A Comparative Ecocritical Reading of Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide* and Ananda Devi's *Soupir*

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at the metaphorical liminal qualities of the Mauritian environment through an ecocritical analysis. It proposes to treat the environment as linked to narratives of resistance in postcolonial island spaces. It, therefore, aims at bridging the gap between culture and nature. My first objective is to develop an understanding of the importance of metaphorical constructs in island spaces and how they open up liminal spaces. This objective will be met through an ecological reading of Ananda Devi's *Soupir*[1]. My second objective is to use my ecological understanding of *Soupir* to critically engage with the portrayal of Mauritian environment in Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide*[2]. My final objective is to problematize the apparently linear ecological national narrative of Collen. This would point out the complexities of articulating the positions on the Mauritian environment.

[1] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002)

[2] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990)

Introduction

This dissertation engages in an ecocritical reading of the Mauritian and Rodrigues natural environment. Ecocriticism acknowledges the anthropocentric construction of 'nature through images and words'[3]. An anthropocentric reading of society would regard mankind as 'the most significant entity of the universe'[4]. Therefore, ecocriticism points out the construction of nature according to anthropocentric values and supports that such reading is oblivious of the role nature plays in cultural articulations. This field of study observes in 'nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning'[5]. It can be deduced then that an "earth-centered"[6] approach to Mauritius and Rodrigues would draw attention to the signifying processes that takes place between nature and culture.

Rodrigues Island and Mauritius form part of the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean. Rodrigues is the smallest of the three Mascarene Islands and the most isolated. It is situated 344 miles east of Mauritius and was first sighted in 1507 by Portuguese travellers. It was colonized by the French, who established sugarcane plantation and, for that purpose, slaves were brought in to work the land[7]. The island was the tenth district of Mauritius. But in 2002 it became autonomous. Mauritius was discovered in 1512 by Portuguese travellers. It lies on the south-eastern coast of Africa. Unlike Rodrigues' colonization history, Mauritius was successively colonised by the Dutch, the French and the British. Both Mauritius and Rodrigues don't have a native population. Mauritius has a more diverse cultural reality than Rodrigues which showcases the Indian, Chinese, African, and European origins of its

[3] Howarth, William, 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* eds. Glotfelty, Cheryll & Fromm, Harold, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 77.

[4]Merriam-Webster: Dictionary &Thesaurus, <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/anthropocentric> [accessed 28 May 2016]

[5] William Howarth, 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism' in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* eds. Glotfelty Cheryll & Harold Fromm, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.77

[6]Glotfelty, Cheryll & Harold,Fromm., eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. xviii.

[7] Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Rodrigues Island', *Rodrigues Island,*(n.d.a), <http://www.britannica.com/place/Rodrigues-Island> [accessed 23 May 2016].

inhabitants[8]. On the other hand, Rodrigues' population is mostly constituted of slave descendants. Both islands have been ecologically altered by the process of colonisation.

The environmental space of postcolonial islands is said to be an alterity in itself due to the ecological modification it went through. Being an alterity, it demands creative ways to be (re)articulated. In the realm of literature, the metaphor is a privileged literary means used by ecocritics, due to the possibilities it gives to read the relationship between namely self and place[9]. Metaphors become important strategic tools for ecocritics to engage critically with the postcolonial environment.

One of my main aims is to 'expand on notions of otherness by thinking beyond the anthropocentric sphere, considering alterity as an environmental issue'[10]. My thesis is that a comparative ecocritical reading of Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide* and Ananda Devi's *Soupir*, helps underscore how cultural otherness is built within the fractured environment of postcolonial island space of Mauritius. Furthermore, my core claim is that there is a permanent cultural and metaphorical negotiation of the environment that takes place in or as an act of resistance. This reveals the liminal quality of the natural spaces of Mauritius. The notion of liminal space is here understood as an in-between space which is fluid and which favours the productions of new meanings. My comparative ecological analysis follows a two way process: (1) an ecocritical analysis of Ananda Devi's *Soupir* and (2) consideration of the findings in *Soupir*'s analysis to reflect about Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide*.

[8] Tyagi Ritu, 'Rethinking Identity and Belonging: "Mauritianness" in the Work of Ananda Devi', in *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* eds. McCusker, Maeve and Soares, Anthony, (Amsterdam-New York, 2011), p. 91

[9] Howarth, William 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism' in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* eds. Glotfelty Cheryll & Harold Fromm, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

[10] Vera Alexander- 'Environmental Otherness: Nature on Human Terms in the Garden', *Otherness: Essays and Studies,* 4.1, sep 2013, pp. 15

1.0 Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

The reading of the island space, since colonial times, has always remained problematic. It has been a source of oppression for islanders and the rapid growth of literatures around the different ways to read the island space is not surprising. Throughout the years, there has been extensive research undertaken on the evolution of island studies. The treatment of the physicality of islands could be separated into two groups: (1) some works have considered it important to emphasise the binary opposition which differentiates islands from continental spaces, whilst others (2) explore the environmental conditions of islands as metaphorically and physically altered spaces. Nevertheless, in both perceptions the notion of the 'imaginatively constructed' dwells and this leads to possibilities of reconfigurations. Few studies have been undertaken about Mauritius Island from an island studies perspective, therefore limiting new outcomes in ways of discussing the Mauritian space.

1.2. Theorizing around the physicality of island spaces

Physicality is an important aspect to consider when attempting a postcolonial reading of islands. This is due to the importance given to their physical aspect notably in colonial readings. Being separated from other land by water, islands are argued to have occupied an important place in literary imagination through myths and fantasy[11].

The usually small scale of islands has influenced the way they are imagined. This underscores the point of view that states that '[…] our surroundings are always culturally mediated, intersocially and intertextually constructed; but they are also responses to nature, and environment […]'[12]. Maeve McCusker and Anthony Soares[13] portray clearly how the physicality of the island space has been influenced by the colonial imagination, hence pointing to the situated metaphorical constructions of these places. They support Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith's[14] assertion according to which the island is perceived as a 'natural colony'[15], that is, a space which cannot resist the colonial gaze. This is due to their vulnerable and isolated appearance and 'their (imagined) small geographic scale'[16].

This anthropocentric view of the world perceives continental spaces as 'beyond the sphere of 'nature'[17] and fixes islands in the 'vulnerable' natural world. In the colonial thought, islands were imagined as the counter opposites of continents. Islands were perceived as unified and opaque spaces which were not affected by the outside world and 'historically, [they were] considered as ideal locale[s], or even laborator[ies], in which to materialise the colonial will, free from undesirable alien influences emanating from the outside'[18].

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[11] Stephanos Stephanides &Susan Bassnett, 'Islands, Literature, and Culture Translatability', *Transtext(e)s Transcultures,* (2009), p.6

[12] Speek, Tiiu - 'Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell's Ecocritical Perspective', N.D.A., p. 163.

[13] McCusker, Maeve,& Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity*, (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2011)

[14] Edmond, Rod, &Smith Vanessa., eds., *Islands in History and Representation,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)

[15] McCusker, Maeve, & Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2011), p. xi

[16] Ibid, p. xi

[17] Huggan, Graham and Tiffin, Helen, 'Green Postcolonialism', *Interventions,* 9:1, 1-11, (2007), p. 6

[18] McCusker, Maeve, & Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2011), p. xi

All these constructs around the island space established themselves around the idea of 'boundedness[19]'. Boundedness is argued to be 'the defining idea of an island' and it makes "islands graspable, able to be held in the mind's eye and imagined as places of possibility and promise"[20]. However, in order to resist such claims, several postcolonial critics have focused on cultural fluidities (creolisation) which are the results of human movements from different cultures during colonisation in islands. Creolisation becomes therefore a cultural phenomenon which counters the physical and cultural limitedness of islands. They argued that instead of being perceived solely as closed spaces, islands should be perceived as "encapsulating both the comfort of finitude and the tease of endless proliferation" as "islands beg and resist interpretation. They are at once microcosm and excess"[21].

From this standpoint, "an island can thus be seen either as a space of isolation or as one of relation, in the discretion of its seemingly firm borders, in its relationship to an often contested mainland, or, for example, in its connectedness to other archipelagic spaces"[22]. This standpoint creates new metaphors which frame islands as spaces that "can perform as images of both separation and connection"[23]. In *Islands and Exiles*, Chris Bongie talks about the island as "…the site of a doubly-identity- closed and open'. He supports that this *doubleness* perfectly conveys the ambivalences of creole identity"[24] and therefore counters the fallacy of boundedness.

The main critique that could be made against this new reading of the island space is that creolisation takes on unifying tones because of the boundedness vs openness. In an attempt to resist colonial metaphors, the theorists have locked up creolisation as a fixed idea of mixing without delving into its complexities. This kind of reading certainly is a counter argument to an exclusively bounded/limited image of the island but it nevertheless neglects the internal

[19] 'Boundedness' here refers to ideas of 'closure', 'limited'. In island terms, it is mostly associated with ideas of insularity.

[20] Edmond, Rod, &Smith Vanessa., eds., *Islands in History and Representation,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.2

[21] Ibid, p. 5

[22] McCusker, Maeve, & Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2011), p. xiv

[23] Edmond, Rod, &Smith Vanessa., eds., *Islands in History and Representation,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.4

[24] Bongie, Chris, *Islands and Exiles : The Creole Identities of Post/colonial Literature,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 18

cultural complexities which are present in island cultures. Despite recognizing the creolized nature of postcolonial islands, Chris Bongie persists on referring to binary oppositions. The risks behind such perception are highlighted by Matthew Boyd Goldie in his article, 'Island Theory: The Antipodes'[25]. He suggests that the "postcolonial studies of insular cultures, histories, and geographies can fall prey to a binary of, on one side, transnational global studies and, on the other side, resistance to largely postmodernist forms of analysis by turning to local, often materialist, investigations"[26]. Positioning creolisation without engaging with it critically, as the main source of resistance against the idea of boundedness, limits the possibilities to read the complexities of the physicality of islands. This kind of reading is oblivious of the negotiations of the deeper layers of island cultures which could affect the ways one sees and experiences the island space.

[25] Goldie, Matthew Boyd, 'Island Theory: The Antipodes', in McCusker, Maeve, & Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2011).

[26] Ibid, p.12

1.3. Edouard Glissant: A new way of reading the post-colonial island

Edouard Glissant, famous Caribbean theorist and writer, also acknowledges the importance to consider creolisation in attempts to counter 'bounded' ideas about islands. However, Glissant advocates a creolisation that acknowledges the different identities that co-exist. According to him, there is a need to consider the encounter of different cultures in creole societies as 'Relation'. Relations are described as 'ce possible de l'imaginaire qui nous porte à concevoir la globalité insaisissable d'un tel Chaos-monde, en même temps qu'il nous permet d'en relever quelque détail, et en particulier de chanter notre lieu, insondable et irréversible'[27].

The notion of 'relation' is bound to the process of creolisation as an act which simultaneously celebrates the different cultures individually and single out specific elements from these cultures to form creolised objects. Glissant's perception of creolisation differs from the other island theorists in that he does not ignore the complexities within creolisation.

His formulation of creolisation renders the island space more complex. Glissant developed his thoughts from an environmental standpoint. He acknowledges the resourcefulness of the creole space of the Caribbean, which he defines as 'the plantation space'[28]. The plantation space differs from other spaces in that it holds the fractures of colonialism and exploitation. He supports that it is important to consider how this altered space has been differently looked at by different cultures. By valuing the notion of 'relation' he considers the various 'traces' (the different remnants of cultural heritage) which perform in the environment.

It is an altered space due to the various physical modifications which the formerly colonized land has known. He also advocates the richness of this space and how the manipulation of the present creolised signifiers ('traces') can help in the reconstruction of a past and a future. Due to its resourcefulness, this creole space has the ability to be re-appropriated and be given new meanings. Glissant acknowledges that "…the milieu is inseparable from the human being' and that the human being is a tributary of the environment"[29]. He proposes to consider the relationship between the environment and individuals. His treatment of the environment is well represented in his novel *Mahogany*:

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[27] Edouard, Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, (Paris :Editions Gallimard, 1997), p.22

[28] Edouard, Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais*, (Paris : Seuil, 1981)

[29] Baudot, Alain and Holder, Marianne R., 'Edouard Glissant: A Poet in search of His Landscape', *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, no.4, (1989), p. 584.

"A tree is a whole country, and if we ask what is this country is, we immediately plunge into the obscure root-tangle of time. We labor to clear the brushwood, we are wounded by the branches, our legs and arm are left permanently scarred" [30].

This extract points to the link Glissant makes between the environment and the scars, traces that this environment leaves on human beings, particularly those who were brought to work the land. For him the environment is a source of history and therefore forms part of the negotiation of everyday life.

Acknowledging the island space as a form of alterity[31], leads Glissant to consider how that space has 'marked' as well the different bodies. He advocates an aesthetic of the earth which he finds also an imaginary form of alterity. In other words, he encourages an aesthetic which would establish a dialogue with the environment. He supports the idea that a metaphorical rearticulation of 'naturalizing metaphors of nature' would allow resistance against discourses of rootedness, hence ideas of boundedness. But at the same time, it would not erase the complexities of island spaces.

However, despite his advocacy to underscore the need to look at the different composites that make up creolisation through the environment, he insists on 'la texture…et non pas sur la nature des composantes'[32]. In other words, despite acknowledging the presence of different 'traces', he celebrates the final product of the creolisation process. This standpoint limits his capacity to read the complexities of the composites that frame creole societies and therefore how this impacts their ways of experiencing the environment. He ignores the "…categorisation, and ultimately the subdivision of hybrid populations into clearly identifiable and manageable sections"[33].

I argue that such an approach limits the insights which an environmental reading of society could bring. His imaginative renegotiation of the fractured land has as final objective to produce a form of creolisation which regroups all the 'traces' and celebrates a constant

[30] Glissant, Edouard, *Mahogany*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p.13

[31] The island space is an alterity because its ecology itself has been modified during colonisation through, for example, the import of new plants. Therefore, the land itself could be considered as an 'Other' which has been framed for imperial reasons.

[32] Glissant, Edouard, *Poétique de la Relation*, (Paris : Gallimard, 1990), p.204

[33] Schnepel, Burkhard and Schnepel, Cornelia, 'From Slave to Tourist Entertainer: Performative Negotiations of Identity and Difference in Mauritius', in McCusker, Maeve, & Soares, Anthony., eds., *Islanded Identities: Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity,* (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2011), p. 112

reconfiguration of identities. This perspective of the post-colonial island environment becomes problematic when we consider the complexities of co-existing in a creole society and of experiencing the land.

1.4. Ecocriticism - Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Edouard Glissant's thought relates to the idea of a 'conceptualised space in relation to colonial history in a way that serves to harmonise the aims of postcolonialism and ecocriticism'[34]. Ecocriticism is 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment'[35]. It holds the view that 'human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it'[36]. Therefore, an ecocritical analysis would critically explore the connections between the natural world and human culture. One of its main focuses is to look at the representation of nature in literary texts. In the literary sphere, Ecocriticism is principally interested in the 'symbolical inscriptions of the Earth'[37].This interest could be explained by the fact that 'ecology itself is an abstract concept that emerged in a historical process'[38]. In fact, the way society has articulated ecology has been reconfigured throughout the years.

Ecocritics are said to be interested in how 'discursive conventions enable and constrain our contact with the environment and place, how much does place inform representations, and how do the means of representations inform our sense of place. They examine significant tropes and myths that shape our environmental imagination and action'[39]. The ecocritic's interest in issues such as discourses and representation has motivated the field of Postcolonialism to acknowledge the need to include ecocriticism in their modalities of investigation. The works of Elizabeth DeLoughrey have had an important impact on implementing ecocriticism in the reading of postcolonial islands and environment.

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[34] Handley, George. B, 'Toward an Environmental Phenomenology of Diaspora', *MFS, Modern Fiction Studies,* vol. 55, no. 3, (2009), p.651.

[35] Glotfelty, Cheryll & Harold,Fromm., eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xviii

[36] Ibid, p. xix.

[37] Oppermann, Serpil, 'Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder', *Journal of Faculty of Letters,* 16.2, (1999), p.1

[38] Ibid, p. 1

[39] Speek, Tiiu - 'Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell's Ecocritical Perspective', N.D.A., p. 165.

Postcolonial ecocriticism 'maintains […] the features of the postcolonial by directing our attention to the specifically environmental dimensions of literary works'[40]. Elizabeth DeLoughrey expands Glissant's perception on the relationship between the environment and human beings and suggests a Postcolonial ecocritical approach not oblivious of the internal negotiations in island cultures. She draws on Glissant's perspective: '….the individual, the community and the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape should be seen as a character in this process. Its *deepest* [emphasized mine] meaning needs to be understood'[41].

In her articulation of the postcolonial island environment, she considers as well Edward Said's notion of place. Said's 'experience of place' underscores the fact that place is lived in different ways by different individuals. Therefore, place 'encodes time, suggesting that histories embedded in the land and the sea have always provided vital and dynamic methodologies for understanding the transformative impact of empire and the anticolonial epistemologies it tries to supress'[42]. In other words, an exploration of how the land is experienced and articulated specifically will point to historical events (colonisation and decolonisation, for example) which have impacted the land.

Like Glissant, DeLoughrey points to the postcolonial island environment as being 'altered' as a consequence of colonialism. She supports that it's important to pay 'heed to the histories of colonial violence embedded in the earth'[43]. By moving her perspective from the final product of creolisation to 'experiences' and to a 'profound dialogue with the landscape', DeLoughrey problematizes the creole space of islands and invites exploration of the different negotiations which could happen in the landscape.

Following Glissant, she supports the incapacity to recuperate nature as it is an alterity in itself. So, alternative ways should be found to negotiate the altered nature. Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, in *Islands in History and Representation*[44], stipulate the need to 'map the

[40] Vadde, Aarthi, 'Cross-Pollination: Ecocriticism, Zoocriticism, Postcolonialism', *Contemporary Literature,* Vol. 52, no. 3, (2011), pp. 565-573, (p.565)

[41] Glissant, Edward, *The Caribbean Discourse,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), P. 105-106.

[42] DeLoughrey, Elizabeth and Hondley, George B., eds., *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.4.

[43] Ibid, p.5

[44] Edmond, Rod, &Smith Vanessa., eds., *Islands in History and Representation,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 5

intersections of metaphor with culture' when reading the island space. In other words, island cultures should negotiate and articulate the metaphorical space they find themselves in[45]. The profound dialogue which one could have with the island landscape, will have to consider the metaphorical constructs which have framed the landscape. The metaphorical rearticulation of the island environment is further highlighted by Edward Said's point of view that defines literary imagination as a core part in the process of decolonization[46]. Therefore, literature could be considered as a site where metaphorical renegotiations of the environment could be performed notably as acts of resistance.

[45]As mentioned earlier, island spaces have read through metaphorically by the colonial mind. This reading has framed the way the islands have been treated by colonizers. Therefore, the island space is metaphorically imbued, both at the imaginative and physical level.

[46] Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

1.5. The Mauritian environment: The Possibilities of an Ecocritical Analysis

Most ecocritical analyses of postcolonial islands have explored particularly the Atlantic region. Exploring the environment of Mauritius, one of the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean, could be a new take on this perspective. Mauritius is an island nation off the southeast coast of the African continent. Colonisation is argued to have been the 'defining characteristic'[47] of the island. Like the other Mascarene Islands[48], Mauritius is an entire creation of the colonial phenomenon[49]. This assumption is based on the fact that the island was colonized by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British. It is argued that such consecutive phases of colonisation have had severe effects on the ecology and ethnography of Mauritius because the island was uninhabited by humans before its discovery by the Portuguese sailors[50].

The first inhabitants were the discoverers or those brought to work the land. Furthermore, historical records point out that 'by the mid-seventeenth century, several species unique to the island such as the flightless Dodo bird had become extinct, and most of the island's native ebony trees had been cut down and shipped to Europe'[51]. Mauritius differs from the other islands which have been so far subject to extensive ecocritical exploration (for example, the Caribbean) in that 'colonialism was not something which came from outside; it was built into the fabric of the whole society'[52].

Mauritius could be called 'a plantation space'[53]. It followed the same separation process as the Caribbean: "[…] slave owners in ile-de-France (as Mauritius was called during the French rule) mixed individuals from different ethnic groups, dissolving family structures and

[47] Seetah Krish, 'Mauritius: An Exploration of Colonial Legacies on an 'Island Paradise', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures,* vol. 4, no. 1, (2010), p.100

[48] The other Mascarene Islands are Rodrigues Island and Reunion Island.

[49] Houbert, J, 'Creolisation and Decolonisation in the Changing Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean' in *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean,* eds. Jayasuriya, Shihan de Silva and Pankhurst, Richard (Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc, 2003), p.124

[50] Mossner, Alexa Weik von, 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide'*, *English Studies,* vol. 91, no. 7, (2010) 761-775, (p. 763)

[51] Ibid, p. 763

[52] Houbert, J, 'Mauritius: Independence and Dependence', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, (1981), vol. 19, no. 1, 75-105, (p.763).

[53] I am here referring to Glissant's notion of the plantation space as a space which is marked physically and metaphorically by the process of colonisation. This space is also argued to have the qualities to be reappropriated metaphorically.

political organisation. As a result in a given compound, there were few shared collective cultural resources […]'[54]. After the abolition of slavery, there was the arrival of the first indentured labourers. These movements and division processes gave rise to Creole spaces. The Mauritian plantation space is relevant in this discussion as it exemplifies how the Creole space is re-appropriated both for national purposes (national collectiveness) and ethnic community purposes (ethnic collectiveness). There is a constant collision in the Mauritian consciousness between the nationalist endeavours to construct a united nation and 'a whole procession of other locations or 'elsewheres' […]'[55]. Therefore, Mauritius, despite being a creolised space, is also highly ethnically marked.

Several anthropological studies[56] have pointed out how the public spaces of Mauritius become liminal spaces where ethnic and cultural negotiations are visible. If a non-anthropocentric view of society is considered, such cultural negotiations could be extended to the natural environment. This affirmation is validated by the fact that in Mauritius, 'Indian immigrants re-created […] Indian spaces, values, norms and other practices that would mimic the way they lived in India'[57].

The first workers who came to the island 'transplanted their beliefs and ritual practices, […] and invented a myth to the effect that the small secluded lake Grand Bassin in Southern Mauritius contained the holy waters of the Ganges. (Today, the largest Hindu festival outside India is said to be the annual Maha Shivaratree pilgrimage to Grand Bassin)[58]. The Indo-Mauritians have reconfigured their culture in the natural landscape of Mauritius. This example underscores the fact that Mauritius' environment is also being constantly negotiated. An 'earth-centred' approach to this society can help uncover the complexities behind the articulation of the environment with an ethnically defined society.

[54] Eriksen, Hylland Thomas, 'Creolisation in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius' (N.D.A).

[55] Pépin, Ernest, 'The Place of Space in the Novels of the Créolité Movement', in *Ici-là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French,* ed. Mary Gallagher, (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V, 2003), P.1.

[56] For example, the work of Reena Dobson entitled 'Beaches and Breaches: Articulations and Negotiations of Identity, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism in Mauritius', *Limina- Special Edition,* 2007. She explores how beaches could be considered as liminal spaces whereby ethnic and national Mauritian identities are negotiated.

[57] Dewoo, Teena, 'The Coolitude of Coolietude: The (re)negotiation of the Indian Identity in Mauritius', *Counter- Cultures in Contemporary Africa, (*2012), p. 6.

[58] Eriksen, Hylland Thomas, 'Creolisation in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius' (N.D.A), pp. 156.

1.6. Conclusion

Two ways of articulating the complexity of the island space have been dealt with in this literature review. One focuses on the phenomenon of creolisation pointing out to the imperative of islands to be understood as both opened and closed. The other supports that the complexity of the insular space could be read in the island's environment itself. However, the former undermines the resourcefulness of the island space by establishing itself on the basis of a binary opposition.

Supporting an environmental approach to understand the island space, both Elizabeth Deloughrey and Edouard Glissant encourage an ecocritical approach. This could be understood as a 'deep' engagement with the environment. Such engagement involves acknowledging that islands exist as metaphors and therefore, a metaphorical consideration of the environment is necessary. However, DeLoughrey's ecocriticism differs from that of Glissant in that she emphasises the notion of 'place'. This means that the way the land is experienced will be different for different individuals, hence opening to the resourcefulness of the analysis of the plantation space as well.

An ecocritical reading of the Mauritian is worth considering. It proposes an environmental and ethnographic approach that differs from the Caribbean. Examples have been provided on how the Mauritian environment has been metaphorically re-appropriated to negotiate ethnic cultural identities. I support that an ecocritical exploration of Mauritius would underscore the complexities of discussing the importance of the environment in an ethnically based society.

2.0 Engaging with Ananda Devi and Lindsey Collen:

2.1 Introducing Ananda Devi and Lindsey Collen

Ananda Devi and Lindsey Collen are major Mauritian novelists from the Francophone and Anglophone literary world respectively. My work comprises a comparative ecocritical study of their work, namely *Soupir* and *There is a Tide*. But before engaging with these texts, I will present the authors and their literary world.

Ananda Devi [1957-] was born in Trois-Boutiques, a small village of Mauritius. She started writing from a very young age and in 1972 she was 'hailed as a child prodigy following the publication of a prize-winning short story written when she was an adolescent school girl'[59]. Some years later she started to study ethnology and anthropology, which led her to earn a doctoral thesis in anthropology from the University of London in 1990. She spent some years in Brazzaville, Congo, but now lives in Switzerland. *Soupir* is her eighth novel. Some of her other notable writings include: *Solstices*[60]; *Rue la Poudrière*[61] ; *L'Arbre Fouet*[62] and *La vie de Joséphin le Fou*[63]. The context for most of her texts is the island of Mauritius. But due to her cultural experiences in Africa and Europe, some of her narratives take place in these regions. *Soupir* and *La vie de Joséphin le Fou*[64] are her only texts that consider the context of Rodrigues Island. Her writings are known worldwide and several of her texts have been translated into different languages.

Her formation as an anthropologist certainly affects her writing. One would notice that the main concern in her texts is to explore the human condition and how they interact with each other. She also explores ways to define the 'self' in the chaos of overlapping cultures. In *Ecritures Féminines et Dialogues Critiques*[65], Françoise Lionnet defines Devi as a postcolonial writer. This is due to the author's deep exploration of the impacts that a

[59] Corcoran, Patrick, *The Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature,* (New York: Cambridge University Press), p.112

[60] Devi, Ananda, *Solstices,* (nouvelle édition), (Mauritius : Editions Le Printemps, 1997)

[61] Devi, Ananda, *Rue La Poudrière,* (Abidjan : Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1988)

[62] Devi, Ananda, *L'Arbre Fouet,* (Paris : Editions L'Harmattan, 1997)

[63] Devi, Ananda, *La Vie de Joséphin Le Fou*, (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2003)

[64] ibid

[65] Lionnet, Françoise, *Ecritures Féminines et Dialogues Critiques : Subjectivité, genre et ironie,* (Mauritius : L'Atelier d'Ecriture, 2012), p.241

postcolonial past has on a society's identity articulations and negotiations. The notion of 'malaise identitaire' is argued to play an important role in Devi's texts[66]. The author's concern for "…la quête de la liberté et (re) construction identitaire'[67] leads her to write about those considered as marginal people and to make them the main characters of her narratives. For example, in *Rue la Poudrière*, Paule, who belongs to the Creole community, is a prostitute and the main character. Being the only narrator, she is given a voice and the opportunity to negotiate her identity.

The relationship between characters and their surroundings plays an important role in some of Devi's texts. Critics have supported that she 'challenge[s] the notion of the island as an idyll in [her] writing'[68]. In several of her texts, the island space is portrayed in a dystopian way. The marginal voice then is placed at the centre of these island narratives[69]. She is not the first Mauritian author to engage with Rodrigues Island. For example, Nobel Prize winner, Jean Marie Le Clézio set his narrative in Rodrigues in *Le Chercheur d'or*[70] and *Voyage à Rodrigues*[71]. But she is the only one, in *Soupir*, to rework 'traditional island metaphors and images' in an attempt to 'discard the Eurocentric male gaze that has lent itself to idyllic images of islands in literature in the past'[72].

Lindsey Collen is one of the best known Anglophone writers in Mauritius. She was born 1948 and grew up in South Africa. At a young age she came to Mauritius, married and took the Mauritian nationality. *There is a Tide*, published in 1991, is her first novel. Six more novels were published since among which there is the highly polemical *The Rape of Sita*[73]

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[66] Medjo, Jean Claude Abada, 'Utopie identitaire et traversée des gens dans l'œuvre d'Ananda Devi', *Les écrits contemporains de femmes de l'Océan Indien et des Caraibes,* (2012), <www.uwo.ca/french/grelcef/cahiers_intro.htm> [accessed 23 May 2016).

[67] Ibid, pp. 140.

[68] O'Flaherty, Ailbhe, 'Every Woman is an Island? The Island as an Embodiment of Female Alterity in Mauritian Woman's Writing', in *Ecritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité,* eds. Bragard, Véronique & Ravi Srilata, (Paris: L'Harmattan), p. 56

[69] Ibid, 56

[70] Le Clézio, J.M.G, *Le Chercheur D'or,* (Paris : Gallimard, 1985)

[71] Le Clézio, J.M.G, *Voyage à Rodrigues,* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997)

[72] O'Flaherty, Ailbhe, 'Every Woman is an Island? The Island as an Embodiment of Female Alterity in Mauritian Woman's Writing', in *Ecritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité,* eds. Bragard, Véronique & Ravi Srilata, (Paris: L'Harmattan), p. 57

[73] Collen, Lindsey, *The rape of Sita*, 2nd edition, (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004)

and *Mutiny*[74]. Two of her novels, *The Rape of Sita*[75] and *Boy*[76] won the Commonwealth literary prize, which contributed to getting her writings known worldwide. The two main languages she writes in are English and Mauritian Kreol. Like Ananda Devi, the setting of most of Collen's texts is the Mauritian society.

Collen's involvement in the political world of Mauritius influences her writing. She even admits that it is hard for her to separate her 'political self and her writing self'[77]. It could be argued that literature becomes for her a platform to clearly display her political ideals. Felicity Hand[78] suggests that Collen's work 'seems to be a remorseless indictment of contemporary Mauritian and, by extension, Western-oriented societies immersed in […] a hedonistic bourgeois capitalist consumerism which has lost sight of the commitment to solidarity and universal fraternity'[79]. She is a member of the political movement 'Lalit' and the social movement 'Ledikasyon pou travayer'. She is critical of the consequences which the phenomenon of globalisation has had on small states like Mauritius. She is also involved in literacy classes for adults.

One of the main concerns of Collen in her works is to represent shared experiences 'for people to become conscious and reactive citizens'[80]. In an interview she gave to Triplopia[81], she suggests that 'these things get into novels easier than into political speeches or pamphlets'[82]. This perspective leads her to construct narratives that bring together people from different social and ethnic backgrounds. As Devi, Collen also advocates the importance of giving a voice to people considered as forming part of minority groups of Mauritius. For example, prisoners are the main narrators in *Mutiny*[83].

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[74] Collen, Lindsey, *Mutiny*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).

[75] Collen, Lindsey, *The rape of Sita*, 2nd edition, (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004)

[76] Collen, Lindsey, *Boy,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005)

[77] Hand, Felicity, 'Lindsey Collen: The Courage to be Parochial', *Wasafiri,* 26:2, (2011), p.42

[78] Ibid, p.41-45,

[79] Ibid, p. 42.

[80] Ibid, p 43.

[81] Triplopia, 'Spotlight To Tell a Story: In Conversation with Triplopia, Lindsey Collen Discusses Rape, Mythology, and Writing as Gift', *Triplopia* , (2005), < http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm?ct_374_>, [accessed 23 May 2016].

[82] Ibid

[83] Collen, Lindsey, *Mutiny*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).

A reading of some of her texts draw attention to the role played by nature in her narratives. For example, in *Mutiny*[84] an approaching cyclone influences the atmosphere of the whole narrative. Like in *There is a Tide*, the environment is dealt with through forms of negotiation with her political ideals.

Thus, we see that Collen and Devi share common concerns in their literary works. They both take island spaces as backdrops for their narratives and they both give a voice to minorities.

[84] Collen, Lindsey, *Mutiny*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).

2.2 Methodology and Theoretical framework

The context of *Soupir* is that of Rodrigues Island. The narrator, Patrice L'Eveillé, recounts the hardships that the inhabitants of Rodrigues go through. Poverty forms part of their everyday life. So, in order to run away from these bad living conditions, Patrice, together with other characters, decides to move to Soupir in order to grow ganja and get rich. Soupir is described as a small, secluded area of Rodrigues. Instead of getting better, living conditions get worst and the characters go through a series of misadventures which draw them closer to their environmental surrounding. The natural world plays an important role in the text; for example, the island *topoi* are extensively used by the author. But instead of constructing Rodrigues through paradisiac metaphors, the author adopts a dystopian description of the island space.

The context of *There is a Tide* is Mauritius. The text is presented to the reader in the style of an anthropological document. At the beginning we are told that all the 'testimonies' (in forms of narratives) in the text have been discovered in the form of a book on a bookshelf in a Mauritian library in 1991. The testimonies belong to three individuals who lived in the 1980's. Due to the historical value they hold, the narratives have been published for the purpose of being studied by students in 2051. The three main narrators are: Fatma, Shynee and the psychiatrist of Shynee. As in *Soupir,* nature plays an important role in the text. The text could also be considered as a political manifesto due to the different references made to trade unions and labour parties.

My methodology comprises the comparison of two literary texts. The comparative approach that will use is the 'lens approach'. In other words, one text will be the 'lens' text *(Soupir)* and the other will be the 'core' text *(There is a Tide).* I will take *Soupir* in the first place and then project the findings on *There is a Tide*. This will be performed with the support of specific theoretical sources from ecocriticism and island studies. Island studies are quite a new field. An island studies perspective considers the specificities of the insular space. The notion of 'liminal space', drawn from Homi Bhabha and Edouard Glissant, will help me consider this perspective.

Due to the special attention given to the physicality of islands in colonial and postcolonial projects[85], an ecocritical analysis seems crucial if one wants to delve into the complexities of

[85] This was further explored in the 'Literature Review' chapter of this dissertation.

postcolonial islands' environments. Ecocriticism will allow me to 'examine the textualizations of the physical environment' in the chosen literary texts and 'to developed an earth-centered approach'[86]. Since metaphor is 'a particularly easy way of establishing […] connections between mind, body, and place'[87], I will use it in my literary analysis.

There are several reasons behind my attempt to engage in an ecocritical comparison of Collen's and Devi's works. First of all, in both texts, the environment plays an important role and it is nature which sustains the narratives. There are also historical similarities between Rodrigues Island and Mauritius. For example, they both lack a native population. Devi's extensive use of nature throughout *Soupir*, gives the reader the sense that it is not people who define the environment but it is the environment that defines people. This aspect of the text underscores the importance of the different ways in which the environment interacts with the characters, whereas the focus in *There is a Tide* is more on how nature is manipulated by individuals for political purposes. Therefore, to use *Soupir* as my 'lens' text allows me to be more critical towards how Collen articulates the Mauritian environment in relation to the characters.

The relationship between ecocriticism and island spaces has been explored in the literature review. I will thus now refer to my understanding of the notion of 'liminal space' and explain its connection with islands' environment.

My understanding of the liminal space relates to Homi K. Bhabha's proposal. Bhabha defines liminal spaces as places of transition. They are at the threshold between 'narratives of originary subjectivities' and 'the articulation of cultural difference'[88]. They are spaces whereby fixed meanings fade and melt and new cultural identity constructions could take place. These transitional spaces are fluid, hence allowing new formations of cultural identity:

> "[…] these 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself'[89].

[86] Oppermann, Serpil, 'Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder', *Journal of Faculty of Letters,* 16.2, (1999), 29-46, p. 5

[87] Ursula K. Heise, 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism', *PMLA,* vol. 121, no. 2, (2006), 503-516, (p.511)

[88] Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture,* (London- New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1

[89] Ibid, p. 1-2

Liminal spaces become also sites of contention.

The link between the notion of liminal space and island spaces is well articulated by Stephanides and Bassnett in "Islands, Literature and Cultural Translatability"[90]. They note that the metaphorical spaces which islands occupy in the literary (colonial) imagination can be defined as 'sites of mediation between cultures'[91]. The example of the traveller's cultural identity which gets reconfigured in an attempt to re-establish cultural difference is given. The boundaries between Self and Other continually shift in the island space and new cultural identity constructions are established. The island becomes a site where the negotiation of cultural identity encapsulates continual interface and exchange of cultural performances. They argue that the liminality of islands comes from the link which is made through 'the metaphoricity of floating or travelling islands with the translatability of culture' (8). The two main points which should be retained from their work are (1) culture proves to be translatable on islands and (2) metaphoricity plays a fundamental role in the production of liminality.

These two important points have been articulated by Edouard Glissant in his theory of 'relation' and in the way he viewed the postcolonial insularity as a resourceful space for creative re-imaginings of cultural identity. For him the environment of the Caribbean, which has been altered by the colonisation and which has been articulated only in terms of pain, should be metaphorically re-appropriated in literature. Following Bhabha's understanding of the liminal space as a transitional phase, this re-appropriation gives a liminal nature to the island environment for negotiating cultural identity.

This perspective will help me read through the representation of Rodrigues and Mauritius natural island settings as sites of recurrent metaphorical (re)negotiations.

[90] Stephanos Stephanides &Susan Bassnett, 'Islands, Literature, and Culture Translatability', *Transtext(e)s Transcultures,* (2006).

[91] Ibid, p. 8

3.0 *Soupir*'s Ecocritical Analysis

'Île réelle, irréalisée, rêvée, nous ne finirons jamais de la découvrir et de la haïr. Nous sommes faits pour vivre dans le transitoire. Pour construire des abris de fortune avec trois feuilles de tôle et quatre «gaulettes », posant dessus des bâches pour nous protéger de la pluie et prompts à les abandonner à chaque cyclone qui menace l'ile […]'[92].

3.1 Introduction

An ecocritical reading of *Soupir* underscores the power of metaphors in island spaces. Ananda Devi takes on an 'earth-centered approach'[93] to frame Rodrigues and its inhabitants. Nature influences all aspects of the characters' life, from daily sustenance to past memories. Its omnipresence is made succinct in the text. My argument is that Ananda Devi's excessive metaphorical constructions around the environment in *Soupir*, allow the reader to draw connections between social life and nature. Anthropocentric views of nature fade. Attention is then shifted to the role which the environment plays in cultural and identity negotiations in the island. The text's dystopian genre complicates preconceived colonial ideas about islands as paradisiac sites and invites new understandings of the space. The metaphorical negotiations of nature, which the author engages with, underscore the space's liminal qualities.

The main aim is to explore the relationship between metaphorical constructions and ecocriticism. The following paragraphs will focus on (i) the metaphorical constructions of Rodrigues' environment; (ii) the liminality of Rodrigues and (iii) zones of liminal tension. Attention will then be given to the insights which an ecological reading of the text provides. These insights will highlight my reading of *There is a Tide*.

[92] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 117

[93] Glotfelty, Cheryll & Fromm, Harold., eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press,1996), p.xviii

3.2 The Metaphorical Constructions of Rodrigues' environment

The physical description of Rodrigues' environment is done in a metaphorical manner. The technique takes its roots into colonial island topos, such as ideas of insularity and limitedness. 'The *topos* of the island' is argued to create 'bridges between the real and the imaginary […]'[94].The author reappropriates the topos to counter colonial views of islands as paradisiac. Instead the island becomes a dystopian space:

> La terre est enflée comme une langue qui n'a pas bu depuis longtemps. Le sable colle aux pores. Les horizons et les regards sont scellés. Au-dessus de nous, le ciel semble ouvert. Mais il n'y a rien d'ouvert, ici. Nous sommes nés enfermés[95].

In the above extract ideas of closure and limitedness are juxtaposed and create a contrast. For example, the word 'horizons', which connotes possibilities and unlimitedness, is juxtaposed to the word 'scellés' which connotes closure and fixity. The tension which such contradictions construct is embedded in the land itself: 'La terre est enflée comme une langue qui n'a pas bu depuis longtemps'. The environment of Rodrigues takes on new meanings which bridge the gap between the human world and the natural world. Throughout the text, similar constructs could be found. For example:

> Mer, soleil, sécheresse et cyclone. Nos quatres rythmes. Nos quatre points cardinaux. Ce qui nous faisait vivre et nous tuait tour à tour. Et nous entrions dans notre abrutissement avec nos yeux lavés de sel, nos silences de cœur, trop lourds, nos mains fripées de trop de mer (24).

The sea, the sun, droughts and cyclones, typical island weather conditions, take on meanings of life, death and sufferings.

It is interesting to note that no colonial infrastructures are mentioned in *Soupir*. Instead, it is the apparently 'unaltered' nature which reflects the colonial presence. This is done through a process of assigning history to the land orally. The young people are described as a forgetful generation in the text. The past is only uttered by the elders :

> Alors, on passait, on partait, on détournait les yeux du miracle du tamarinier, parce que pour une fois Matante Simone ne gémissait pas comme elle le faisait presque en permanence mais

[94] Stephanos Stephanides &Susan Bassnett, 'Islands, Literature, and Culture Translatability', *Transtext(e)s Transcultures,* (2006), p. 8

[95] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 13

parlait d'une voix douce et grave, racontait, car elle savait qu'il ne lui restait plus beaucoup de temps, les choses qu'elle avait envie de transmettre, la mémoire de ce qu'elle avait vécu, les temps inexorablement perdus de l'ile Rodrigues de sa jeunesse, et léguait à Marivonne cette charge brûlante comme si Marivonne devait être l'unique dépositaire des souvenirs de l'île et de tous ses êtres, de ses pierres et de ses éboulements[96].

Matante Simone on the verge of death, delivers past memory to Marivonne. Matante Simone is the main source of information about 'l'ile et de tous ses êtres, de ses pierres et de ses éboulements'. In this scene Matante Simone is ascribing history to the whole island and to what it contains. Through this transmission of memory, the past reflects on the present and the inhabitants of the island together with 'ses pierres et de ses éboulements' take on new definitions. Nature fixes the whole scene into the sacred and becomes a metaphor of past memory:

Le soleil les illuminait entre les balancements des branches et le ruissellement du vent et le froissement des vagues, le sable s'élevait en nuages fins autour de leurs chevilles, venait se poser sur leurs bras nus, saupoudrait leurs cheveux frisés, et elles parlaient, un murmure songeur et complice, un doux ronronnement de femmes […][97].

Further in the text, Constance, the old woman who led a solitary life in Soupir and who committed suicide, becomes the source of past memory. Her testimony to Ferblanc fills the historical gap which is felt in the text and meaning is assigned to the space that surrounds him:

[…] on travaillait le corps plié en quatre, tu ne peux pas savoir, Constance, ce que cela signifie, chaque bribe de ta chair se souvient de sa douleur, et de chaque douleur qui vient s'emboiter sur la précédente, mais c'était notre punition pour avoir bravé nos maitres, et surtout celui qui nous a jetés à Rodrigues comme des larves de crapaud dans un gué après qu'on a affronté ses yeux terribles, ses yeux vairons qui avaient l'air de rugir et de cracher la fureur du ciel[…]. […] il n'y avait aucun gardien, personne d'autre que l'ile déserte et les yeux du Maitre […][98].

[96] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 124

[97] Ibid, p.124

[98] Ibid, p. 166

The dryness of Soupir's soil becomes representative of colonial history. The knowledge of the past which Ferblanc and his friends receive from Constance enlightens them. History starts framing the environment:

> Il nous avait légué une mémoire ancestrale dont nous ne voulions pas. Il nous avait donné un passé qui oblitérait notre futur et nous obligeait à regarder en arrière, comme dans la légende de Pieter Both, pétrifiés par ce geste et par la dette terrible contractée par ce seul regard. Il avait imposé sur notre vision de soupir une autre image : celle d'un envol suspendu, d'un châtiment immérité qui trainait sa chaine expiatrice, des jumeaux oubliés à présent déterrés, et qui ne sortiraient plus jamais de nos consciences[99].

The mediation between past and present is the ghost of Constance. Constance and Matante Simon inhabit the liminal space of neither life nor death. This liminal space blurs fixed constructions and ideas and provides possibilities of rearticulations. New meanings are assigned to the environment through their liminal selves and Soupir becomes the physical metaphor of a colonial past and sufferings.

The relationship between nature and the human beings is also worth exploration. It is constructed on symbolical grounds. Regularly in the text, nature is compared to human beings or vice versa: « …les arbres ont des racines noueuses, faites pour s'agripper au sol, et les forêts de vacoas ont un crépitement de flammes. C'est exactement comme les gens d'ici. Ils ont les jambes et les pieds forts pour mieux s'agripper, et les yeux à la fois brulants et tristes »[100].

The condition of the human beings integrates the environmental condition of Rodrigues. The metaphorical here allows the barrier between nature and human physicality to fade away. They become one. The characters' feelings of desperation and sadness get reflected in the environment and the environment's dryness gets reflected in the characters' body:

> Le vent de Rodrigues souffle en nous, je le sais. Il nous prend les tripes et les serre, il nous dessèche de l'intérieur et le paysage aride qu'il dessine ainsi nous apprend des instincts de

[99] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 167

[100] Ibid, p. 13

survie que nous ne devinions pas. Nous sommes tranchants et impitoyables. Nous sommes les gardiens de notre terre. C'est le vent de Rodrigues, en nous[101].

The symbolical construction of Rodrigues by the author takes its roots into a relationship between the natural environment and the characters. Both of these entities are interdependent and they signify through each other.

[101] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 119.

3.3 The Liminality of Rodrigues' environment

Metaphorically porous, Rodrigues's nature reveals to have liminal qualities which allow the characters to negotiate their natural surroundings. My main aim here is to explore the processes of rendering environment liminal. My understanding of the notion of liminality draws on the idea of an inbetween space which favours fluidity and the overlapping of identities.

In different parts of the narratives a contrast is created between how locals perceive the island and how tourists experience it:

> Ça a l'air accueillant, rieur, un tout petit peu sauvage, juste de quoi plaire aux touristes qui viennent en plus grand nombre depuis qu'ils connaissent notre existence. Ils apportent de l'argent, un peu de peau blanche […], une autre façon de vivre, même lorsqu'ils croient mimer la nôtre. Ils apportent un air d'ailleurs, mais ils ne comprennent rien à l'air d'ici. On les regarde de l'autre côté d'une barrière qu'ils ne voient pas […][102].

This contrast between appearance and reality reveals a process of fixing the island into the pittoresque: "On croit que nous sommes des gens doux et accueillants. Le pittoresque, c'est ça qu'ils viennent chercher ici. *Letan lontan, letan margoz*. Temps des legumes amers. Mais nos legumes à nous ont toujours été amers »[103]. DeLoughrey explains that such process takes the 'isolation axiom to hyperbolic levels'[104] and therefore, fixes the island and its inhabitants in time. In *Soupir*, this process silences the inhabitants and opens up a liminal space for outsiders to assign colonial metaphors of exoticism to the environment.

A close reading of Pitié's rape by a tourist is insightful:

> La première fois qu'il l'avait prise, elle avait onze ans […]. Depuis ce jour-là, elle était devenue une enfant sauvage […] La première fois, il l'avait surprise marchant dans un bois à la recherche d'un cabri enfui. Lui était un touriste en quête de quelque chose d'éternellement absent. Il l'avait vue entre les branches et l'avait suivie pendant quelques minutes, puis, au moment où elle était entrée dans une déclivité remplie de fourrés, pensant sans doute que le cabri s'y était pris et ne pouvait plus sortir, il s'était jeté sur elle. […] Il l'avait prise

[102] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 24

[103] Ibid, p.25

[104] DeLoughrey, Elizabeth, 'Island Ecologies and Caribbean Literatures', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie,* vol. 95, no.3, (2004), 298-310, (300).

tranquillement, calmement déchirée en se délectant des vagues électrisantes de douleur parcourant son corps, avait éprouvé sachant qu'il pouvait tout lui faire et qu'elle ne tenterait qu'une minuscule égratignure sur son visage […]. Il était parti ensuite […] en jetant seulement sur son corps […] une serviette qu'il avait autour du cou parce qu'il était allé nager dans une crique non loin[105].

The rape scene is described through hunting imageries. The tourist 'l'avait surprise' in a forest near where she lived. He saw her 'entre les branches' and 'il s'était jeté sur elle'. Pitié becomes the prey and the tourist is the hunter. I support that the forest is transformed into a liminal space which is negotiated by the tourist. It allows him to assign meanings to the surrounding and to Pitié's body. He is described as being 'en quête de quelque chose d'éternellement absent' and Pitié's body, which is reinscribed in the liminal space of the environment , provides him 'un plaisir pareil à aucun autre à ainsi tenir cette chose cassable entre ses mains énormes'. The body of Soupir is given new meanings by the tourist. It becomes part of the natural environment and is consumed. We see that through such symbolical negotiation, the physical space of Soupir is experienced different ways.

Royal Palm is described as in perfect communion with the natural environment of Rodrigues. The reader is told that he was found by a woman in a bin near the beach as an infant. He was wrapped into a towel with the word 'Royal Palm' written on it. As he grew up the other inhabitants perceived him as an enigma: '[…] il agaçait le monde avec son insolence. On n'a jamais beaucoup aimé l'inconnu'[106]. The only legacy of his past is the 'Royal Palm towel'. His common loss of memory prevents him to build long-term knowledge about his past: 'Il aurait voulu se souvenir de tout, ne jamais rien oublier parce que cela lui donnerait une impression de continuité, sinon d'origine- mais cela aussi lui a été refusé'[107].

Given that the natural environment of Rodrigues in *Soupir* signifies through metaphors, it offers Royal Palm a liminal space to negotiate the absence of an 'origin' and to assign meaning to his life:

Il ne sait pas que cette horreur du poisson lui vient de la benne à ordures où il a été trouvé, et où il a côtoyé des viscères et des têtes de poisson qui pourrissaient au fil des heures […] et

[105] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p.131

[106] Ibid, p. 129

[107] Ibid, p. 90

que ses descentes dans les boyaux de la terre sont comme une plongée dans le dégoût, mais il y va quand même, parce que c'est une façon de ne pas s'oublier (90).

Mais personne ne devine l'envie d'inconnue qui le pousse à explorer les parties les plus intimes de l'ile, ses cathédrales de basalte souterraines, ses gorges intérieures qui se rétrécissent […][108].

I support that his whole being represents Rodrigues' environment liminality. His common loss of memory puts him in a constant liminal situation, inbetween past and present, whereby he is constantly experiencing his surrounding to create meaning.

Il escaladait les côtes, descendait les pentes, s'infiltrait à l'intérieur des rochers […]. Des caves obscures, aux parois scintillant à la lumière des lampes électriques […]. Des puits profonds dans lesquels il n'hésitait pas à descendre au bout d'une corde, pour en ressortir trempé et frissonnant de froid […][109].

In *Soupir,* nature is highly liminal and metaphorical negotiations are constantly being framed around it.

[108] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 91

[109] Ibid, p. 29

3.4 Zones of liminal tension

It is argued that 'the natural environment is constituted and constitutive of human history. As a process rather than a passive template, this indicates a particular dialectic between the land and its residents'[110]. In other words, human history could be read through the land. I argue that the metaphorical language which Ananda Devi uses to deal with the intricacies of slave history in *Soupir* produces tension.

The region of Soupir in the text could also be described as a liminal zone. It positions itself between past and present, and the real and the unreal. Meanings are constantly being negotiated and redefined. But it differentiates itself from other places in the text by the tension which emanates from it. I support that this tension comes from the author's ability to also include social context realities in her ecological articulation of the space. I suggest here to adopt an ecocritical reading of Soupir which values an 'interpretive strategy […] that would […] recognize that language cannot deliver the material world ("nature") free of linguistic, cultural, or social mediation and critical attention would thus be drawn to histories of change, social and environmental, for indication of the situations through which language has evolved"[111]. Devi's linguistic articulations of Soupir's environment encapsulates violence:

> Ensuite, avec une rage irraisonnée, nous nous sommes défoulés sur les lapins […] Mes mains tordaient leur cou fragile, cassaient net les pattes qui tentaient de se dérober, broyaient leur chair palpitante […]. Et, à la fin, Soupir dévasté comme un champ de bataille[112].

This bout of violence could argued to be a metaphorical representation of past suffering which affected individuals in Soupir. It is argued that the presence of violence in island literature reflects 'la violence du sol et de la nature; la fragilité du territoire physique'[113]. The killing of the rabbits reflects the violence which land of Soupir has experienced.

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[110] DeLoughrey, Elizabeth, 'Island Ecologies and Caribbean Literatures', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie,* vol. 95, no.3, (2004), 298-310, (p.229).

[111] Vital, Anthony, 'Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and *life &Times of Michael K, Research in African Literatures,* vol. 39, no. 1, (2008), pp 87- 106, (p. 89).

[112] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p.19

[113] Marimoutou, 'Littératures indiaocéaniques' in 'Les littératures indiaocéaniques', *Revue de littérature comparée,* 2, (2006), p.134

Another zone of liminal tension in the text is Bwa Mor. Bwa Mor, a secluded forest, is liminal because of its physical distinctiveness:

> Il est vrai que ces rangées d'arbres frappés d'immobilité créaient une impression d'irréalité, comme lorsqu'on entre dans un rêve et qu'on s'aventure dans des lieux où tous les sens sont éteints. On aurait dit qu'un volcan avait craché ici sa rancune et ses cendres et tout figé par des langues de feu […]. Personne ne savait ce qui s'était passé ici. C'était trop lointain et cruel […][114].

The physical description of Bwa mor places it in the in-between space of death and life. Its environmental features give it unnatural qualities which affect the individual. While walking in the forest, Patrice L'Eveillé felt the tension Bwa Mor encapsulates:

> […] j'ai marché parmi les ombres, sans aucun son, dans un silence tourbeux, et je me suis senti comme ces âmes errantes qui ne peuvent jamais mourir. Il m'a semblé que nous étions tous comme cela, à Rodrigues : des écorces vides, déjà mortes, qui ambulaient avec une immobilité dans le regard, le cœur pétrifié par une ancienne souffrance[115].

The forest becomes a physical metaphor of the slave past of Rodrigues. A past which is still unknown to most inhabitants of the island and which has not been resolved. Constance's ghost appears to Patrice in the wood and she tells him about Rodrigues' colonial past and how it has marked the whole environment: 'Tu sais que toutes les terres défrichées par des esclaves portent en elles la dureté de la pierre ? C'est inévitable. Leur cœur refusait ces terres, et ils y ont semé leur rage'[116].

The metaphorical language of Devi to articulate the environment in *Soupir,* is conscious of the complexity behind articulating a slave past because of 'the lack of power that characterize the position of slaves'[117]. This knowledge creates a tension which affects the way she symbolically assign meanings to nature.

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[114] Devi, Ananda, *Soupir,* (Editions Gallimard, « Continents noirs », 2002), p. 113

[115] Ibid

[116] Ibid, p. 115

[117] Prabhu, Anjali, 'Representation in Mauritian politics: Who speaks for the African pasts', *International Journal of Francophone Studies,* vol.8, no. 2, (2005), 83-197, (p. 190).

3.5 Conclusion: The resourcefulness of *Soupir*

Ananda Devi's work engage with the liminal traits of Rodrigues' environment. Her text draws succinctly the possibilities of reading and negotiating history through the land. *Soupir* is a resourceful text in ecocritcal terms due to its excessive use of nature. Literature provides a creative space which allows the author to create bridges between the real and the imaginary/surreal. Because of the prominent role of the environment in the text, the reader is led to pay special attention to the articulations of nature. The author's treatment of Rodrigues postcolonial landscape is knowledgeable of the important role which metaphorical constructs play in island discourses.

The main points which could be drawn from a close ecocritical reading of *Soupir* are:

(1) Metaphors become a useful tool in the hand of writers to articulate the postcolonial island environments;

(2) A symbolical negotiation of islands opens up liminal spaces which allow the production of new meanings;

(3) An ecocritical analysis should consider how the metaphorical language used by the author forms part of a discourse[118]. Locating the discourse helps interpreting the tensions which are framed within the liminal spaces of the island.

These insights will highlight my ecocritical reading of *There is a Tide*.

[118] In the case of *Soupir*, the discourse is located into the complexities of articulating a slave past.

4.0 There is a Tide

4.1 Introduction

As in *Soupir*, nature plays an important role in *There is a Tide*. Lindsay Collen's text is divided into three main narratives. Despite their apparent independent status, they are interrelated by the environmental thread. Collen's text points out to an interrelationship between the articulation of nature and the negotiation of cultural identity.

My main argument is that a comparative ecocritical reading of Lindsey Collen's *There is a Tide*, through the ecological framework of Ananda Devi's *Soupir*, underscores how cultural otherness is built and negotiated within the fractured postcolonial environment of Mauritius. This involves acknowledging the metaphorical power of the postcolonial island space; locating liminal spaces which are created in nature and considering the language used by the author as forming part of a wider discourse. This way of proceeding will allow me to delve into the complex relation between symbolic and cultural negotiation in liminal spaces. My core claim is that Lindsey Collen engages in a metaphorical negotiation of the environment in an act of cultural resistance. This reveals the liminal quality of the natural spaces of Mauritius.

This chapter is divided into five main parts: (i) The colonial landscape of Mauritius; (ii) Food: reconnecting with the Mauritian soil; (iii) The cyclone: national symbol; (iv) The sugarcane field and (v) Zones of liminal tension

4.2 The colonial landscape of Mauritius

Colonial landscapes signal a form of colonial presence in postcolonial settings. Landscapes are argued to be 'shaped as much by the ideologies and philosophies of the peoples who create them as by the practical work that brings them into physical existence'[119]. In other words, colonial landscapes symbolise the imaginative and physical representations of colonial endeavours. It is important to point out that 'the resident belonging to and being necessarily a part of his/her environment, […] envisions the landscape not only as a collection of physical forms, but as the evidence of what has occurred there'[120]. The colonial past of Mauritius in *There is a Tide* is visible through colonial infrastructures. I support that these types of infrastructures inscribe the colonizer-colonized binary in the environmental setting. They point to the inhabitants' position as 'Others'. William Howarth indicates that 'learning and writing [landscapes] become a way of mapping cultural terrain'[121]. We could then suggest that the author's choice to present such colonial landscapes indicates her will to point out how 'the memory of a colonial history [repeats] itself'.[122]

Following the forward chapter by Jaya Ng Sang (the elected reporter for the work chosen for 2051), the narratives of *There is a Tide* open with Fatma telling about Shynee's grand-father and father. This episode situates itself in the 1980's. Their surrounding is described in the following terms:

> They sat leaning on a thing called the *syen de plon*, which means "leaden dog", a relic of a giant iron bollard that ships used to tie themselves to...They were rather just turning their backs on the whole hurry of Por Lwi…They turned their backs on colonial statues. They turned their backs on the sugar barons headquarters, and on the more humble government headquarters, Government House…They stared at the horizon[123].

[119] Brayshay, Mark & Cleary, Mark, 'Shaping colonial and imperial landscapes', *Landscape Research,* 27:1, (2002), 5-10, (p.5).

[120] Maufort, Jessica, '"Man-as-Environment": Specialising Racial and Natural Otherness in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow*', *Ecozona,* vol. 5, no.1, (2014), (p.158).

[121] William Howarth- 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism'- in *The Ecocriticism Reader,* eds. Glotfelty Cheryll &Fromm Harold, pg 80 (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996)

[122] Poddar, Namrata, 'The islands Within: Alterity, Imperialism and the Metroport in Mauritian Fiction', *Dalhousie French Studies,* vol. 94, (2011), 39-51, (p.41).

[123] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.13

The '*syen de plon'* symbolizes the arrival of the conquerors in colonial ships or it could also reflect the arrival of slaves and indentured labourers by ships. It is interesting to note how the past and the present are performed through the environment. The colonial statues and sugar barons' headquarters are juxtaposed to 'the whole hurry of Por Lwi' on a normal working day. Fatma and Shynee decide to turn their backs to this landscape and stared at the horizon. The colonial infrastructures are not limited to Port-Louis. In the same chapter it is mentioned how "the traffic cop with his sirens on conducting the Prime Minister from the Governmental House on to the road to Vakwa"[124]. The road to 'Vakwa' leads to the Claris House which is the official residence of the President of the Republic and it is a colonial building.

At different instances in the text, the performance of everyday life is juxtaposed to the colonial landscape:

> A peanut seller, basket on his arm cried "stas sal, 'stas bwi". Dockers, heavy-bodied with overtime, formed groups under a giant tree between the post office and the fish-and-meat section of the bazaar, their *ruk* hooked into their trousers, and bought great plates of biryani from street sellers' trolleys. Cars hooted and revved up and accelerated and braked […]. Home-made tricycles plied their way through the day[125].

The colonial landscape of Por Lwi forms part of the daily routines of the inhabitants. This bridges the gap between cultural /social life and the environment. Collen's construction of the colonial landscape of Por Lwi as a metaphor for colonial past, resembles Ananda Devi's metaphorical construction of the colonial presence in *Soupir* because they both make use of the environment to negotiate past events.

I support that the juxtaposition of everyday life with the colonial landscape produces a liminal space where past and present overlap. It reflects "the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference […] [where] cultural value are negotiated"[126]. This juxtaposition opens up a liminal space where new ways to resist could be imagined. An ecocritical analysis of these liminal instances reveal the possibilities and complexities of negotiating cultural resistance through the natural environment.

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[124] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.15

[125] Ibid, p. 12

[126] Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture,* (London- New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 2

4.3 Food: Reconnecting with the Mauritian soil

Food position itself in the ecological, cultural and postcolonial discourses of *There is a Tide*. It serves as 'a form of cultural memory, a social and cultural condensate of the subsequent imports of plants, animals and people that shaped and reshaped Mauritian environment and culture over the centuries'[127]. Furthermore, food in the text consists of 'ingredients originally indigenous to the island and produce that was imported by various colonizers and immigrants, and mixing Creole, Chinese, European, African and Indian culinary traditions'[128]. Therefore, food is framed by the ecological history of the island and form part of the cultural memory of the inhabitants. I argue that it inhabits a liminal space whereby the fluidities of the past and present coexist and it is used by the author to negotiate resistance.

Through metaphorical constructs, the author places food at the intersection of oppression and resistance. Shynee Pillay (a.k.a Tiny Shynee) is the character who articulates cultural negotiations through food. In her written testimony, at the psychiatric hospital, the reader learns about her repudiation of milk. This comes from her childhood experiences. Her father was a milkman and due to sanitary reasons, extreme precautions were taken:

> At home, there was always milk, milk. Milk. Milk. "Wash your hands, Shy, before touching the milk or your father." The milk or your father. Something rings odd […]. Cleaning the milk container on the bicycle, cleaning the quarter measure […]. Taking shoes off before going into the kitchen, so the milk would be clean […]. Eating only vegetables so the milk would be clean enough to sell to clients. Meat and fish "bisayn". "Bisayn", relative to milk, was dirty[129].

Milk represents cleanliness and purity and takes on oppressive characteristics. The discourses around it treat Shynee as an 'Other' and classify her as dirty/ impure.

It could be argued that the author engages in a metaphorical construct whereby Shynee's rejection of milk symbolises a break away from the notion of an 'origin': '[…] milk was my first food, and I don't want to drink milk'[130]. Milk is the first food that a baby consumes and

[127] Mossner, Alexa Weik von , 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's There is a Tide', *English Studies,* 91:7, (2010), 761-775, (p. 762).

[128] ibid

[129] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.27

[130] Ibid, p. 27

it symbolises the link between a mother and her child. But here this significance is alienated. Milk also forms part of 'discriminatory cultural traditions'[131] in the text. Shynee refers to religious traditions which position women as 'Others' through ideas of purity:

> Anyway, to cut a long story short, you can't walk on fire or *lev kavedi* if you've got your periods. They're unclean. So it's an unclean thing to do. In any case, the milk in the lota on your head will go sour and everyone will know that you've got your periods […] Eating meat before walking on fire or before *lev kavedi* is unclean […]. Fasting is clean. Cleanliness is next to godliness. Being a woman is unclean. This is difficult to change[132].

The constant parallels between milk and cleanliness cause her to stop eating: 'Is eating unclean? I have stopped eating doctor, in order to be cleaner'[133].

She rejects food because of the 'mindless circuit of transnational production and consumption' of food and other cultural products 'of which she is part'[134]. Her anorexia is the consequence of her refusal to 'consume' the mass production of cultural products which is affecting the island: 'I have no objection to eating, to using food. I just happen to refuse to consume food. I am a producer. I work'[135].

However, like the other characters in *Soupir,* Shynee engages in a negotiation of the natural environment. Collen uses the relationship between local food and the natural world to engage Shynee in a rearticulation of her cultural identity. Through her reconnection with the natural surroundings, she reconnects with food:

> When I was little in Banbu we used to pick wild leaves, *bred malbar* from the ground, *bred murum*, from trees, *bred sonz* in the marshes, and *bred gandol*, and *bred batat*, and *bred martin*, and these were our vegetables, they grew by themselves and were free for the taking

[131] Mossner, Alexa Weik von , 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's There is a Tide', *English Studies,* 91:7, (2010), 761-775, (762).

[132] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p. 57-58.

[133] Ibid, p.59

[134] Mossner, Alexa Weik von , 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's There is a Tide', *English Studies,* 91:7, (2010), 761-775, (762).

[135] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.104.

[…]. We would go fishing at Kolonnday with a bamboo rod picked from the bamboo tufts at Lavalet […]. And we would drink milk from our cow […][136].

Such remembrance signifies the important role that the natural environment plays in the relationship between food and the individual. The food that Shynee used to like inscribes itself into Mauritius' fauna and flora. The act of remembering signals the framing of cultural memory which locates itself in the Mauritian natural world.

A decisive episode which permanently reconnected her with food was when she 'tasted' a dead animal. This action is the metaphor of Shynee's 'reconnecting with the Mauritian environment'[137] and with her cultural 'essence':

There was a catalyst. I have to admit it. It was a *tang* […]. It was a rotting *tang* […]. There's no smell as wild [...]. My head back, I sniffed deeply and loudly. I became like an animal, went down on all fours, and put my nose to the ground and sniffed out that dead and rotting tang […]. I picked it up in my mouth and bit into it. My teeth went through the prickly hair, through the flesh and crushed the bones. My top teeth clenched against my bottom teeth […]. It got my appetite back a little […]. Something was unblocked inside me[138].

Later we are told that she hunt another tang in her back garden and that 'something else was unblocked in [her]'[139].The "tasting" and hunting of the "tang" becomes a metaphor for a reconnection with the 'Mauritian soil'.

Food in *There is a Tide* is a paradox. It can oppress but it is also a liminal zone which it relates to the Mauritian environment. As Mossner[140] argued, food represents cultural memory and by (re)connecting with nature, Shynee reconnects with her alienated cultural self.

[136] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p. 105

[137] Mossner, Alexa Weik von, 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's There is a Tide', *English Studies,* 91:7, (2010), 761-775, (p. 774).

[138] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.173-175.

[139] Ibid, p. 175

[140] Mossner, Alexa Weik von, 'Of Sweatshops and Cyclones: Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Ecology in Lindsey Collen's There is a Tide', *English Studies,* 91:7, (2010), 761-775.

4.4 The cyclone: The Birth of a National Symbol.

Cyclones, which are typical island weather conditions, play an important role in *There is a Tide*. They are known to have influenced colonial projects. We know that, for example, they have been chief discouraging motifs for Dutch and Portuguese travellers to establish settlement on Mauritius. They are used by the author to frame the historical and cultural memory of the inhabitants.

I support that they act as bridges between past and present in the text. Common references to cyclones point to their importance in the collective memory of the nation:

> Fatma: "She and I were left all alone in the cyclone. Together, the two of us. Alone. Sheila and me. And the 1945 cyclone. The most worstest cyclone ever, girl. They say there is no such thing as the worst. I can believe it. But old people said it was worse than the 1892 cyclone. I wasn't there in 1892, so I don't know"[141].

Cyclones form part of islander's reality and it could be argued that they influence perceptions of the inhabitants. They are examples of how nature frames the social life of people. In the text, we see how they are ingrained into ways of livings of the inhabitants:

> 'It's the cyclone. It's coming […]. The sounds of preparations started. Fisherman gathering on the beach […]. People shouting to one another from straw roof tops, as they battened down the flimsy houses'[142].

It is argued that memories 'of landscapes constitute social narratives of heritage and cultural identity'[143]. The aftermath scene of the cyclone, as described by Fatma, shows how this natural calamity impacted how she experienced her surroundings and it framed her memory of that event:

> I walked into a desolate scene. The trees were all naked outlines […] .Spears piercing the sky. Stark. Naked. It looked like after a holocaust. The earth was thick with green pulp.

[141] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p. 99

[142] Ibid, p. 51

[143] Tolia-Kelly, Divya P, 'Landscape, race and memory: biographical mapping of the routes of British Asian landscape values', *Landscape Research,* 29.3, (2004) 277-292, (p. 289)

Leaves six inches thick everywhere. Mixed in with mud. People just clustered in a space […]. Where a house had been, huddled a miserable family[144].

Cyclones bridge the gap between human and animal/vegetal worlds:

Fatma: "Then gradually we got covered in shredded leaves from every known tree in Flikanflak. The bits of leaves blew through the gaping hole where there had been thatch, and these same bits of leaves stuck to our naked bodies. We became a kind of vegetal creature, and even smelt of this mashed up, smashed up greenery. All those crushed leaves let off a green pong of life. Raw […]. The two of us and the animals, all of us covered in bits of leaf[145].

I argue that this is how the cyclone takes its liminal qualities in *There is a Tide*. It's a space which cannot be grasp and where new definitions can be formed and negotiated.

The birth of the Broken man (Shynee's father) during a cyclone is metaphorically loaded. He is defined in the narrative as a national hero and has 'history imprinted on him'[146]. He will lead a revolution against sugarcane barons. The moment Sheila (the Broken man's mother) gave birth, the atmosphere changed:

As she was calmed down, as she prepared to give birth, the sound of the cyclone, without any warning, quite suddenly, the sound of the violent gusts, receded into the distance. We could hear it moving away. "It's gone", she said. "Oh no", I said, 'only going past. It's the eye'. "We were in the eye of the cyclone. Suddenly everything was still. A stillness you can never know. Nothing moved anymore. We all sat perfectly still[147].

The birth of the Broken man in the eye of the cyclone could be interpreted as a national symbol which would bring deliverance from the wrath of oppression.

Therefore, cyclones play an important role in the text and are used by the author to create liminal negotiations.

[144] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p. 135.

[145] Ibid, p. 102

[146] Ibid, p. 53

[147] Ibid, p. 123-124

4.5 The sugarcane field

The sugarcane field in *There is a tide* is ambivalent. It is representative of past sufferings but is also a site where new narratives are being rearticulated, hence also dwells in liminality. It could be described as forming part of the colonial landscape of Mauritius. It gains its liminal qualities through the way the author articulates the past and present simultaneously through it. Sugarcane fields are clear examples of altered landscapes of postcolonial islands because 'the monoculture plantocracy violently altered the natural and social environment'[148]. They are also symbolical of loss of cultural identity of indentured labourers and slaves. I support that through a metaphorical renegotiation of the sugarcane field, the author creates new narratives which counter the colonial presence.

The field is a site whereby past memories meet, which creates a form of collectiveness. At several instances in the text attention is given to the common pasts which indentured labourers and slaves share:

> They went on the tunnelling away on all fours through the cane until they were at the right place[…]. It was next to the *mel*, a great pile of rocks, cleared just like thousands of others like it, from the cane fields by generations of slaves and indentured labourers, and piled into pyramids[149].

The burning down of the field, by Ghandhi and his friend Tikey, is symbolical of resistance against the field owners who exploit workers. It is also interesting to consider the description of the space in which Fatma orally narrates about Shynee's grandfather (Ghandhi) and father (the Broken man), who both resisted oppression. The background encapsulates sugarcane mills and fields. It is argued that the 'oral story telling' situates itself 'between creation and tradition, between memory and invention"[150]. Therefore, through her narratives, Fatma invests her surrounding with new meanings. The oppressive presence of the sugarcane mills and fields is symbolically negotiated.

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[148] Cilano, Cara and DeLoughrey, Elizabeth, 'Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment,* 14.1, (2007), p.78.

[149] Collen Lindsey, *There is a Tide*, (Mauritius: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 1990), p.24

[150] Williams- Wanquet, Eileen, ' "Anti-novel" as ethics: Lindsey Collen's *The Rape of Sita, Connotations,* vol. 15-1-3, (2005-2006), p. 204

The sugarcane field in *There is a Tide* gets its liminal qualities by being a site where past and present meet. The author successfully reinscribes meaning to it and transform it into a national symbol for unity. However, it can also reflect tension in the Mauritian context. This aspect will be explored in the following chapter.

4.6 Zones of liminal tension

I support that the metaphorical language used by Collen to articulate the environment of Mauritius forms part of a discourse. This standpoint was first explored in *Soupir*. To explore the liminal tension in *There is a Tide*, I propose an ecocritical analysis which acknowledges 'the complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and how language both shapes and reveals such interactions'[151]. It is interesting to see how Collen negotiates her political ideals through the environment. In order to understand this process, it is important to refer to the social context *There is a Tide* was published.

The book was published in early 1990's. During this period, Mauritius went through an economic boom in the textile industry. However, the gap between poor and rich got wider and the island started to feel the negative impacts of globalisation[152]. I suggest that her metaphorical negotiations around food, cyclones and the sugarcane field point to her political will to construct a collective Mauritian identity. The natural environment of Mauritius becomes the site where articulations of resistance against the legacy of (neo)colonialism are formulated. Despite her apparent success to narrate a national narrative that celebrates unity and re (connection) with the Mauritian soil, a tension within the liminal spaces could still be perceived.

Several anthropological researches have pointed how the Mauritian society is highly marked with ethnic and cultural negotiations. Some studies have described Mauritian public spaces as liminal. It is argued that within these spaces, the ambivalence around ethnic relations could be perceived[153]. I support that such reality is absent from the work of Collen. In her attempt to construct a unifying national narrative, she is oblivious of the complexities of the Mauritian public spaces and therefore, (re) articulates the natural environment in a non-problematic way.

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[151] Anthony Vital, 'Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and *life &Times of Michael K, Research in African Literatures,* pp.90, vol. 39, no. 1, 2008, pp 87- 106.

[152] Jeffery, Laura, *Chagos Islands in Mauritius and the UK: Forced Displacement and Onward migration,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.29

[153] Reena Dodson- 'Beaches and Breaches: Articulations and Negotiations of Identity, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism in Mauritius', Limina- *Special Edition,* 2007.

It is argued that "… any attempt to represent the pluralism of Mauritius must contend with the complex history of 'representation' itself within this postcolonial nation"[154]. Thus, I suggest that a critical approach towards Collen's metaphorical language to articulate the environment should pay attention to the dilemmas of representation in Mauritius. Daily ethnic performances take place in Mauritius. These performances include 'first names and surnames- clothing, jewellery, phenotypes features (that is, physical appearance), as well as religion and religious practices'[155]. All these are said to be used to signify ethnic difference. Paying attention to these performances in the text, expands the ecocritical reading of *There is a Tide* and underscores tension in the liminal spaces of the Mauritian environment.

As mentioned earlier, in an attempt to resist (neo)colonial forces that affect Mauritius and its inhabitants, the author constructs national narratives through the liminal spaces of the environment. For example, local food leads to a (re)connection to a form of 'Mauritian essence'. The meaning of cyclones is redefined and signifies the birth of a hybrid national hero. And the sugarcane field becomes the site where past collective memories suffering meet and where, in an act of resistance, fire is set to the field by the descendants of slaves and indenture labourers. The author's constant juxtaposition of individuals from different ethnic groups in situations of resistance clearly mark her endeavour to create a 'Mauritian nation'. Collen's language to articulate the environment could be position in a nationalist discourse.

One should notice ethnic performances in the text, despite Collen's will to create a unifying concept of the Mauritian society. To do so, I suggest to focus on specific instances in text where the ambivalences of history could be perceived.

The indo-Mauritians, in their attempt to rebuild an identity into the land and redefine their status, have weave their fight into the 'Mauritian national romance of indenture'[156]. In other words, Mauritian national narratives have been constructed on Indo-Mauritian ideals of repossessing the land and resisting colonialism. In such narratives, sugarcane fields become symbolical. Abhimanyu Unnuth '*Sueurs de sang'*[157] exemplifies how the 'indenture romance'

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[154] Anjali Prabhu, 'Representation in Mauritian politics: Who speaks for the African pasts', *International Journal of Francophone Studies,* vol.8, no. 2, 2005, 183-197, (p. 183)

[155]Reena Dodson- 'Beaches and Breaches: Articulations and Negotiations of Identity, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism in Mauritius', Limina- *Special Edition,* 2007, p. 5.

[156] Ibid, p. 32

[157] Abhimanyu Unnuth '*Sueurs de sang,* (Stock, 2001).

was constructed around sugarcane fields. In his text the field represents suffering but is also (re)appropriated by the indenture labourers. They become sites where resistance takes place. The Mauritian soil is argued to be 'forever bound to the Indian'. It is an 'ethnic space, a space that they would be devoted and loyal to. The cult of new soil, Mauritian soil, fixed the Indo-Mauritian identity, inflating the myth of the symbolical appropriation of the island as theirs'[158].

The psychiatric doctor, who belongs to the Indo-Mauritian community, mention that his father worked on a sugar estate as a *Sartye*, which means that he transported canes from the fields to the mills. This status allowed him to save some money and to buy land. This money allowed the psychiatric doctor to study abroad and to experience social mobility. I suggest that this exemplifies the Indo-Mauritians have been able to negotiate their social status by owning land.

The complexity for slave descendants to articulate the land is well represented in Ananda Devi's *Soupir*. But such a reality is elided by Collen. In several instances in the text, the author mentions the slave past. For example, the accumulated rocks in the middle of the field which is associated to slaves' bad working and living conditions. In *There is a Tide*, Françoise, the psychiatric doctor's mistress, refuses to speak Kreol and shows a deep concern about light skin colour. Françoise, who belongs to the Creole community (descendants of slave) is portrayed to be able to negotiate her identity on language issues but not in relation to the environment.

I support that the liminal tension in *There is a Tide* is situated within the author's uncritical articulation with the Mauritian environment. By creating a national narrative through the liminality of the Mauritian environment, she does not engage with the complexities of Mauritian public spaces.

[158] Teena Dewoo, 'The Coolitude of Coolietude: The (re)negotiation of the Indian Identity in Mauritius', *Counter- cultures in Contemporary Africa,* 2012, p.8

4.7 Conclusion

An ecocritical reading of Collen's text clearly points to the liminal qualities of the Mauritian environment. Like Rodrigues in *Soupir*, nature in *There is a Tide* signifies through metaphorical constructs. These constructs are linked to a colonial past.

Colonial presence is established in the environment. We see how this presence impacts the cultural memory of the inhabitants. The translatable nature of the Mauritian environment becomes the means through which the author is able to resist the colonial presence and invest new cultural meanings to the environment.

However, an exploration of the 'environmental discourse emerging in response to local conditions'[159] proves to be useful to read hidden intricacies in the text. Like Devi, Collen's metaphorical language forms part of a discourse and is subjective. Behind the linear ecological national narrative, unresolved histories hide. Therefore, Collen's narrative portrays the complexities of articulating the environment of a multi-ethnic society.

[159] Anthony Vital, 'Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and *life &Times of Michael K*, *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 39, no. 1, 2008, 87- 106, (p.100)

5.0 Discussion

Using *Soupir* as my 'lens' text to read *There is a Tide* has proved useful. Ananda Devi showcases a good understanding of the creative opportunities which the island space can provide. Devi's excessive use of island *topoi* to articulate the environment allows her to successfully manipulate the metaphorical qualities of Rodrigues's space. The presence of, for example, ghosts and surreal descriptions of Rodrigues's landscape in the text highlight the possibilities for authors to create liminal instances in natural spaces where new meanings could be created. A particular attention could then be given to specific environmental articulations in Collen's text. For example, cyclones and food could be interpreted from an ecocritical perspective. An ecocritical reading shows how Collen is also focused on the possibilities that the Mauritian environment, as a 'plantation space', could offer. Both authors' creative engagement supports Glissant's perspective.

Colonial fixing of the environment

Both Mauritian authors discuss how the postcolonial environment of islands 'others' the islanders. Homi Bhabha suggests that 'an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological constructions of otherness'[160]. He further supports that 'fixity' connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well […] daemonic repetition'[161]. In other words, the process of 'othering' pushes individuals into mobility and forces them to signify repeatedly in the same way. As we have seen, both the Mauritian and the Rodriguese environments reflect such qualities in the texts. In *Soupir*, the island is fixed by the gaze of outsiders (tourists). The way they read and experience the island's fauna and flora reflects colonial stereotypes of islands as stuck in time or as savage. On the other hand, the colonial setting of Mauritius in *There is a tide* is done through colonial infrastructures. Such infrastructures, as explored in the previous chapter, mark the colonial presence in the daily life of the inhabitants. Forming part of the Mauritian landscape, the colonial infrastructures signifiers are based on this binary opposition. In order to counter such 'environmental-othering' processes, the authors find new ways of engaging with the environment thus constructing new forms of ecological depictions.

[160] Bhabha Homi, 'The Other Question', (N.D.A), p.1.

[161] Ibid, p. 1

Metaphorical language and discourse

An ecocritical analysis which acknowledges the 'complex interplay of social history with the natural world'[162] raises awareness about how both authors' style and rhetorical choices form part of a discourse. I support that both texts exemplify how 'language cannot deliver the material world ("nature") free of linguistic, cultural, or social mediation'[163]. In other words, the way the authors will articulate the natural world will be influenced by specific discourses. A non-anthropocentric approach to nature underscores the authors' social and political engagement. Ananda Devi clearly negotiates the slave memory and the impacts this has on Rodrigues. She advocates for a reconnection with the past in order to define the present. In an interview, she said that *Soupir* is about 'un voyage dans la mémoire. Ce sont des gens qui descendent des esclaves et qui ont été amenés là par des colons. Pendant très longtemps ils ont un peu oblitéré cette mémoire de l'esclavage […]. A travers ce roman je dis qu' il faut accepter cela, qu'il faut aller vers la reconnaissance de ce qui nous constitue pour pouvoir aller plus loin, vers la connaissance de soi-même'[164]. This ideological standpoint is made clear through the metaphorical language she chooses in order to discuss Rodrigues's environment. Collen's political stand also influences her expression in *There is a Tide*. She creates a form of 'Mauritianess' which is established through a reconnection with the Mauritian natural environment.

However, Devi's dystopian genre stresses the complexity to conciliate slave past with the land due to a lack of memory. My claim at this point is that her dystopian approach draws attention on Collen's apparently unproblematic negotiation of nature. Elizabeth DeLoughrey says that 'an ancestral relationship to place' would lead to 'challenges posed by its discursive recuperation'[165]. In other words, the enunciation of the land is always influenced by past discursive constructions which happened around it. Dana Haraway suggests that 'nature is that which we cannot not desire. Excruciatingly conscious of nature's discursive constitution

[162] Vital, Anthony, 'Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and "Life & Times of Michael K", *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 39, no. 1, (2008), 87- 106, (p. 90).

[163] ibid

[164] Commentaires d'Ananda Devi recueillis par Ainize Butron, 'Le travail d'un écrivain, est d'explorer quelque chose de nouveau', *Le Journal du pays basque,* 2002. En ligne sur : <http://www.lejournaldupaysbasque.fr/article.php3?id article=165>

[165] DeLoughrey, Elizabeth and Hondley, George B., eds., *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 108

as 'other' in the histories of colonialism, racism, sexism and class domination of many kinds, we nonetheless find […] something we cannot do without, but can never "have"'[166]. Therefore, nature cannot be possessed due to the multiple discourses on and around it. Its negotiation is complex. As I have explored in my analysis of *Soupir*, Devi foregrounds such complexity through, for example, bouts of physical violence. And this creates a tension in the liminal spaces.

On the other hand, Collen uses a more linear discourse in her depictions of the Mauritian environment. The tension in *There is a Tide* seems to be related to an opposition between colonizers and colonised. As I have explored in the previous chapter, all her hypotheses are meant to resist neo-colonial forces. This leads to the celebration of creolisation and unity among the inhabitants. The topic of creolisation is, for example, celebrated by mentioning local prescriptions (which are composed of local ingredients) throughout the text. Shynee's reconnection with the Mauritian fauna and flora allows her to resist the effects of globalisation. However, in her endeavour to 'imagine'[167] a liberated nation through a repossession of the Mauritian land by the people, the author neglects the complexities which surround the articulation of a postcolonial, multi-ethnic island nation (this issue will be further unpacked in the following section of this chapter). As a consequence, she frames a linear ecological narrative. I argue that this is where the liminal tension can be placed.

[166] Haraway, Dana, *Promises of Masters,* in DeLoughrey, Elizabeth and Hondley, George B., eds., *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 296.

[167] I am here referring to Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined nation (Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism,* (London: Verso, 1991*)*. She contends that the idea of forming part of a nation is part of a signifying process where signs are being manipulated to form meaning.

The resourcefulness of an ecocritical reading of the Mauritian environment:

An ecocritical reading of *There is a Tide* highlights the strong liminal qualities of the Mauritian environment. As we have explored in the text, the liminal space to which belongs the island's natural world, is used to negotiate cultural otherness. Through the use of metaphors, the author inscribes the production of cultural otherness within the Mauritian landscape. The negotiation of culture through the environment in the text bridges the gap between nature and culture. In different instances, we see how the environment, for example the cyclone, infiltrates the cultural memory of the inhabitants. The author inscribes cultural identity into the island's territory.

By problematizing Collen's linguistic choices, the multi-ethnic island environment shows it complexity. Knowledge of how the Mauritian environment has been discussed in the past and how cultural groups have articulated it in their cultural narratives, supports my ecocritical analysis. Some instances, which do not seem meaningful in the text, bring in information about the issues surrounding land negotiation. Acknowledging what ethnic identity signifies in the Mauritian public space is also important. It allows us to locate the characters and delve deeper into such interpretations. By leaving out such complexity in the portrayal of the environment, the author narrows the resourcefulness of the Mauritian environment.

Homi Bhabha's definition of the liminal space as a site where cultural identities overlap has proved useful to engage with the Mauritian environment. By using the liminal space of nature to articulate cultural belonging to the land, the author brings in new insights about ways of defining cultural identity in Mauritius. But the author's non-engagement with the complexities underlying the negotiations of the environment for the sake of a linear national narrative could be problematized. I propose that the liminal space of the Mauritian environment could become a privileged space which belongs to those who can manipulate language at the expense of those who can't. Collen is the one manipulating the metaphorical potential of language; therefore she has the authority to represent the land. Her negotiation of cultural otherness which is inscribed in the Mauritius reinforces 'the very binaries that undergird hegemony in the first place'[168].

[168] DeLoughrey, Elizabeth and Hondley, George B., eds., *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

6.0 Conclusion

An 'earth-centred' approach to read the liminal qualities of Mauritius' and Rodrigues' space has been the focus of this dissertation. In *Soupir* and *There is a Tide*, the environment is articulated as an entity where otherness is inscribed. Both authors of these works acknowledge this and engage in recurrent metaphorical (re) negotiations of nature. My choice of using Ananda Devi's work as my 'lens' text to reflect on *There is a Tide* underscores the complexities and intricate cultural articulations regarding the Mauritian natural environment. Mauritius's environment, like that of Rodrigues' in *Soupir*, has shown to be metaphorically and physically marked by the colonial past. Both texts clearly underscore how the environment links the past to the present. However, Collen's text highlights visibly the difficulties to discuss the environment of a multi-ethnic insular territory. Liminal spaces represented by and through islands should be read and discussed with caution. They could be considered as creative means of political resistance but they could also replicate oppressive colonial stances.

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