représentant le monde de couleur assimilé/hiérarchisé à la société blanche' (*Île rêvée, île réelle*, p. 20). There is also great diversity even within these classifications. For an analysis of Mauritian census data and the issues therein, see:

fact tends to favour certain ethnic and religious groups (notably, the Hindu-Mauritian majority) to the detriment of others (especially Creoles). Mauritius's multicultural political model and the diasporic, ethnic forms of belonging that underpin it thus contribute to the increased marginalisation of individuals or sections of the population who do not (feel that they) readily 'belong' to any of the traditionally prescribed, diasporic, ethnolinguistic and religious groupings.

1999 Kaya riots

Eriksen and Eisenlohr both recognise that Mauritius's multicultural politics of 'unity in diversity', and the forms of collective, communalist identity that underpin it, hinder the creation of a shared sense of Mauritian nationhood with which all citizens might identify. It is noticeable that they and other commentators nonetheless tend to downplay the potentially incendiary implications of the divisive scenario that is thereby created. This tendency to downplay is due in part, of course, to the particular focus of their studies, none of which is directly concerned with examining the situation of disaffected minorities. But, revealingly, it can also be linked to the date of publication of these studies. With hindsight, it is ironic to note how many critics publishing in or before 1999 base their praise of Mauritius's successful political, multicultural model on the lack of interethnic unrest since independence, rather than on any more positive manifestations of national unity. In 1993, for instance, Lionnet lauded Mauritius as 'a "model" postcolonial state [… and] a superb example of successful mediations of the uncertain relationship between nationhood and ethnic or cultural identity'.[24] In so doing, she contrasted Mauritius's harmonious, multicultural stability with the tumultuous volatility of l'Île de la Réunion, the nearby French *département d'outre-mer* which had been racked by interethnic rioting in 1991. In 1998, Eriksen repeatedly stressed that 'there has been no public, violent ethnic unrest since 1969', which he optimistically interpreted as an indication of his central premise that 'Mauritians can be *a people* tomorrow if they

A.J. Christopher, 'Ethnicity, Community and the Census in Mauritius, 1830–1990', *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 158, no. 1 (1992), pp. 57–64.

24   Françoise Lionnet, '*Créolité* in the Indian Ocean: Two Models of Cultural Diversity', *Yale French Studies*, vol 82 (1993), pp. 101–12 (p. 106).

decide to'.[25] Dinan, Nababsingh and Mathur presciently warned, in 1999, that 'there have been some worrying signs of growing religious and communal fundamentalism'. Nonetheless, they claimed that 'these minor incidents could in no way be compared to the more serious outbreaks of racial violence which occurred in the few years preceding independence',[26] and so ultimately concluded by praising the Mauritian government for its successful accommodation of cultural diversity.

With hindsight, such enthusiastic praise for post-independence Mauritius's interethnic harmony looks rather short-sighted and idealistic, based more on wishful thinking and an absence of evidence to the contrary than on substantive signs of social cohesion. For the precariousness of the island's much-celebrated multicultural stability was dramatically highlighted in 1999, when violent, interethnic unrest broke out across the country, following the suspicious death in police custody of the popular Creole singer Kaya.[27] The social *malaise* revealed by this sudden and protracted outbreak of deadly violence was not limited to the island's disaffected Creole population, although they were certainly the first group to rise up in protest at what they saw as yet another example of police brutality against one of their number. The Kaya riots of 1999 – the first serious social unrest to beset Mauritius since independence – dramatically highlighted widespread and long-simmering ethnic and class divisions behind the island's image as a harmonious and prosperous 'rainbow nation': divisions that the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' had sought to occlude and that the prevalent, exclusionary practices of communalist, ethnic belonging had arguably helped to exacerbate.

Whether the Kaya riots of 1999 are viewed as a minor, self-contained aberration or as a symptom of a much broader, deeper and entrenched social *malaise*, their symbolic timing on the eve of a new millennium has provided fuel for much renewed soul-searching – amongst politicians, social commentators, activists, academics and the general public alike – about the future of Mauritius's 'model' multicultural society. The Kaya

25   Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, pp. 10, 151, 169.

26   Monique Dinan, Vidula Nababsing and Hansraj Mathur, 'Mauritius: Cultural Accommodation in a Diverse Island Polity', in Crawford Young (ed.), *The Accommodation of Cultural Diversity: Case Studies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 72–102 (p. 101).

27   An anti-communalist pacifist artist from an impoverished, largely Creole suburb of Port Louis, Kaya is credited with developing *seggae*, a musical form that fuses Rastafarian-inspired reggae with the Mauritian *séga*.

riots acted as a wake-up call, reigniting debates about the interrelated notions – and lived realities – of nation, community and belonging in multi-ethnic Mauritius, 30 years after independence. Questions of national versus ethnolinguistic belonging returned to the political agenda, reflecting the earlier *mauricianisme* versus 'unity in diversity' debates of the independence period. As this book will explore, the Kaya unrest also marked a shift in literary depictions of the place of the individual in postcolonial Mauritius's diverse and often divided 'rainbow nation'. My project in the current study is to investigate how novels written after the 1999 unrest respond to the fraught issues of belonging and, conversely, of exclusion, inequality and disaffection which the riots once again brought to the fore in such devastating and spectacular fashion. As we shall explore, belonging can be expressed in many different ways, and is intimately associated with highly subjective feelings of being safe or 'at home' in a place or of 'fitting in' with a group of people. Ethnic and social inequalities of the kind revealed by the Kaya riots clearly have a direct, negative impact on specific groups' or individuals' ability to affirm such positive feelings of inclusion, familiarity, safety and attachment. My book aims to investigate how such issues of inclusion and exclusion are articulated in the contemporary literary imaginary and how – or even if – alternative, more inclusive forms of belonging are imagined.

Belonging in twentieth-century Mauritian novels

In focusing on novels published after the Kaya riots, I do not wish to suggest that authors writing before 1999 were not also concerned with issues of social inequality, ethnic division or national cohesion. Indeed, the problem of belonging – linked to an exploration of the relationship between individual and society, between different ethnic groups or between people and island – has long been a concern of Mauritian literature, even before 'Mauritian' literature as such existed. In the mid-twentieth century, during the era of decolonisation and as Mauritius began to prepare for its own transition to independence, a number of writers, mirroring the concerns of contemporary politicians, used their fictional writing to promote visions of *mauricianisme* as a basis for the new Mauritian nation.[28] One such figure was the novelist,

---

28   My focus here, as in the rest of the book, is upon the novel form. Mauritius also has long literary traditions of theatre and poetry. Important poets of the

poet and painter Malcolm de Chazal who, in contrast to the majority of Franco-Mauritians, was an enthusiastic supporter of Mauritian independence. In his 1951 novel *Petrusmok*[29] he presents a vision of the nation in which the mythical roots of the Mauritian people are imagined as lying in the natural geology of the island, rather than in separate, ethnically delineated, ancestral homelands. According to Chazal's inclusive foundation myth, the island of Mauritius is a remnant of the ancient lost continent of Lemuria, and its mountains and valleys were sculpted by giants, the island's original inhabitants. Inspired by the natural world of Mauritius, *Petrusmok* imagines an alternative, spiritual history of the island with which all inhabitants, irrespective of historical origins, could collectively identify. Transcending ethnic divisions, Chazal thus postulates a form of national belonging that unites Mauritius's multi-ethnic population in an imagined communion with their shared island space.

Another key exponent of Mauritian independence and of *mauricianisme* was the poet, journalist and novelist Marcel Cabon. In contrast to Chazal's mythical and fantastic vision, Cabon's dream of *mauricianisme* is one based on interracial harmony and a common project of physical and sociopolitical nation-building. In his novels of the independence period, *Namasté* and *Brasse-au-vent*,[30] Cabon depicts a Mauritius in which different ethnic groups work together to build a shared society. *Namasté* tells the story of the Indo-Mauritian Ram, who galvanises the multi-ethnic members of his village to work together to build its infrastructure and, with it, a sense of *enracinement*, community and belonging. A broader aim of Cabon's novel was to overcome pre-independence prejudice against the Hindu majority, by depicting how Indo-Mauritians' energy and hard work could be harnessed for the greater good in the construction of the new nation. *Brasse-au-vent* is set in eighteenth-century Île de France, at the time of the island's original settlement, and depicts a society in which

independence period who explored questions of Mauritian identity, multi-ethnic coexistence and belonging in their works include Robert-Edward Hart, Edouard Maunick, Jean Fanchette and Raymond Chasle. Another important novelist of the period was Loys Masson, whose *Le Notaire des Noirs* (1961), written and published in France, touches upon issues of racial prejudice, disaffection and lack of interethnic integration in early twentieth-century Mauritius.

29   Malcolm de Chazal, *Petrusmok* (Port Louis: Standard Printing, 1951).

30   Marcel Cabon, *Namasté* (Rose-Hill: Éditions de l'Océan Indien, 1981 [1961]) and *Brasse-au-vent* (Rose-Hill: Éditions de l'Océan Indien, 1989 [1968]).

both French settlers and Creole slaves work together to domesticate the island space and to found colonial society. It also tells the tale of the love between the young *colon* Sylvestre and the fugitive slave girl Mayotte. *Brasse-au-vent* is not an idealising, apologist tale of settler endeavour and harmonious interracial relations, however: as in *Namasté*, in which Ram's dreams are quashed and he becomes a social outcast, *Brasse-au-vent* ends in disillusionment, with the murder of Mayotte and with Sylvestre's definitive departure from the island. Together, Cabon's novels present the dream – but, crucially, not the realisation – of a mixed and integrated Mauritian people transcending ethnic divisions. Acknowledging the population's divided history, and recognising both the free and the unfree labour of all communities, both novels represent the potential of Mauritians of all ethnicities to be united in their love for, and connection with, the natural beauty of their island home. While Cabon imagines the grounds on which a genuinely inclusive, non-ethnic sense of belonging might one day be created, however, the ultimate failure of his characters' dreams nonetheless arguably reflects the author's painful awareness of the enduring and seemingly insurmountable barriers to such a vision.[31]

In rather different vein, the independence period also saw the publication of a number of novels that Srilata Ravi labels the 'coolie romance': nationalist narratives which, reflecting the contemporaneous political discourses of communalism and 'unity in diversity', sought to elevate the figure of the Indo-Mauritian rural labourer to the status of 'model citizen'.[32] As an affirmative response to the Indo-Mauritians'

31 In their study of *mauricianisme* in Cabon's novels, Evelyn Kee Mew and Nicolas Natchoo conclude that 'l'échec de la rencontre et du métissage s'explique sans doute par le fait que les Mauriciens de l'époque ne sont pas prêts encore à accepter une telle évolution des choses'. See: 'Marcel Cabon et le mauricianisme', in Vicram Ramharai and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François (eds), *Marcel Cabon: écrivain d'ici et d'ailleurs* (Trou d'Eau Douce: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2014), pp. 171–96 (pp. 190–91).

32 Srilata Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians: National and Postnational Identities', *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2010), pp. 29–45 (p. 34). This article largely reworks Chapter 2, 'Coolie Heroism: Nationalism, Postnationalism and the Romance of Indenture Immigration', from Ravi's monograph *Rainbow Colors: Literary Ethno-Topographies of Mauritius* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 19–45. Examples of such 'coolie romances' include: Abhumanyu Unnuth, *Sueurs de sang* (Paris: Stock, 2001 [1977]) and *Le Culte du sol* (Mauritius: Printemps, 1997 [1972]), both translated from Hindi; and Nando Bodha, *Beaux Songes* (Mauritius:

history of cultural displacement, and as a reflection of their political and social ascendancy, emphasis is placed in these works on the essentially Hindu values of land ownership, education and hard work. These intra-communally unifying values form the basis of a group sense of physical and emotional *emplacement*, with 'the village [as] the primary spatial unit of belonging'.[33] In contrast to the inclusive, non-ethnic aspirations of *mauricianisme*, the 'coolie romance' reasserts the primacy of communal, ethnolinguistic senses of belonging at the same time as it promotes the specific culture – and interests – of the Hindu-Mauritian community. As in the political sphere, the literature of the mid-twentieth century is thus characterised by competing conceptions of the relationship between people and nation: either in terms of national unity, local allegiance, *mauricianisme* and 'common denominators' (Eriksen), or in terms of communal, diasporic, ethnolinguistic and religious affiliations, reflecting the population's diverse histories and origins.

Marie-Thérèse Humbert's novel *A l'autre bout de moi*,[34] published in France in 1979, attracted much critical attention and public outrage at the time for its frank depiction of social tensions and ethnic divisions in multicultural Mauritius, as embodied in the differing life choices of the mixed-race narrator, Anna, and her twin sister, Nadège.[35] From the late 1980s, an increasing number of emergent novelists began, following Humbert, to criticise the divisive effects of the political model of 'unity in diversity' and to expose the inequalities and prejudices undergirding it. In 1992, Mauritius became a republic – a change of constitutional status that arguably revived interest in questions of Mauritian nationhood and collective belonging. As Ravi notes, 'the 1990s saw a new generation of writers who question the validity of the nationalist narrative and seek

Bénarès, 1999). Interestingly, Ravi also includes *Namasté* in this categorisation, even though the motivation for Cabon's choice of an Indo-Mauritian protagonist was rather different from that of the translated Hindi-language novels with which it undoubtedly shares certain thematic characteristics. It is worth noting, in this context, that Cabon himself was of mixed Creole ancestry.

33   Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians', p. 33.

34   Marie-Thérèse Humbert, *A l'autre bout de moi* (Paris: Stock, 1979).

35   As Ravi points out elsewhere, 'in the 1970s and 1980s no single novelist, apart from Marie-Thérèse Humbert, seems to have made a lasting mark on the Mauritian literary scene' (*Rainbow Colors*, p. 4). This paucity is tentatively attributed to the social volatility of the post-independence period, which witnessed the emigration of large numbers of French-speaking Mauritians, including writers such as Jean Fanchette and Edouard Maunick.

to re-image Mauritian society'.[36] Carl de Souza's *Le Sang de l'Anglais* (1989),[37] for instance, focuses upon the ambivalent relations between the Franco-Mauritian narrator, Saint Bart, and his socially ostracised British-Mauritian friend, Hawkins, set against the backdrop of the interethnic tensions and large-scale emigration of the independence years. Based on a real-life *fait divers*, Souza's later novel *La Maison qui marchait vers le large* (1996)[38] uses the metaphor of a crumbling colonial house and its inhabitants (an impoverished but snobbish Franco-Mauritian owner and his Muslim tenants) as the house slides inexorably downhill, to depict the entrenched prejudices and shifting power relations at play in multi-ethnic twentieth-century Mauritian society. As in his later novel, *Les Jours Kaya*, which we shall discuss in the next chapter, Souza's works suggest that the destruction of entrenched ethnic categories is an essential, but as yet unrealised, step towards creating a truly *post*colonial Mauritian society.

Ananda Devi's novels of the 1980s and 1990s also grapple with the problem of belonging in an ethnically divided, highly patriarchal society, with a particular focus upon the impact of such divisions and inequalities on female characters. As we shall explore in Chapter 2, these concerns continue to be central to her later novels. Devi's first novel, *Rue la Poudrière* (1988),[39] explores issues of social inequality, male aggression and racial prejudice from the point of view of an impoverished young Creole prostitute living in a run-down street in Port Louis. In *L'Arbre fouet* (1997) and *Le Voile de Draupadi* (1999),[40] on the other hand, Devi critiques the repressive normative practices used in patriarchal Hindu-Mauritian society to control the potentially transgressive behaviours of its female members. Mauritian literature of the late twentieth century commonly rejects nationalist narratives of ethnic distinctiveness and, as Ravi comments, deploys instead 'a plurality of narratives relating linguistic attachments, cultural affiliations and national loyalties'.[41] That is, as Ravi's terminology

36   Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians', p. 37.
37   Carl de Souza, *Le Sang de l'Anglais* (Paris: Hatier, 1989).
38   Carl de Souza, *La Maison qui marchait vers le large* (Paris: Serpent à Plumes, 1996).
39   Ananda Devi, *Rue la Poudrière* (Abidjan: Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1988).
40   Devi, *L'Arbre fouet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) and *Le Voile de Draupadi* (Vacoas: Éditions Le Printemps, 1999).
41   Ravi, *Rainbow Colors*, p. 9.

here implies, novels of this period are commonly concerned with the seemingly intractable *problem* of belonging in multicultural Mauritian society, whether experienced within or outside the dominant, ethnically delineated 'community system'.

Belonging in twenty-first-century Mauritian literature

A concern with the *problem* of belonging becomes even more pronounced in twenty-first-century, 'post-Kaya' Mauritian fiction, as the various chapters of this book will both separately and comparatively explore. The first two decades of the new millennium have witnessed an unprece-dented blossoming of Mauritian literature in French, with the emergence of powerful new voices (such as Nathacha Appanah, Shenaz Patel, Barlen Pyamootoo, Bertrand de Robillard and Amal Sewtohul) and the critical affirmation of more established authors who had risen to prominence in the later decades of the twentieth century (including Ananda Devi, Carl de Souza, Marie-Thérèse Humbert and the Nobel Prize winner Jean-Marie Le Clézio). To an even greater degree than their twentieth-century precursors, the novels of this period are marked by a repeated questioning of ethnic communalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the postulation of diverse, alternative attachments, affiliations and loyalties. All of the main novels of my corpus have been selected because – as is characteristic of contemporary Mauritian fiction more generally – they portray the complexities and divisions of contemporary Mauritian society, and the attempts of individual characters to create an alternative sense of attachment to Mauritius's place and people.

The eight novels that will be the main objects of analysis – Nathacha Appanah's *Blue Bay Palace* (2004), Ananda Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* (2006), Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* (2005), Bertrand de Robillard's *L'Homme qui penche* (2003) and *Une interminable distraction au monde* (2011), Amal Sewtohul's *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance* (2001) and *Made in Mauritius* (2012), and Carl de Souza's *Les Jours Kaya* (2000)[42] – were

---

42 *Blue Bay Palace*, *Ève de ses décombres*, *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance* and *Made in Mauritius* are all published by Éditions Gallimard in Paris. *Les Jours Kaya*, *Le Silence de Chagos*, *L'Homme qui penche* and *Une interminable distraction au monde* are all published by Éditions de l'Olivier in Paris.

written, chronologically and attitudinally, in the wake of the Kaya riots of 1999: an event which brought to the fore long-standing concerns about the divisiveness and inequality underlying Mauritius's much-praised multicultural political model. Written by both men and women writers with different ethnic backgrounds and heritage, the novels all reflect directly or indirectly on crucial questions about the state of contemporary Mauritius raised by the unrest, and on the lessons to be learnt from these. Carl de Souza's *Les Jours Kaya*, as its title suggests, most directly interrogates the causes, momentum and implications of the 1999 unrest, albeit in highly fictionalised form. Arguably responding more implicitly to the Kaya unrest, rioting is also presented as the seemingly inevitable outcome of the downward trajectory of the characters of Devi's *Ève de ses décombres*, until averted at the very end of the novel. Violent confrontation between different ethnic groups, either contemporary or historic, forms the backdrop of most of the other novels at some level.[43] All the novels portray Mauritian society as profoundly unequal and divided, still largely structured by the legacies of its traumatic colonial past. Collectively, they present a picture of contemporary Mauritius riven by unemployment, disaffection, poverty and interethnic tension, which debunks both celebratory political discourses of multicultural harmony and externally created tourist clichés of a peaceful island paradise. Often narrated from the point of view of the underdog, these novels reveal how the fruits of Mauritius's late twentieth-century 'economic miracle'[44] have not benefited

---

43 Nathacha Appanah's *Blue Bay Palace* climaxes with a brutal inter-caste murder, depicted as an inevitable consequence of societal divisions and inequities. Amal Sewtohul's *Made in Mauritius* and Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* both retrospectively depict the nation's accession to independence as a time of confrontation and division, implicitly linking the nation's violent foundation to contemporary social inequalities and ethnic tensions. In *Made in Mauritius*, the pre-independence riots and the student protests of the 1970s are both presented as potentially foundational moments in the nation's history. Sewtohul's *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance* and Bertrand de Robillard's *Un Homme qui penche* both depict, in more light-hearted fashion, the typically violent confrontation between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds and classes. The theme of violence is the subject of Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François's recent study of contemporary francophone fiction, including recent works by Ananda Devi: *Poétiques de la violence et récits francophones contemporains* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2017).

44   For a discussion of the seemingly 'miraculous' nature of Mauritius's economic

all sections of the population, many of whom feel profoundly disaffected and live in abject poverty. They depict protagonists who live in a state of mutually exclusive ignorance regarding their fellow Mauritians and who do not know the geography of Mauritius beyond the very narrow confines of their ethnically and class-delineated 'communities'. Although the books studied – and hence my book – grapple with many of the real-life issues exposed so dramatically by the Kaya riots and analysed at length by scholars in the social sciences, I wish to emphasise that both my corpus and my approach are essentially literary. My readings and findings are based on the novels' *fictional* representations of modern-day Mauritius. While the novels all reflect on urgent questions of belonging and exclusion, inequality and justice that beset contemporary Mauritian society, they do so in original, often non-realist and highly imaginative ways.

Without wishing to state the linguistically obvious, it is of course with the *idea* of belonging that the francophone novels of my corpus engage, rather than with the term itself. Whilst the negative associations of seemingly similar French words such as *communauté* and *appartenance* are on occasions explicitly criticised, as we shall explore in Chapter 2 in particular, a desire for alternative senses of non-communalist belonging implicitly but insistently underlies all of the novels of my corpus. Unlike *appartenance*, the term 'belonging' does not necessarily connote religious, ethnic or other forms of collective affiliation. Nor is belonging sullied, as *communauté* is in the Mauritian context, by association with communalism and the dominant 'community system'. Yet, despite these advantages over other terms, 'belonging' still emerges as a constant conundrum in contemporary Mauritian literature, the difficulty of its articulation reflected in both form and content. The novels and their protagonists pose imponderable existential questions about the position of the individual in Mauritian society – 'Que cherches-tu?'[45]

development, see Deborah Bräutigam, 'The Mauritian "Miracle": Democracy, Institutions and Economic Policy', in R. Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp. 137–62; Martin Minogue, 'Mauritius: Economic Miracle or Developmental Illusion?', *Journal of International Development*, vol. 4, no. 6 (1992), pp. 643–47; Larry W. Bowman, *Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Arvind Subramanian and Devesh Roy, 'Who Can Explain the Mauritian Miracle?', in Dani Rodrik (ed.), *In Search of Prosperity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 205–43.

45   Ananda Devi, *Ève de ses décombres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 76.

'Qu'est-ce que je fiche là?'[46] 'Comment suis-je arrivé là? […] dans ce pays, dans cette famille, dans ce monde? Qui suis-je, en fait?'[47] – to which no definitive answers are given. Several of the novels, or sections thereof (*Le Silence des Chagos*, *Ève de ses décombres*, *Histoire d'Ashok*, *Made in Mauritius*, *L'Homme qui penche*), take the form of physical journeys or psychological quests, although precisely what lessons are learnt in the process, or how such lessons might ultimately contribute to the construction of protagonists' senses of belonging, remains unresolved. Many of the novels (*Les Jours Kaya*, *Blue Bay Palace*, *Histoire d'Ashok*, *Made in Mauritius*) are marked by sudden pronounced generic shifts, from realist to fantastic or magic-realist modes, which destabilise straightforward interpretations of the novels as representative of Mauritian 'reality'. Several of the novels (*Ève de ses décombres*, *Le Silence des Chagos*, *Histoire d'Ashok*, *Made in Mauritius*) are multilayered, non-chronological and told by multiple narrators, with different strands of narrative cutting across and often undermining each other. Several of the narrators (notably those of *Blue Bay Palace*, *Made in Mauritius*, *L'Homme qui penche*) are portrayed as profoundly unreliable (because insane, hallucinating or alcoholic). Seemingly symbolic imagery frequently loses its elucidatory function by dint of its very excess (*Les Jours Kaya*, *Blue Bay Palace*, *Ève de ses décombres*), and conventional generic devices (such as the romance plot in *Les Jours Kaya* or the *Bildungsroman* form in *Histoire d'Ashok*) are deployed in order to be subverted, questioned and defamiliarised. Whilst all of the novels studied represent contemporary Mauritian society as profoundly divided and unequal, and as a place where it is especially difficult to belong, they also – with the possible exception of *Le Silence des Chagos* – portray it as a place for which the protagonists feel a profound love and commitment and to which they *long* to belong.

As the diverse works that constitute the body of contemporary Mauritian literature collectively reveal, belonging can never be taken for granted. People's affective feelings of belonging are, inevitably, inextricably tied up with official, political understandings of the term, based on notions of citizenship and the legal barriers between inclusion and exclusion. As Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* (discussed in Chapter 3) poignantly emphasises, the Mauritian nation has, since its

---

46 Sewtohul, *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance*, p. 147.
47 Sewtohul, *Made in Mauritius*, p. 175.

very foundation, been based upon the forced expulsion of the Chagos islanders from their homeland. The grubby politics of belonging and exclusion have thus been at the heart of the Mauritian national project from its very inception. After the Kaya riots, a number of novels – including Devi's *Le Sari vert* (2009)[48] and Alain Gordon-Gentil's *J'attendrai la fin du monde* (2016),[49] as well as Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* and Sewtohul's *Made in Mauritius* – have returned to the historical moment of the nation's official creation for literary inspiration, in order to elucidate the causes of enduring, contemporary divisions and exclusions. Against such a backdrop, contemporary Mauritian fiction consistently portrays belonging as an aim or an aspiration, rather than as a reassuring source of stability, identification and rootedness.

Critical approaches to Mauritian literature

Although not previously the main thematic or conceptual focus of critical studies, a concern with belonging nonetheless can be seen to underlie much recent research on Mauritian fiction. Frequently used analytical terms such as ethnicity, creolisation, hybridity or 'coolitude' all centre on the relationship between individuals and broader society, between people and place: that is, directly or indirectly, on questions of individual or collective belonging. I shall now briefly review some of the broad trends in existing critical approaches to Mauritian literature before outlining how my own focus on belonging intersects with or diverges from these. According to Eriksen, as we have seen, 'ethnicity is the most important criterion for ordering the social world'[50] in Mauritius. Not surprisingly, then, the term is also widely used by literary critics when analysing fictional texts from Mauritius. As Peghini pertinently notes, the term 'ethnicité' is 'utilisé de manière extensive et lâche'[51] in the Mauritian context, encompassing cultural, linguistic, religious and, often, racial senses that are themselves in constant mutation. Hence the need, evident in the diverse conceptu-alisations of 'ethnicity' by literary scholars, constantly to interrogate

48   Devi, *Le Sari vert* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).
49   Alain Gordon-Gentil, *J'attendrai la fin du monde* (Paris: Julliard, 2016).
50   Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 122.
51   Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle*, p. 17.

and qualify the various significations, uses and abuses of the term. In an article entitled 'Roman et ethnicité',[52] Michel Beniamino identifies an evolution in literary engagements with the notion of ethnicity from what he calls 'l'ethnicité triomphante' to 'l'ethnicité bloquée' and finally to 'l'ethnicité ébranlée' – an evolution that approximately but counter-discursively maps onto some of the shifting political discourses about multiculturalism and national coexistence outlined above. Beniamino's broadly chronological study does not, however, deal with novels written after the Kaya riots, when questions of ethnic identity and interethnic relations came to the fore with increased urgency. Kumari Issur highlights the limitations of focusing exclusively on ethnicity as a way of understanding Mauritian literature or society. In her article 'Communalisme, classe sociale et capitalisme',[53] she argues that a fundamental interplay between ethnicity and class – an interplay she terms 'ethnoclasses' – underlies representations of Mauritian society and interpersonal relations in recent literature, thus questioning dominant political conceptions of 'ethnicity'. Similarly, when exploring the fictional representation of Franco-Mauritian characters in recent novels, Markus Arnold emphasises the overlap between ethnic and socio-economic hierarchies in creating and perpetuating the community's distinct, elite status.[54]

Srilata Ravi's monograph *Rainbow Colors: Literary Ethnotopographies of Mauritius* draws on the metaphorical possibilities of the island space to interrogate representations of Mauritian society's diverse ethnic communities. Ravi analyses the ways in which recent literature depicts a plurality of 'ethnisles', exploring how these in turn intersect with issues of race, gender and national identity. As with Beniamino's analyses, however, Ravi's book does not consider how these various interactions are played out in literary works written in response to the Kaya riots and to the challenge they posed to the island's multi-ethnic diversity. In a series of recent articles, Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François

52   Michel Beniamino, 'Roman et ethnicité: voix et voies de l'identité à Maurice', *Francofonia*, no. 48 (2005), pp. 61–72.

53   Kumari Issur, 'Communalisme, classe sociale et capitalisme: représentation en littérature mauricienne', *Alizés*, no. 36 (July 2012), n. pag., http://oracle-reunion. pagesperso-orange.fr/communalisme.html (accessed 1 October 2012).

54   Markus Arnold, 'Les hiérarchies socio-économiques et ethniques à l'Île Maurice: homogénéités et ruptures dans l'identité des Franco-Mauriciens', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Autumn 2011), pp. 125–41.

takes ethnicity as the starting point for exploring how contemporary Mauritian fiction challenges the fixed and prescriptive notions of ethnic allegiance that underpin the official 'community system'. Recognising the limitations of applying the all-encompassing term 'ethnicity' to diverse situations, Jean-François variously nuances his own use of the term by the addition of qualifying adjectives – popular, nomadic, humorous – that attempt to capture its many, often very different, significations in the Mauritian context.[55]

In an article that mixes historical, sociopolitical and literary analysis, Suzanne Chazan-Gillig argues that Mauritius's multi-ethnic society continues to be structured according to discrete but overlapping categorisations inherited from its colonial past: assimilationist categorisations based on skin colour and race enforced under French colonial rule, and multicultural categorisations based on ethnicity and 'way of life' introduced under British rule. Despite the enduring hold of these ethnic and racial formulations on Mauritian society, Chazan-Gillig nonetheless optimistically suggests that the violence of the Kaya riots represents the destruction of both racial and ethnic categorisations, paving the way for a more ethnically mixed or 'creolised' society.[56] In all of their various applications and adaptations, literary critics have thus interrogated how contemporary Mauritian literature problematises and critiques the political conceptions of 'ethnicity' that structure the official multicultural model of 'unity in diversity'.

Khal Torabully's concept of 'coolitude' also grapples with issues of ethnicity, exclusion and inclusion in multi-ethnic Mauritius, albeit from a rather different perspective. Combining the previously pejorative term 'coolie' with the postcolonial neologism *négritude*, 'coolitude' seeks to draw attention to the contributions of mainly Indian indentured labourers to the multicultural make-up of Indian Ocean and Caribbean

55   Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, 'Dire l'ethnicité populaire par l'humour: statuts socio-économiques, possessions territoriales et croyances religieuses dans quelques textes mauriciens', in Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo and Mar Garcia (eds), *Pou fé ri la boush/Fer gagn riye? Rires amers dans les littératures et productions filmiques réunionnaises et mauriciennes* (Paris: K'A, 2013), pp. 45–70; Jean-François, 'De l'ethnicité populaire à l'ethnicité nomade: Amal Sewtohul ou la "fabrique" d'une nouvelle mauricianité', *Loxias-Colloques* (May 2013), n. pag., http://revel.unice.fr/symposia/actel/index.html?id=411 (accessed 7 October 2015).
56   Suzanne Chazan-Gillig, 'Les fondements du pluriculturalisme mauricien et l'émergence d'une nouvelle société', *Journal des Anthropologues*, vol. 87 (2010), pp. 139–68, http://jda.revues.org/2754 (accessed 1 October 2012).

societies.[57] As such, it represents an important corollary to the African focus of much Caribbean-born identity politics and postcolonial theory (such as *négritude* itself), foregrounding both the Indian contribution to processes of creolisation and the creolisation of diasporic Indian cultures. Coolitude has been usefully applied to Mauritian literary production by Véronique Bragard, particularly in her transoceanic comparative studies of women's *kala pani* narratives from the francophone Indian Ocean and Caribbean.[58] Coolitude has also spawned some fascinating interdisciplinary studies, notably by historian Marina Carter, which foreground the often-silenced voices and experiences of indentured labourers.[59] Yet, in its focus on a historical phenomenon, primarily on one section of Mauritian society,[60] and on a term with which no one currently identifies, coolitude has not gained much purchase as a form of positive identification in Mauritius itself.

A number of fascinating and illuminating studies have taken postcolonial theoretical concepts that were originally developed in different geographic and socio-historical contexts (especially the Caribbean) and applied them to the Mauritian context, so revealing both similarities and important differences between these contexts. The term 'hybridity' (or its French near-equivalent, *métissage*) is deployed in strikingly different ways by various literary scholars to explore the many points of intercultural contact, both productive and conflictual, that characterise the Mauritian situation. In *The Other Hybrid Archipelago*, Peter Hawkins uses the term very broadly to indicate his application of mainly anglophone postcolonial theory to the cultures of the relatively neglected francophone Mascarene archipelago.[61] Anjali Prabhu uses

57 Torabully gives creative expression to the concept of coolitude in *Cale d'étoiles-coolitude* (Saint-Denis, Réunion: Editions Azalées, 1992) and *Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies* (Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge Editions, 1999).

58 Véronique Bragard, *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

59 Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834–1874* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire* (London: Cass, 1996); Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

60 While Indians constituted the vast majority of indentured labourers, there were also a small but significant number from China and other geographic areas.

61 Peter Hawkins, *The Other Hybrid Archipelago: Introduction to the*

hybridity, in her monograph *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects*, as a lens for interrogating anti-black prejudice and taboos around racial mixing in different spheres in Mauritius.[62] Finally, in her book *Locating Hybridity*, Ashwiny Kistnareddy uses the term to examine the ways in which Ananda Devi's works contest binary oppositions of all kinds.[63]

Françoise Lionnet's numerous pioneering studies of Mauritian culture, many of which are collected in the two recent volumes *Le Su et l'incertain* and *Écritures féminines*,[64] draw notably on the postcolonial theoretical notion of creolisation, employed both in isolation and in combination with theories of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism to elucidate the complex patterns of productive intercultural exchange at work both within Mauritian society and between Mauritius and an increasingly globalised, interconnected world. Lionnet's interdisciplinary analyses reveal much about the specificity of the Indian Ocean situation but also about the complex ways in which the Mauritius example recalibrates dominant theoretical paradigms. As Lionnet recognises, 'creolisation, in Mauritius as elsewhere, is an unstable and open process', necessitating an adaptable, locally responsive approach to its application. Thus, as she both exhorts and cautions,

> Mauritian creolisation is an ideal case study, provided one is willing: to look past scholarly and cultural clichés, beyond exoticism and impressionistic assertions; and especially to scrutinize the unfortunate realities of a colonial heritage that continues to provide firm ground for contemporary forms of structural racism.[65]

As Lionnet's words here signal, 'creolisation' – in the broadest sense denoting productive processes of intercultural encounter and mixing – is a highly fluid and malleable concept that has been variously deployed

---

Literatures and Cultures of the Francophone Indian Ocean (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

62   Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007).

63   Ashwiny O. Kistnareddy, *Locating Hybridity: Creole, Identities and Body Politics in the Novels of Ananda Devi* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).

64   Françoise Lionnet, *Le Su et l'incertain: cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien* (Trou d'Eau Douce: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012). Lionnet, *Écritures féminines et dialogues critiques: Subjectivité, genre et ironie* (Trou d'Eau Douce: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012).

65   Lionnet, 'Mauritius in/and Global Culture', p. 379.

to interrogate the multiple influences structuring Mauritius's political, cultural, linguistic and social diversity. Yet it is also a concept that, in order to be fruitfully applied to the specificities of the Mauritian context, necessitates a locally sensitive recalibration of its dominant, originally Caribbean-inspired connotations. The term 'Creole', from which *creolisation* is derived, does not have the same connotations in Mauritius as it does in the Caribbean, as expounded in the influential *Éloge de la créolité*,[66] for instance. Rather than refer, inclusively, to the entire population resulting from the meeting and mixing of different cultures on a shared island home, 'Creole' in Mauritius refers to a specific ethnic and social group: the dark-skinned or mixed-race descendants of enslaved Africans and Malagasy. As a result, as Peghini points out, in Mauritius 'la "créolisation" est perçue comme une menace d'assimilation'[67] by other ethnic groups, especially Hindu Mauritians. Cautioning against the straightforward application of the Caribbean-inspired concept of creolisation to the very different Mauritian situation, Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo compellingly argues that 'sous l'illusion d'une unité de composition, la société mauricienne n'est jamais qu'une juxtaposition de fragments isolés'.[68] As Lionnet and others explore, 'creolisation' in the Mauritian context and in its literature does not connote processes of interethnic mixing and integration in the same way, or to the same extent, as it does in the paradigmatic, postcolonial senses of the term developed in the francophone Caribbean and elsewhere. Indeed, given the very different semantic and sociocultural meanings of the term 'Creole', Peghini argues that the non-hyphenated designation 'Mauritian' might in fact be a more appropriate local term to refer inclusively to cultural traits common to 'tous les Mauriciens natifs de l'île'.[69]

---

66   Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

67   Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle*, p. 51.

68   Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianajafitrimo, 'Le "désancrage" et la déréalisation de l'écriture chez trois écrivains mauriciens, Ananda Devi, Carl de Souza, Barlen Pyamootoo', in Martine Mathieu-Job (ed.), *L'Entredire francophone* (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2004), pp. 67–100 (p. 70). Magdelaine-Andrianajafitrimo makes a similar point, refuting the easy applicability of the concept of 'creolisation' in her article 'Ethnicisation ou créolisation? Le paradigme de la traite dans quelques romans francophones mauriciens et réunionnais contemporains', *e-France: An On-line Journal of French Studies*, vol. 2 (2008), pp. 100–15.

69   Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle*, p. 56.

Belonging: a new critical approach

Although the various highly mobile theoretical approaches to Mauritian literature and culture so far outlined (ethnicity, coolitude, hybridity, creolisation) all tangentially pertain to the issue of belonging – that is, a sense of attachment to, and identification with, people and/or place – no critical study has yet taken this term as its primary focus of investigation. Tantalisingly, Françoise Lionnet notes that many contemporary Mauritian writers 'are concerned with the aesthetics and politics of belonging'[70] and elsewhere refers to the 'sense of multiple belonging that characterises the creoleness of Mauritian identity and society today'.[71] The terminology (of attachments, affiliations, loyalties) used in Ravi's description of Mauritian literature cited above also implicitly acknowledges a central engagement with the issue of belonging. Yet to date, no one has taken belonging itself as the thematic or conceptual starting point for an exploration of the works of contemporary Mauritian writers. My aim, in focusing on belonging in this book, is not to dismiss or refute the usefulness of existing postcolonial theoretical concepts such as hybridity or creolisation in 'opening up binaries and the forms of entanglement they hide',[72] as Lionnet and others have already done with such dexterity in their own studies. Instead, my aim is to adopt a different perspective – belonging – from which to approach some of the same thorny issues and forms of entanglement.

Belonging is widely recognised as a universal human need. Yet, as the political scientist Nira Yuval-Davis recognises, 'people can "belong" in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment'.[73] The advantage that belonging has over other seemingly related terms (such as identity, community, nation, ethnicity, creolisation or hybridity) is that it does not presuppose the nature of individuals' attachment – desired or actual – to place or people. As the novels of my corpus illustrate, belonging is not always defined in terms of ethnicity or national identity. Belonging may not involve membership of a recognised 'community'.

---

70   Lionnet, 'Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans, Insular Identities', reproduced in *Le Su et l'incertain: cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien* (Trou d'Eau Douce: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012), pp. 58–89 (p. 59).

71   Lionnet, 'Mauritius in/and Global Culture', p. 379.

72   Lionnet, 'Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives?', p. 61.

73   Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 12.

Individual, personal feelings of 'being at home in a place' may not necessarily be associated with broader projects of social cohesion, national unity or interethnic mixing. All of the novels studied in this book are concerned with the question of what it means to be 'Mauritian' in a postcolonial, multi-ethnic situation but, in imagining diverse forms of belonging to island and people, they do not conform to pre-existing models or propose consistent answers. Although points of convergence and common ground emerge between them, the novels expose the dangers and limitations – for both those excluded and those who 'belong' – of establishing or being contained by fixed, identitarian boundaries. The inherent fluidity of the concept of belonging – repeatedly expressed as a longing, a quest or a need – allows for a constant and necessary renegotiation of the relationship between self and other, between individual and group. My book aims to explore how, in contemporary Mauritian literature, individuals seek to assert their own, diverse kinds of belonging to Mauritius's island space and to each other, within, against or despite existing (national or postcolonial) models of collective identity. My aim is thus to take the novels' common central concern with belonging as my starting point, and thence to apply an eclectic mix of theoretical approaches as appropriate to the particular subject matter of the novels in question.

The vast majority of studies of Mauritian and Indian Ocean literature that have emerged in the past decade or so, whether volumes or individual articles, have either been broad overview surveys or have taken highly comparative, representative approaches. Very few critics have therefore examined individual novels in any great depth, in order fully to interrogate their complexities, paradoxes and self-reflexive, counter-discursive features – features which, as we shall explore, frequently resist overarching theoretical interpretations. The eclecticism of my own approach in the current book is motivated by my observation that, while all the novels of my corpus are centrally concerned with the problem of belonging, they explore this concern in very different ways – ways which cannot be easily categorised according to one pre-existing theoretical model, however protean it might be. The novels analysed imagine a wide range of forms and objects of belonging – to a moment of violence, to the natural geology of the island, to a brutally lost homeland, to everyday habits and domestic spaces, to a state of rootlessness and nomadic mobility – that refute dominant local models of ethnic, ancestral allegiance, that question received notions of nationhood and that frequently elude the application of widely used

postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Hence, for instance, while several of the novels (*Les Jours Kaya*, *Blue Bay Palace*, *Ève de ses décombres*, *Made in Mauritius*) allude to the possibility that collective belonging may one day be expressed in terms of interethnic mixing or creolisation, this is not universally the case. In none of the works studied is such productive interethnic interaction depicted as already being realised.

The central aim of the present book is to investigate how novels written after 1999 respond, directly or indirectly, to the problematic issues of belonging and exclusion that have long marked Mauritian society, and which the Kaya riots brought again to the fore in such devastating and spectacular fashion. Given the complexity of Mauritius's social make-up and the opportunities and challenges posed to it by the transnational flows of modern-day global capitalism, I want to explore how Mauritian writers respond to the traditional dominance of models of ethnic, diasporic allegiance in their contemporary fictional works. How are individual, self-affirming connections with the island nation and with fellow Mauritians imagined? What alternative, more inclusive, potentially non-ethnic forms of collective belonging are postulated in a context in which notions of 'nation', 'community' and 'identity' remain so divisive and hotly contested? My book will thus investigate how diverse micro-narratives of embodied, material or symbolic belonging interrelate with, or conversely contest, the macro-narratives of communal and/or national identity that still dominate the Mauritian public sphere. It will also consider how the shifting interrelation of local and global influences opens up the possibility of new, transnational forms of individual and collective identification.

Critical literature on belonging

Until now, I have only offered a very basic, working definition of the term 'belonging' that is to be the focus of this book: that is, a sense of attachment to, and identification with, a place or people. I shall now explore the notion of belonging in more depth, as it is treated in a variety of different disciplines, in order to expand upon this basic definition. I shall probe some of belonging's multifaceted complexities and contra-dictions, so as to demonstrate why it is such a useful perspective from which to analyse the diverse literary texts of our Mauritian corpus and the urgent, existential questions with which they grapple. While belonging has not previously been the main thematic or conceptual

focus of much literary scholarship, there is quite a large body of critical literature on the topic in the fields of social psychology, politics, geography, social sciences, philosophy, anthropology, queer studies and law. In these studies, the term 'belonging' is widely and seemingly intuitively deployed in relation to notions such as 'home', 'nation', 'citizenship', 'community' and 'identity', notions with which it appears at times to be regarded as virtually synonymous. Yet, to a far greater degree than these related terms, use of the term 'belonging' is marked by a general lack of precise definition – a fact that has not escaped the notice of some of its more assiduous analysts. Despite its widespread use, as geographer Marco Antonsich points out in his eloquently titled article 'Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework', people 'actually know very little about what belonging stands for and how it is claimed'.[74] The reasons for this lack of clarity are (at least) twofold: first, because of the term's apparent self-evidence (everyone thinks they know what they mean when they say 'I belong here'); and, second, because belonging means quite different things to different people, in different places, contexts and disciplines. The diversity of meaning, definition and use of the term 'belonging', but also of the interrelated terms 'belongingness', 'belongings', 'belong' and 'belonger', is evident in the sheer number and length of subdivided dictionary entries. The Oxford English Dictionary defines belonging in four distinct but interrelated senses: membership, residence or connection, classification or fit, and ownership. Whilst 'belonging' is a term that is routinely used, in diverse senses and contexts, in everyday (English-language) discourse, the multifariousness of its often context-reliant meaning makes it particularly hard to pin down. Rather than rendering 'belonging' unusable as either an object or as a method of enquiry, however, the term's simultaneous psychological importance and conceptual slipperiness are, in my view, precisely what make it such a potentially productive concept for analysing the theoretical, thematic and formal complexities of contemporary Mauritian literature. It is a term that is broad and fluid enough to apply to the rich diversity of Mauritian fiction – and the society from which it emerges – whilst being coherent enough to encompass both similarities and differences therein.

In common parlance, as in the field of social psychology, belonging (or 'belongingness') has broadly positive connotations: of family, home, safety, hope, self-expression and affirmative identification. According to

---

74 Marco Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework', *Geography Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6 (2010), pp. 644–59 (p. 644).

Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, along with love, belonging constitutes a basic psychological human need and motivation.[75] According to such a view, as Yuval-Davis points out in her overview of the term's many uses, belonging is 'about an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling "at home"'.[76] In many other contexts, in contrast, belonging is seen to have distinctly negative connotations or applications, being frequently associated with tribalism, nationalism, xenophobia, anti-immigration and exclusion. In such contexts, as John Crowley observes, 'belonging is a property associated with […] boundaries' and with 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance'.[77] According to this view, the discourse of belonging is often used, usually by those wielding political power, to construct an exclusionary demarcation between 'us' and 'them', between those who belong and those who do not. The symbolic and material benefits of group membership are thereby denied to those who are deemed not to belong. In its more extreme manifestations, as the novels of our corpus explore, such an exclusionary logic can be seen to underlie Mauritius's official discourse of 'unity in diversity', in which discourses and practices of ethnic distinctiveness and of diasporic affiliation work to exclude those who do not fit into the received constitutional categories of the 'community system'.

As Antonsich, Yuval-Davis and others have identified, there exist two main but very different types – or interpretations – of belonging: on the one hand, 'belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being "at home" in a place' and, on the other, 'belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)'.[78] The radically opposing nature of the different, affective versus political, understandings of belonging is largely dependent not just on context, but also on perspective: that is,

---

75   Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954).

76   Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, p. 12. It is revealing to note here how, through syntax and punctuation (parenthesis and inverted commas), Yuval-Davis avoids giving a categorical definition of her key term: belonging is *about*, rather than *being*, an emotional (or ontological) attachment; it is *about* feeling, rather than feeling 'at home'.

77   John Crowley, 'The Politics of Belonging: Some Theoretical Considerations', in Andrew Geddes and Adrian Favell (eds), *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 15–39 (p. 30).

78   Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging', p. 645.

on who speaks of belonging and on whose behalf. To speak of one's own sense of belonging and of feeling 'at home' connotes something quite different from stating, from a position of authority, that 'we belong here and you do not'. While Hindu Mauritians, for instance, may draw affirmative emotional consolation and social advantage from asserting a sense of belonging to their own ethnic community, such an internally comforting sense of affective belonging is simultaneously asserted to the exclusion and detriment of individuals or minority groups who are not included as members of their seemingly homogeneous grouping.

My interest in the notion of belonging in this book is primarily with the first, as yet less studied, personal and emotional sense of the term: that is, with the multifarious ways in which individual, affective senses of belonging, attachment, love and commitment to place and/or people are experienced, created or asserted in the contemporary literary imaginary. My investigations of the representation of belonging will, however, also inevitably entail an examination of the ways in which such narratives of affective belonging interrelate with more hegemonic, sociopolitical uses and abuses of discourses of belonging and exclusion (at national or communal levels). For, as Antonsich recognises, 'Although the expression "I belong here" remains first and foremost a personal, intimate feeling of being "at home" in a place (place-belongingness), it is also unavoidably conditioned by the working of power relations (politics of belonging)'.[79] Indeed, as contemporary novelists highlight, Mauritius's dominant 'community system' is based on often competing power relations between different ethnic groups, each of which has traditionally been constructed around a strong sense of internal, collective belonging. In seeking to analyse the diverse articulations of belonging and, conversely, of exclusion in the contemporary Mauritian literary imaginary, my study will therefore heed Antonsich's enjoinder that 'studies on feelings of territorial belonging should necessarily take into consideration both dimensions' (that is, affective place-belongingness and the politics of belonging) and should 'map belonging at the intersection of these two ongoing dynamics'.[80]

Whilst the term 'belonging' is widely used, it is also inherently vague. This lack of definitional fixity has been both demonstrated and acknowledged by academics working in a range of different disciplines. In his examination of the interrelated notions of 'home' and belonging in

79   Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging', pp. 652–53.
80   Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging, p. 653.

situations of migration, for instance, Jan Willem Duyvendak recognises that 'one problem with home is its very familiarity: people speak in terms of "belonging" and "feeling at home" all the time'.[81] It is interesting to note here that while Duyvendak recognises the lack of definition of the term 'home', he nonetheless uses the term 'belonging' in the same sentence as if it were largely synonymous with 'home' and without attempting to define it or problematise its usage. Similarly, in *The Perils of Belonging*, which analyses the uses and abuses of the discourse of 'autochthony', Peter Geschiere asserts that 'it is the free-floating profile of [the term "autochthony"], combining apparent self-evidence with great ambiguity and variation in its meaning, that makes it of particular interest for unravelling the general conundrum of belonging in our globalized world'.[82] It is revealing that, despite his attentiveness to the inconsistencies and ambiguities underlying the term autochthony – which, he argues, 'seems to represent the most authentic form of belonging'[83] – and despite acknowledging that belonging is a 'conundrum', Geschiere repeatedly deploys the term 'belonging' as if *its* meaning were self-evident and thus useful in helping to define 'autochthony'.

In her analysis of the legal terminology used in the case of the Chagos islanders, Stephanie Jones argues that the key term belonging 'is deployed as if it has a self-evident meaning' when, in fact, 'it is a highly contingent concept'.[84] She goes so far as to suggest that 'it is hard to imagine a legally and culturally workable meaning for […] belonging that always takes account of all ethical imperatives'.[85] We shall return to Jones's insightful analyses of the nebulous and protean uses of 'belonging' in an analysis of Shenaz Patel's novel *Le Silence des Chagos* in Chapter 3. For now, it is interesting to note how, even when used as a central concept in a context as supposedly objective and prescriptive as the law, in which the interpretation of terminology can have a direct bearing on important legal judgements that directly affect people's lives

81   Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 26.

82   Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 6.

83   Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*, p. 2.

84   Stephanie Jones, 'Colonial to Postcolonial Ethics: Indian Ocean "Belongers", 1668–2008', *Interventions*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2009), pp. 212–34 (pp. 220–21).

85   Jones, 'Colonial to Postcolonial Ethics', pp. 227, 233.

and livelihoods, 'belonging' remains curiously protean and ill-defined. My aim in this book is not to attempt to come up with a 'legally and culturally workable' definition of the term, but rather to explore some of the many 'contingencies' and 'ethical imperatives' that nuance its various forms of expression in the contemporary Mauritian imaginary.

Whatever the context in which it is deployed, 'belonging' is characteristically used to encompass numerous overlapping, shifting and even contradictory connotations. As Yuval-Davis recognises, 'belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity'.[86] While, in some real-life contexts, there are potential drawbacks or even dangers in its lack of definitional fixity, the shifting vagueness of the term 'belonging' is also one of its most potent strengths. In a sociological context, Duyvendak argues that the term's vagueness 'is both an advantage and a disadvantage'.[87] Less equivocally, John Crowley asserts, in an article that ponders some of the theoretical considerations of the politics of belonging, that: 'the term "belonging" is a vague one, and this is precisely its usefulness'.[88] Vikki Bell makes a slightly different but related claim for the usefulness of belonging when, in the introduction to a volume on performativity and belonging, she states that: 'The beauty of the term "belonging" is that it affords those of us who were never sure which discipline we were meant to reside within, the opportunity to address both philosophical and social concerns'.[89] The vagueness and versatility of the term, combined with its recognised psychological importance and inherent interdisciplinarity, make belonging a particularly useful conceptual tool – especially, I contend, for the analysis of complex and shifting literary texts like those of my Mauritian corpus, in which the theme of belonging and an engagement with sociocultural realities are so prevalent.

In addition to its ubiquity, psychological importance and vagueness, belonging is also commonly seen as being characterised by an inherent affective dimension. Jones has identified the tendency, even at the highest levels of the British judicial system, to deploy 'extra-legal', 'emotive', 'rhetorical' and 'poetic' language and literary and mythological examples, in order to overcome the term's lack of clear definition and so

---

86   Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, p. 12.
87   Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home*, p. 26.
88   Crowley, 'The Politics of Belonging', p. 17.
89   Vikki Bell, 'Introduction', in Vikki Bell (ed.), *Performativity and Belonging* (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

give 'correct weight and ethical nuance' to legal rulings over people's right or not to 'belong'.[90] The profoundly affective nature of discourses on belonging that purport to be entirely non-affective and rational is also highlighted by Hedetoft and Hjort in their introduction to *The Postnational Self*, where they remark that '"home" and "belonging" […] are affectively, rather than cognitively, defined concepts' and thus that 'national attachment and identity […] are inconceivable and inexplicable without recourse to a certain measure of irrationality, emotionality, sentiment'.[91] Such an assertion echoes Eisenlohr's exploration of the highly performative, emotional and even irrational nature of 'ethnolinguistic belonging' amongst the Hindu-Mauritian community, in his provocatively titled *Little India*. As he argues, it is unlikely that many of the so-called 'ancestral' Indian languages that form such a fundamental part of Indo-Mauritians' collective diasporic identity were in fact spoken by their immigrant ancestors. Instead, such 'irrational' linguistic practices are crucial to Hindu Mauritians' sense of emotional belonging in contemporary society.

Hedetoft and Hjort argue that 'there is a great need for detailed scholarly work on the different processes that are instrumental in reconfiguring the contexts, meanings and objects of belonging in the contemporary world'.[92] In this they echo Crowley's observation that, 'while the term [belonging] itself is not new, it is little used as an analytical or theoretical tool'.[93] Antonsich similarly remarks that 'the notion of belonging as an emotional feeling of being at home in a place is not frequently analysed by scholars'.[94] I hope that, by interrogating the different kinds of affective, irrational, emotional and sentimental belonging articulated – or, at least, sought – in contemporary Mauritian literature, my book will be able to make a contribution towards filling this analytical and theoretical gap. Rather than having 'recourse to'[95] the affective dimension of belonging in order to elucidate the term's legal, political or social significations, however, I intend to make

90   Jones, 'Colonial to Postcolonial Ethics', pp. 225–27.

91   Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, 'Introduction', in Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort (eds), *The Postnational Self* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. vii–xxxii (pp. vii, xi).

92   Hedetoft and Hjort, *The Postnational Self*, p. xx.

93   Crowley, 'The Politics of Belonging', p. 18.

94   Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging', p. 647.

95   Hedetoft and Hjort, *The Postcolonial Self*, p. xi.

belonging – particularly in its affective, performative and literary forms – the primary focus of my investigation. As such, my study aims to explore some of the reconfigurations of diverse 'contexts, meanings and objects of belonging' evoked in contemporary Mauritian fiction. As I have already discussed and the subsequent analyses will demonstrate, belonging is commonly presented in contemporary Mauritian literature as an ambition, a dream or a conundrum, rather than as a reassuring reality. Characters' dreams of connection with people and place are often thwarted by the exclusionary politics of belonging that underpin Mauritius's 'community system' and/or by the global power struggles with which Mauritian politics are entangled. My analyses of the fictional and affective dimensions of belonging will therefore, inevitably, also examine their many fraught points of intersection with the often brutal politics of belonging, locally and globally.

A fortuitous, linguistic advantage that belonging has over other related terms, such as community or identity, and which appeals to me when approaching the slippery, shifting, multifaceted materials that comprise contemporary Mauritian fiction is, as Geschiere points out, that 'it is at least in the *-ing* form'.[96] Like Stuart Hall's preference for the fluid, multifarious and context-driven process of 'identification' over the static and essentialist concept of 'identity',[97] belong*ing* implies, in its seeming continuous grammatical form, an ongoing action, work in progress or quest, rather than a reified entity or a fixed, ready-made answer. The fluidity and movement inherent in both the form and meaning of belonging are key to Elspeth Probyn's queer theoretical interrogations, in *Outside Belongings*, of the 'outside' or 'threshold' qualities of the term: in contrast to 'the fixity of the categorical logic of identity', she argues, 'belonging […] foreground[s] the space of movement – the changing configurations of social relations – and the movement across space'.[98] This idea of belonging as movement, process or work in progress – as something difficult and unresolved that requires labour, struggle, time and commitment, and that may yet never be fully achieved – is, as we shall explore in later chapters, recurrent in both the subject matter and the form of the Mauritian novels of my corpus. Indeed, concern with

96   Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*, p. 32.

97   Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994 [1990]), pp. 392–401.

98   Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 9, 11.

the ongoing 'problem' of belonging is, I argue, a key characteristic of the modern Mauritian literary aesthetic, reflected in the recurrent form of a journey or quest.

Probyn goes so far as to argue that there is a causal relation between belonging's inherent mobility and its essential affective qualities. This causal relation is manifested in 'the longing to belong' that, she contends, underpins both the form and the meaning of the term 'belonging'. As Hedetoft and Hjort also note, 'the English word belonging is a fortuitous compound of *being* and *longing*, of existential and romantic-imagery significations and associations'.[99] This point is echoed by Bell, when she writes that 'the term "belonging" allows an affective dimension – not just be-ing but longing'.[100] Rather than being simply a matter of 'fortuitous' linguistic coincidence, it is this inherent interplay between affectivity and mobility that makes belonging so useful, for Probyn, as 'another perspective from which to view the complexities of identity, difference, subjectivity and desire'.[101] The affective and mobile qualities of belonging also underlie my own investigations of contemporary Mauritian literature, in which thematic and formal tensions between different forms of, and quests for, belonging recur: tensions, for instance, between *being* but not fully *belonging* in Mauritius, expressed as an anxious *longing* to belong by many protagonists; or, most notably in the depiction of Chagossian exiles, tensions between being *ici* but longing to be elsewhere, *là-bas*, where they feel they 'belong' and long to return.

Despite the diversity of disciplinary and theoretical approaches adopted by critics in their engagements with belonging, certain common themes emerge which chime with my own interest in the term and its multiple associations. First, for all its ubiquity and apparent self-evident nature, belonging is an inherently vague, protean and ill-defined term – a fact which, paradoxically, makes it an extremely useful, versatile tool for literary analysis. Second, it is generally agreed that belonging is a fundamentally important human need, but that it means different things, both positive and negative, to different people and in different contexts – or, in the case of Mauritius, to different people in ostensibly the same, yet internally diverse context. Third, the 'ordinary' understanding of belonging – as a basic human desire for emotional attachment – is in many ways quite different from, although inevitably entangled with, the

---

 99   Hedetoft and Hjort, *The Postnational Self*, p. ix.
100   Bell, *Performativity and Belonging*, p. 1.
101   Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 14.

'politics of belonging', which seek to construct exclusionary, categorical boundaries between 'us' and 'them' – a duality which is very much present in Mauritius's internally cohesive but segregated 'community system'. Fourth, in contrast to the fixity structuring the logic of identity, belonging implies, both linguistically and semantically, a sense of movement and process: a never-fulfilled quest or journey, rather than a categorical answer or point of arrival. Indeed, as we shall explore, the trope of the journey of geographic and psychological discovery is recurrent in contemporary Mauritian fiction, as characters seek answers to existential questions. Finally, the inherent vagueness of the term 'belonging' makes it potentially extremely useful but, in fact, little used as an analytical tool or as an object of consistent enquiry. Whilst the politics of belonging have received quite extensive recent critical attention, far less has been paid to the 'ordinary' but fundamental, subjective and affective senses of the term. Although largely inseparable from the politics of belonging that structure Mauritian society, it is the latter, emotional sense of belonging that is most central to my literary corpus.

For all of these reasons and more, I believe belonging to be both a highly pertinent object, and an extremely useful framework, of critical enquiry for this book's analyses of the rich, complex and diverse body of works that constitute contemporary Mauritian literature. My book will seek to investigate the kinds of affective belonging between individuals and the places where they live and/or the people with whom they share those places, that are depicted or alternatively postulated in recent francophone Mauritian literary narratives. I shall also interrogate the ways in which forms of affective belonging, whether individual or collective, are represented as interrelating, either explicitly or tacitly, with prevalent national, communal or even transnational discourses of belonging and exclusion. In so doing, I aim to exploit the potentially powerful linguistic felicities of belonging – the continuous mobility implied by its *-ing* form; and its eloquent combination of notions of *be*ing and longing – as applicable to my Mauritian literary corpus.

Diversity of belonging and of approach

A survey of critical studies on belonging from a wide range of disciplines has been useful in outlining some of the main features, definitions and applications of belonging that make it such a fruitful focus for my own study. The individual chapters of my book, each focusing in depth on

just one or two novels, will draw upon an eclectic mix of theoretical approaches relating to the notion of belonging to which the form and content of the specific novels analysed lend themselves. As indicated earlier in this introduction, my aim in taking such an eclectic approach to the idea – or the problem – of belonging in contemporary Mauritian novels is not to read them collectively according to pre-existing theoretical paradigms, thus running the danger of eliding their differences and glossing over their difficulty, but rather to adopt approaches that best respond to the rich diversity of the novels themselves and of the society that they reflect.

The exceptional diversity of Mauritian society, eluding conventional models, is highlighted by Eriksen when he asserts that: 'The Mauritian example shows that nations may emerge from very diverse "cultural materials", which apparently do not need to postulate shared origins and which need therefore not, perhaps, be ideologies of metaphoric kinship'.[102] Expanding upon Eriksen's claim, Ravi argues that at any historic moment, Mauritian society can in fact be seen as simultaneously divided into four seemingly distinct but overlapping social models: *a plural society*, in which each ethnic group upholds distinctive linguistic, religious and cultural characteristics; *a creole society* based on racial and cultural mixing; *a colonial* – or, I would add, *neocolonial – society* maintaining centralised administrative and social hierarchies calqued onto those of the (former) colonial centre; and *a national society* that attempts to impose the unifying model of a 'rainbow nation' onto a fragmented colonial heritage. As Ravi rightly observes, however, 'generally accepted literary readings of communitarianism, nationalism or pluralism ignore such a configuration of Mauritian culture'[103] and so underplay the complexity and competition that characterise the diversity – and thus the diverse senses of belonging – of Mauritian society.

In adopting a diverse theoretical approach to the diverse expressions of belonging articulated in my corpus, my project seeks to acknowledge the multilayered and competitive configuration of Mauritian society and culture. My approach is thus in line with that of Steven Vertovec, whose concept of 'super-diversity' advocates compellingly for the need to diversify our understanding of diversity, and our approaches to it.[104]

---

102 Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, p. 139.
103 Ravi, *Rainbow Colors*, p. 9.
104 Steven Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its Implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 6 (2007), pp. 1024–54.

My eclectic approach seeks to answer, in a different context, Vertovec's call for new, non-ethnic-focused, qualitative approaches to the 'plurality of affiliations'[105] (age, gender, legal rights, politics, property, etc.) that influence people's relationships to place and to each other, and thus shape their feelings of individual or collective belonging. As Vertovec argues, 'there is much to be gained by a multi-dimensional perspective on diversity, both in terms of moving beyond the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study […] and by appreciating the coalescence of factors which condition people's lives'.[106] My aim is to adopt just such a diverse, multidimensional approach exploring, both in individual chapters and over the course of the book as a whole, the coalescence of different factors that condition diverse senses of belonging in the contemporary Mauritian literary imaginary, and in the multi-ethnic society with which it engages.

Chapter overview

The first chapter of this study, 'Belonging to the moment', examines Carl de Souza's *Les Jours Kaya* (2000) in relation to Frantz Fanon's seminal analysis, in *Les Damnés de la terre*, of the cathartic and unifying value of anti-colonial violence, and also to Elspeth Probyn's theorisation of belonging as a 'tenacious and fleeting desire'.[107] Written as an immediate response to the sudden, violent unrest of the 1999 riots and as an attempt to make sense of the profound *bouleversement* that the riots represented to Mauritians' sense of attachment to their island, Souza's *Les Jours Kaya* attempts to give form to both the destructive but also, importantly, the creative dimensions of the violence. The chapter asks the central question: What, if any, alternative kinds of collective belonging might be seen to emerge in place of the old, divisive, ethnic identities that the violence sought, at least temporarily, to destroy? At the start of Souza's novel, Mauritius is portrayed as profoundly divided and unequal, with its multi-ethnic cast of characters living in a state of mutual ignorance and suspicion, reminiscent of the 'monde compartimenté' of Fanon's analysis. But, despite the 'caractères

---

105   Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its Implications', p. 1048. Vertovec's focus in this article is on diverse immigrant communities in Britain.
106   Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its Implications', p. 1026.
107   Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 8.

positifs, formateurs'[108] of the violence depicted, at the end of the novel, Mauritius's future is portrayed as uncertain and, echoing Fanon's own warnings, its post-independence nation-building project still largely unfinished. Instead, there emerges in Souza's depiction of 'les jours Kaya' a strong sense of collective belonging to the moment, and to the transformative potential which this all-too-fleeting moment embodies. Whilst offering no easy answers to the problem of belonging that the riots so violently raised, this chapter argues that *Les Jours Kaya* urgently warns of the dangers of squandering the unique opportunity for positive social change offered by the riots, and of failing to harness their cathartic and unifying, nation-building potential.

Engaging with the work of feminist geographers such as Tovi Fenster and Doreen Massey, Chapter 2, 'Belonging to the island', explores the ways in which the relationships between place, gender and belonging are depicted in two female-authored and female-centred novels. In both Nathacha Appanah's *Blue Bay Palace* (2004) and Ananda Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* (2006), the man-made spatial configurations of the fictionalised contemporary Mauritian environment – town, *quartier* and home – are depicted as reflecting and constructing uneven, exploitative power and gender relations between its inhabitants. At different geographic scales, these man-made environments are shown to be sites of estrangement or even danger for the novels' female characters. In contrast, this chapter analyses how both novels postulate alternative forms of female identification with, and attachment to, the island's natural, non-human and pre-human geography. The highly gendered, geological imagery of both novels thus portrays the female protagonists' murderous violence both as a reaction *against* repressive masculine configurations of the island space, and as a self-affirming reaction *to* the powerful, elemental forces that formed and continue to shape its natural landscape. In both, a female harnessing of the island's elemental power is seen to open up, however provisionally, the possibility – or the hope – of more loving, mutually inclusive, woman-made forms of collective belonging to place in the future. Despite the differences between the two novels, there emerges a common, female-gendered aesthetic of affective belonging to place that, while being firmly (and, in some senses, problematically) grounded in the island's natural, elemental topography, is also strongly future-orientated and inclusive.

Drawing on Stephanie Jones's study of the judicial term 'belonger' in

108   Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961), p. 69.

the Chagos islanders' long legal battle, Chapter 3, 'Belonging Nowhere', analyses Shenaz Patel's 2005 novel, *Le Silence des Chagos*, which is based on the 'histoires romancées' of real-life Chagossian refugees to Mauritius. Central to all aspects of the Chagos islanders' story – to their original expulsion, to their ongoing legal battles for the right to return, and to their continued exclusion from contemporary Mauritian society – is the notion of belonging, in both its politico-legal and its emotional senses. This chapter argues that Patel's lengthy descriptions of daily Chagossian life serve to emphasise not only the Chagossians' profound *affective* sense of belonging to their homeland but also the grounds for their *legal* rights as 'belongers' not to be deported and hence to be allowed to return. I argue that the writing of *Le Silence des Chagos* – and thereby making the Chagossians' long-silenced story better known to a national and international reading public – constitutes an act of political and ethical solidarity on the part of the novel's Mauritian author. Intricately bound up with the foundation of the Mauritian nation, the Chagossians' real-life story of displacement, suffering and legal battles amply demonstrates, in the most brutal way possible, the inextricable links between the notions of 'place-belongingness' and the enduring politics of belonging.

Chapter 4, 'Everyday Belonging', explores the thorny issue of Franco-Mauritian belonging in Bertrand de Robillard's *L'Homme qui penche* (2003) and *Une interminable distraction au monde* (2011). Drawing on metropolitan theories of *le quotidien* (by Certeau, Barthes, Lefèbvre, Perec and Augé), this chapter investigates the nature of the protagonists' thwarted quests to appropriate and hence to belong to the shared, public spaces of Mauritius and Paris, and ultimately their gradual reappropriation of and reconciliation with everyday, largely domestic space. Robillard's white, male characters do not feel that they belong in the Franco-Mauritian 'community' into which they were born. But, despite their strategic 'pratiques de l'espace' (Certeau), the protagonists remain unable to find or create alternative places of belonging either abroad or in Mauritian locations away from their dreary, drizzly hometowns. Instead, as this chapter explores, Robillard's Franco-Mauritian characters come to realise that they belong to a 'microscopic', geographic and associative territory, to the 'vie intime' of a couple, to their own personal tastes, habits and mundane interactions: that is, to the everyday place of 'home'. Robillard's fascinating and unjustly neglected novels portray Mauritius as an everyday place where everyday people work and live everyday lives, confounding critical expectations of the nature of 'postcolonial'

literature. Nonetheless, as I argue, when considered in relation to the brutal politics of belonging and exclusion revealed in Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos*, Robillard's works could also be seen to depict Mauritius as a place in which, even today, only white, male, middle-class individuals have the luxury of entertaining such purportedly 'everyday' forms of belonging.

In contrast to the individual, 'microscopic' forms of everyday belonging portrayed in Robillard's novels, Amal Sewtohul's *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance* (2001) and *Made in Mauritius* (2012) depict the epic, transnational, intergenerational journeys of a multi-ethnic cast of Mauritian characters. More than any of the other novelists of my corpus, Sewtohul is concerned with imagining the grounds for a collective sense of Mauritian national identity in a context of ongoing mobility and global migration.

In contrast to traditional models of national 'imagined community', based on geographic rootedness and ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, as famously theorised by Benedict Anderson, Chapter 5, 'Nomadic Belonging', examines how Sewtohul's novels attempt to give creative form to the ambiguous national slogan of 'unity in diversity'. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's and Rosi Braidotti's theories of nomadic versus sedentary relations to place, the chapter analyses how, in both their content and form, Sewtohul's 'images of communion' – a composite painting of 'l'âme du pays', a mythical 'esprit marron' running through Mauritius's collective history, or the multifarious trope of a shipping container full of international bric-a-brac – assert a paradoxical sense of nomadic belonging to Mauritius. Rejecting the ethnic homogeneity and sedentary relationship to land underlying Mauritius's community system, the characters of Sewtohul's novels are portrayed as being – or becoming – Mauritian precisely because of their common displacement, mobility and ongoing nomadism. Taken to an iconoclastic, self-deconstructive extreme, I argue, Sewtohul's fictions of rootless, free-floating Mauritian belonging embody a quintessentially nomadic 'desire to suspend all attachment to established discourses',[109] including those of nation, community and communion themselves.

A common concern with the problem of belonging underlies all of the Mauritian novels analysed in this book, as does a common rejection

---

109 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 18.

of dominant discourses of ethnic, diasporic belonging. No single, overarching model of collective belonging emerges from our study of twenty-first-century francophone Mauritian fiction. Instead, a diverse range of models of belonging, both individual and collective, is tentatively imagined. Despite the many differences – of scale, form, perspective and content – between the kinds of belonging imagined in the novels, there also emerge several areas of striking convergence: notably, the trope of the journey of discovery; moments of rapturous connection with the island's natural beauty; the haunting figure of the stateless migrant; and an implicit but persistent desire to connect with Creole characters and, through such interpersonal connections, with a long-suppressed, locally rooted 'Creole' Mauritius that endures in the interstices of Mauritius's dominant, diasporic 'community system'. As discussed in the conclusion to this book, when combined with the novels' common resistance to prescriptive identitarian models, these convergences betray a powerful, underlying, future-orientated commitment to common values and to the ongoing project of Mauritian nationhood – arguably reminiscent, in spirit if not in form, of earlier visions of *mauricianisme* – that might yet coalesce to form the provisional bases of a sense of collective, national belonging.

Selection of the corpus

The eight core novels of my corpus have been selected as representative both of each writer's *oeuvre* and of broader trends in recent Mauritian fiction. Whilst this primary corpus offers ample grounds for the exploration of belonging in the contemporary Mauritian literary imaginary, any selection inevitably entails the exclusion of many other fascinating novels – and, indeed, of other genres, such as poetry, theatre, film or song, each of which has a rich, established or emergent tradition in Mauritius. My decision to focus my analysis on the novel form is motivated by a number of interconnected factors, the first and most obvious being the sheer number of high-quality novels published in the last two decades by Mauritian writers. In addition, the relative length of the novel, combined with the storytelling potential of the genre's conventional features – teleological plot, psychologically rounded characters, narrative viewpoint, description, setting, reader – provide authors with the space and range of tools, whether conventionally deployed or subverted, with which to explore complex issues and to seek answers to

seemingly imponderable existential questions. In common with other postcolonial contexts, where European cultures were long exclusively taught in the colonial education system, Mauritian writers adopt and subvert the quintessentially European literary form of the novel in order to 'write back' to the former colonial centre(s) and to present their own, very different realities and aspirations. In this study's twenty-first-century literary corpus, therefore, the traditional forms of the *Bildungsroman*, the romance plot or the quest narrative, as well as more experimental forms such as life writing, collective testimony or self-reflexive stream of consciousness, are variously deployed and subverted in order to portray their Mauritian protagonists' searches for a place and a purpose in their island home. The aesthetics of the novel, whether traditional or more avant-garde, is thus particularly well-suited to addressing questions of belonging and exclusion in a postcolonial, multi-ethnic situation, and to postulating alternative forms of coexistence – hence my decision to limit analysis exclusively to this genre.

In focusing on novels of French expression, I am choosing not to examine the small but growing bodies of creolophone, Hindi, Chinese or anglophone Mauritian literature where, arguably, very different forms of belonging may be expressed.[110] Such a focus is not unduly restrictive, however. Despite Mauritius's striking heteroglossia, 'French remains the most influential language used in literature and other forms of creative expression' and, therefore, as Ravi argues, 'Mauritian writings in French constitute the most substantial and representative of Mauritian identity'.[111] In analysing literary representations of *contemporary* Mauritian society, I am inevitably excluding novels set in earlier periods, such as Nathacha Appanah's *Les Rochers de poudre d'or* (2003) and *Le Dernier Frère* (2007),[112] or the many fascinating works, notably by Ananda Devi, which take a more oblique and metaphorical approach to their Mauritian sociocultural material of inspiration. Nonetheless, several of the novels analysed – *Le Silence des Chagos* and *Made in Mauritius* especially – do oscillate between different time frames in order

110   The linguist, politician and playwright Dev Virahsawmy is the most notable exponent of Mauritian literature in Kreol, whilst South African-born Lindsey Collen has an international reputation for her works in both Kreol and, especially, English.
111   Ravi, *Rainbow Colors*, pp. 2–3.
112   Published in Gallimard's 'Continents Noirs' series and by Éditions de l'Olivier, respectively.

retrospectively to reconsider the historic roots of patterns of inclusion and exclusion that endure in the contemporary society depicted. My cut-off date of 2000 means that Barlen Pyamootoo's bleakly evocative novel *Bénarès* – which in many ways prefigures my corpus' anti-exotic depictions of contemporary society – is also excluded.[113] Jean-Marie G. Le Clézio[114] and Marie-Thérèse Humbert[115] do not figure on my list, because the publication dates and settings of their Mauritian-set novels are not contemporary and so do not share the same twenty-first-century preoccupation with questions of belonging and exclusion. Finally and, I recognise, perhaps contentiously, all of the novels that I have selected were published with Paris-based publishing houses, rather than in Mauritius.[116] Whilst such a decision is not without compromises, it is motivated by a desire to increase the profile and, I hope, the readership of a fascinating but still relatively neglected body of works – at least in comparison to the literatures of other francophone regions. I do not wish to hamper this endeavour further by analysing works that are not readily available outside Mauritius itself.

I do not wish to overstate the critical and public neglect of Mauritian literature. In recent years, increasing numbers of journal articles, doctoral theses, special issues and edited volumes on Mauritian literature and culture have been produced. Yet, as mentioned above, most of these studies are comparative in generic focus, geographic scope and/or

113   Barlen Pyamootoo, *Bénarès* (Paris: Éditions de l'Olivier, 1999). I am conscious that the cut-off date of 2000 is also somewhat artificial in other ways. An earlier manuscript version of Sewtohul's *Histoire d'Ashok et d'autres personnages de moindre importance* won the Prix Jean Fanchette in 1999: that is, before the Kaya riots, on which my selection hinges. An interesting future project might compare the two versions of the novel in order to consider what impact the Kaya events may have had on final revisions.

114   Le Clézio's 'Mauritian' novels include: *Le Chercheur d'or* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), *Voyage à Rodrigues* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), *La Quarantaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995) and *Alma* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).

115   Novels by Humbert set in Mauritius include: *A l'autre bout de moi* (Paris: Stock, 1979), *La Montagne des Signaux* (Paris: Stock, 1994) and *Amy* (Paris: Stock, 1998).

116   For a consideration of the circumstances and implications of Mauritian authors' publication with Parisian publishing houses, see: Vicram Ramharai, 'Le champ littéraire mauricien', *Revue de littérature comparée*, vol. 318, no. 2 (2006), pp. 173–94; Julia Waters, 'From Continents Noirs to Collection Blanche: From Other to Same? The Case of Ananda Devi', *e-France: An On-line Journal of French Studies*, vol. 2 (2008), pp. 55–74.

thematic approach.[117] To date, very few in-depth, book-length studies of twenty-first-century Mauritian fiction have been published, in either French or English.[118] A notable recent exception is Markus Arnold's *La*

[117] Recent special issues and edited volumes include: Julia Waters (ed.), *L'ici et l'ailleurs: Postcolonial Literatures of the Francophone Indian Ocean*, special issue of *e-france: An Online Journal of French Studies* (2008); Bénédicte Mauguière (ed.), *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, vol. 23, no. 1, special issue on the Indian Ocean (2008); Françoise Lionnet and Thomas Spear (eds), *Mauritius in/and Global Culture*, special issue of *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4 (2010); Véronique Bragard and Srilata Ravi (eds), *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010); Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo and Garcia (eds), *Pou fé ri la boush/Fer gagn riye?* (2013); Kumari Issur and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François (eds), *S'écrire entre soi et autre: nouvelles formes de l'altérité dans les littératures francophones de l'Ile Maurice et de Madagascar*, special issue of *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2013); Issur and Jean-François (eds), *D'une île du monde aux mondes de l'île: dynamiques littéraires et explorations critiques des écritures mauriciennes*, special issue of *Loxias-Colloques*, vol. 3 (2013), http://revel.unice.fr/symposia/actel/index.html?id=392; Jean-François (ed.), *Écritures de l'Océan Indien*, special issue of *Les Lettres Romanes*, vol. 68, no. 1–2 (2014). Single-authored, introductory surveys include, in French, Jean-Louis Joubert, *Littératures de l'Océan Indien* (Vanves: Edicef, 1991), which traces francophone literature of the Indian Ocean region from its origins to the 1980s; and, in English, Peter Hawkins's *The Other Hybrid Archipelago* (2007), which updates Joubert's pioneering overview but, like its precursor, offers no in-depth textual analysis of the works covered. Despite this recent flourishing of academic studies, it is notable how little coverage the Indian Ocean receives relative to other geographic areas within the broader field of francophone studies. In comparative overviews, Mauritius or the Indian Ocean tend to be featured, if at all, as an adjunct to other geographic regions: in a section on 'Creole Islands' in Belinda Jack's *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); in addition to 'Black Africa' in Malcolm Offord et al., *Francophone Literatures: A Literary and Linguistic Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001); or, strangely, under 'Oceania and the Middle East' in Patrick Corcoran's *Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[118] Ravi's *Rainbow Colors* was the first monograph to focus upon Mauritian literature on its own, rather than alongside the literatures of the wider Indian Ocean region. Ravi's focus on works written between the 1940s and 2000, however, means that the most recent surge of fiction written following the Kaya riots is not covered. Ravi's slim but enlightening collection of essays *Rethinking Global Mauritius: Critical Essays on Mauritian Literatures and Cultures* (Trou d'Eau Douce: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2013) also offers interesting and original readings of Mauritian literature, culture and film in relation to theories of modernity, colonialism and globalisation. Published by the same Mauritian-based publishing

*Littérature mauricienne contemporaine: un espace de création postco-
lonial entre revendications identitaires et ouvertures interculturelles*
(2017).[119] As its lengthy subtitle indicates, Arnold's ambitious book
engages with a wide range of broadly postcolonial theoretical paradigms
in order to interrogate the contrasting identities – insular, local and
postcolonial versus open, global and contemporary – evoked in contem-
porary Mauritian literary engagements with *l'interculturalité*. Arnold
defines his understanding of *l'interculturel* in the Mauritian context as
'un espace intermédiare, une négociation permanente entre la créoli-
sation, l'hybridité, le transculturel d'une part, le multiculturalisme et
la diaspora de l'autre'[120] – an opposition, or 'négociation permanente',
that chimes with other contrastive conceptualisations of Mauritian
nationhood (notably, *mauricianisme* versus 'unity in diversity') discussed
elsewhere in my introduction. Arnold sees Mauritian literature as an
ideal testing ground for a comparative, interdisciplinary approach
that combines francophone studies' focus on predominantly linguistic
interconnections between France and different French-speaking literary
spheres, with postcolonial studies' focus on the relationship between text
and sociopolitical context.[121] Within a much broader (francophone and

house, Françoise Lionnet's recent volumes *Le Su et l'incertain* and *Écritures
féminines* gather together essays on Indian Ocean cultures from throughout the
author's career which, when read together as a body of thought, offer wide-ranging
but complementary readings through the theoretical lenses of creolisation,
cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. Ritu Tyagi's *Ananda Devi: Feminism,
Narration and Polyphony* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) is the first book-length study
of Mauritius's most famous female author and attests to the growing international
interest in Devi's work.

119 Markus Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine: un espace de
création postcoloniale entre revendications identitaires et ouvertures intercul-
turelles* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017).

120 Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 15.

121 Despite the efforts of French scholars such as Moura and Bardolph, in
French academia it is still the case, as Arnold observes, that: 'Considérer les
textes francophones par le prisme du postcolonial constitue pour certains un
rapprochement paradoxal et impossible entre universalisme et relativisme particu-
lariste' (*La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 11). While an approach such
as Arnold's, combining francophone studies and postcolonial studies, is indeed
original and much-needed in French academia, where disciplinary boundaries still
prove resistant to 'the creolisation of theory' (in Lionnet and Shih's terms), the
interdisciplinary field of francophone postcolonial studies has been remarkably
active and productive in the past couple of decades in both the UK and the US. See,

anglophone) corpus than my own, Arnold analyses many of the same texts as I do in the chapters that follow. Nonetheless, despite this and other convergences, our books take fundamentally different approaches to our common material: while Arnold adopts a broad postcolonial and comparative theoretical approach and sets out to answer a long list of wide-ranging research questions,[122] my own study concentrates on the single, if protean notion of 'belonging' and is much more focused in terms of scope and objectives. While I do apply an eclectic mix of theoretical approaches in different chapters, as appropriate to the novels' diverse articulations of belonging, these approaches are not predominantly postcolonial. While Arnold's study is highly comparative in approach and objects of analysis, my own investigation of the consistent problem of belonging in the Mauritian literary imaginary is conducted by means of a series of in-depth textual analyses of just one or two novels. As such, the highly focused readings of my analysis offer a contrastive and complementary corollary to Arnold's much broader, comparative study. Taken together, our two monographs illustrate the rich diversity of the literary works that make up our common field of interest, and of possible approaches to them.

Despite this recent burgeoning of interest in Mauritian literature, there remains, as Françoise Lionnet notes, 'an urgent need for greater analytical study of the trends of the past twenty-five years'.[123] One of the most significant such trends in twenty-first-century Mauritian fiction is, I contend, a common concern with the problem of belonging. As we

for instance: Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds), *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003); Margaret Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007); Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010); Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman (eds), *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (eds), *The Creolization of Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). For studies on this subject by French academics, see: Jean Bessière and Jean-Marc Moura (eds), *Littératures postcoloniales et francophonie* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001); Jacqueline Bardolph, *Études postcoloniales et littérature* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002).

122   Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 8.
123   Lionnet, 'Mauritius in/and Global Culture', p. 372.

have seen, scholars of Mauritian literature frequently allude to the issue of belonging, although it has not yet been the specific focus of scholarly analysis. Recent critical studies in a range of disciplines, and on topics such as (trans)nationalism, globalisation, migration, cosmopolitanism and diaspora, have repeatedly highlighted the need for more scholarly work on the notion of belonging, the affective dimension of which in particular has received relatively little attention. By examining an under-researched trend in contemporary Mauritian fiction through the lens of the under-used concept of belonging, it is hoped that this book will help to address two important scholarly needs. It is also hoped that the eclectic analytical framework developed here, when examining diverse literary expressions of belonging from Mauritius, might be extrapolated to other multi-ethnic situations, and so help to recalibrate our understandings of the dynamics of belonging and exclusion in diverse multicultural societies. As its title indicates, the present book is centrally concerned with analysing 'fictions of belonging' in contemporary Mauritius: in the sense that it explores the central preoccupation with belonging in recent literature from the island but also in the sense that, as the various chapters individually and collectively reflect, belonging itself is always an ongoing work of longing, imagination and fiction.