Abstract. Mauritius is a former French and British colony in the Indian Ocean. Now, this island has become a multicultural and multi-ethnic society due to several waves of immigration from Europe, Africa and Asia, all through the past three centuries. Each wave of immigration brought in new people along with their cultures, religions and languages. Nevertheless, not all the migrants settled in Mauritius of their own accord. Some were slaves; some came as free workers and others as colonisers. Today, in Mauritius, the differences in the arrival of modern Mauritians' ancestors are still felt like balls and chains for some communities, or else some sub-communities. Colonisers came to Mauritius bringing in slaves, hence starting imperialism, or in other words, colonialism, to qualify the domination of so-called strong people over so-called weaker people. That situation paved the way for the foundation of Mauritius. Without colonisation and colonialism, Mauritius might not have existed as it is today. However, the modern multi-ethnic Mauritius has not yet overcome the consequences linked to colonialism because an invisible ethnic group named Creole is now facing what is referred to as the malaise creole. This condition might be the fact that: The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves, as Frantz Fanon put it. Indeed, a lot of modern Creoles, but not all of them, have slaves' ancestors. However, this malaise, linked to one ethnic group, might as well be the malaise of an entire population.

Introduction
This paper deals with the way the Mauritian population was built out of colonialism but at the same time how post-colonialism has left the country in a mess. Although we will keep in mind that Mauritius is not the only country of the Commonwealth to be in this situation. The best example seems to be India and Pakistan, the two former parts of the Empire. The former is left with a major group of Hindus and a minor group of Muslims, while it is the other way round for the latter. Post-colonialism has left these groups to forced cohabitation; almost the same situation prevails in Mauritius.

This island-country is a multicultural and multi-ethnic society resulting from several waves of immigration from Europe, Africa and Asia, all through the past three centuries. Each wave of immigration brought in new people along with their cultures, religions and languages. Its flag – with red, blue, yellow and green horizontal stripes – allegedly reflects the various ethnic groups living there today. Red was said to represent the Hindus or the Chinese, blue stands for the Creoles, yellow supposedly represents the Telegus or the Tamils – two Indian sub-groups, though they are often identified as Hindus – and green stands for the Muslims – this group is also part of the Indian immigrants' descendants, but they shared completely opposed faith with the whole Hindu's group. The flag also allegedly reflects the four symbols, which recount the Mauritian history. In this other way of interpreting the colours, red stands for the colour of blood shed for the island's development and allegedly, for its independence, blue represents the crystal colour of the sea and the sky. The yellow colour is for the ever-shining sun, which also represents life, and green represents the sugar cane that used to be the island's economic backbone and the luxuriant nature of the island. However, these are definitely viewed as tales rather than true stories; these are not the 1968 view when Mauritius became independent. When the flag was introduced to the Mauritians, it was said that “red” represented the struggle for independence. However, there had been no struggle. In this work, I rely on interviews and observations I made from 2008 to 2012. I interviewed 43 people

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from various backgrounds, in different parts of the island and from all the ethnic groups, using the unstructured interview method and 98 questionnaires.

Hence, I will first focus on the various waves of colonisation in Mauritius making it a multicultural society. Then, I will study how the diverse ethnic groups live alongside each other nowadays, in post-colonialism era. Finally, I will study the colonial legacies behind, and the bearing of, slave descendants’ family and sub-group names today.

The Making of Mauritius: a Multicultural Society

Mauritius was once said to be inhabited, though sailors would stop over on their way to Asia for a provision of fresh water and for meat. However, not all the migrants, who first settled in Mauritius, did it of their own accord. Some came as slaves, others as free workers, as adventurers or as colonisers. Therefore, today we can ask ourselves whether these differences continue in modern Mauritius. Do the descendants of the different groups have equal opportunities in today’s Mauritius because as Frantz Fanon put it: The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves. Do the descendants of the oppressed still feel oppressed today? Of course, there is neither slaves nor slave-owners anymore, but today there are groups, that can be referred to as, ethnic groups and others, that can only be called groups, living alongside each other on a very small surface. Among the groups, one is seen as a majority group in terms of number and of political power and there are many other minority groups. The majority group is the Hindu; some came to Mauritius; others were brought in, but even though they were originated from different parts, yet they all came from the same country, which is India. This is unlike the group known as Creoles in modern Mauritius. It is certain that not all the groups living in Mauritius can be called “ethnic groups” according to definition. The definition of “ethnic group” used to be based on shared culture by all members of a group, but nowadays it is more and more difficult to justify this position (Eriksen 1993: 33). As Professor Eriksen put it, the sharing of cultural traits frequently crosses group boundaries and, moreover, people do not share all their ‘cultural traits’ with the same people. One may have the same language as some people, the same religion as some of those as well as of some others (Eriksen 1993: 33-4). Maybe the descendants of those who came to Mauritius, where they were considered less than animals, and who represent today the second biggest group, are still feeling the malaise linked to the way their ancestors arrived. However, the group known as Creole today in Mauritius is one where we can find all people who cannot be put in the other groups; they are seen as the residues of the other groups. Even for census, they are classified as “general population” along with the Whites who represents more or less 1% of the population, revealing somehow a lack of proper status or denomination. Still, in Mauritius, one may be confused by a Creole because the latter can be mistaken for a Hindu, a Muslim, a Chinese, depending on his or her facial features and skin colour. Creoles are often a mix of either two or several groups in Mauritius; some have African ancestors; others do not, that complex definition of a Creole is one of the reasons why it is difficult to qualify them as a community or an ethnic group. Today, how do they live this reality, which started during the colonial era? Have the Creoles as slave descendants overcome the legacy of their ancestors?

In this paper, I will focus on the making of a multi-ethnic Mauritius, but first I will put forward a simple definition of the term “Creole” in order to understand who they are and some of the reasons for the so-called malaise creole. Then, I will study how the ethnic groups live alongside each other nowadays, in the post-colonial era. Finally, I will study colonial legacies to the Creoles, in terms of social opportunities and for instance, in the bearing of, slave descendants’ names today.

Colonisers came to Mauritius bringing in slaves, displaced people from their motherland, hence starting imperialism, or in other word, colonialism, to qualify the domination of the so-called strong people over the so-called weaker people. That situation paved the way for the foundation of Mauritius and for the situation of Mauritians today. While working on the Mauritian situation today, it is obvious that had it not been for colonisation and colonialism, Mauritius would never have existed.

This research is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. I focused my research on interviews, as well as on casual discussions with people on the streets and in malls in Mauritius, where I gathered several important elements for this paper. I targeted people of all groups, whether they could be considered to belong to an ethnic group or just to communities and groups, people residing in different parts of the island, in urban and rural areas. Among the people, I interviewed there were three who seemed to be directly concerned with the malaise creole. The first one was Kaya’s wife, Mrs Topize. To my mind, it was important to pay attention to her opinion concerning the Creoles situation today because she is the wife of a man who died in prison. Her husband was a
Rasta is a sub-group of Creole, which came into existence with the popularisation of Rasta culture in Mauritius and the invention of the seggae in the 1980s. It developed in specific groups of Afrokreols (Creoles who claim to be of African origin) in Port-Louis. They claim their affiliation to Africa, they show their pride to have slave ancestors and they claim to perpetuate the lineage of the Maroons and the slaves. They are quite despised by other Mauritians and they have to face racial discrimination, even among the other sub-groups of Creole. Kaya was allegedly beaten to death in prison by police officers, in 1999. According to his wife, he was a man of peace, willing to gather, not only all the Creoles but also principally all Mauritians alike. His death provoked riots in Mauritius, not only from the Creoles but from the other groups as well. It was alleged by some people that riots broke out mainly because people were fed up with police violence, but a survey showed that more Creoles die in prison under police violence compared to the other ethnic groups. I also interviewed Mr. José Rose, who is said to be the Rasta's president. The third person I met was Mr. Bancoult, who defends the Chagossians' right in Mauritius as well as their right to go back to their homeland from where they were deported. Mr. Bancoult qualifies himself as the president of the Chagossians.

A priest named Roger Cerveaux, in the 1990s, coined the malaise creole. He died in May 2013. During his priesthood, he fought for the right of the slave descendants, putting forward the fact that they are now in an awful situation because of post-colonialism and the trauma linked to slavery that their ancestors underwent. Hence, they are facing direct post-colonial traumas. What is a trauma? According to psychiatrists, sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows can cause trauma for external events may quickly be incorporated into the mind. The ancestors of the Creoles underwent a series of physical as well as emotional blows and they seem to have transmitted the feelings of these blows from generation to generation. However, according to Bloom, the trauma itself does not cause the damage. It is the way the individual's mind and body react in its own unique way to the traumatic experience in combination with the unique response of the individual's social group that causes the damage. In Mauritius, nothing has been done so far to allow the slave descendants to overcome the damage caused by the traumas their ancestors encountered. Instead, some sub-groups of Creoles seem crushed as if they inherited of the balls and chains from their ancestors.

In order to understand the malaise creole, we need first to understand the meaning of Creole in general as well as in its specific ways in Mauritius.

The term Creole was first coined by Spanish and Portuguese colonisers and borrowed into French during the seventeenth century. It was used to qualify people born in Islands, any of them, not only Mauritius, in other words, it used to qualify any white people born outside France or any other European countries. It was first applied to European settlers and not to black people. Then the term was later used to separate the slaves born in the islands from the slaves who had just arrived in the islands and who originated from Africa or elsewhere. The slaves, who were not born in the colonies but who were taken from Africa, were called Bossales. That was the reason why there were slaves who were referred to as Creole in Mauritius, soon after the beginning of the French settlement, in the 18th century, unlike the Indians immigrants, who were originated all from a single country, India. The slaves were taken from different countries, inside these countries they were ripped from different tribes, which had no shared customs and no shared cultures. Some other slaves were also taken from other colonies where they were born from African slave parents. Contrary to other groups that settled in Mauritius, those who are qualified Creoles today, especially the group having slave ancestors can hardly rely on ancestral customs, since they were stripped of their ancestral cultures. Indeed, slaves were not allowed to keep their cultures. There was even a tree called “the tree of forgetfulness” situated near the port of Port-Louis, which, according to José Rose, the Rasta's president, all slaves, brought to Mauritius, had to walk around in order to forget their past lives as free people. Hence, they were stripped of their identity; they were baptised according to the Code Noir and were given new names by their white masters. Today, the term “Creole” is used in Mauritius to refer to African slave descendants, free African descendants, but also to coloured people with mixed origins, either from European and African or from Indian and African ancestors. There are also hyphenated Creoles, when children are born within mixed marriages or people from other ethnic groups who are baptised. The word “Creole” is then hyphenated with the other ethnic groups. This is only a brief definition of the term “Creole” as understood in Mauritius because its complete definition reveals something far more complex.

To make a long history short, Mauritius was probably long known by the Arab seafarers because it was mentioned on the 1502 Portuguese, Albert Cantino's map as Dina Arobia. Portuguese sailors used to call at Mauritius on their way to India. However, the first population to settle there was the Dutch, who called the island “Mauritius”. Their first attempt of settlement was in 1598. The first Dutch settlement started in the
southwest of the island. They brought along African and Indian slaves. They introduced some varieties of animals along with the sugar cane cultivation. Some of the slaves, they brought in, escaped from their masters and became Maroons. They went to live in inaccessible areas such as Black River Gorges or The Morne Brabant, both places situated in the south-eastern part of the island. They were unreachable places at that time because of the deep forest surrounding Black River Gorges and the steepness of The Morne Brabant. Today, many Creoles still live there. The Morne Brabant is now part of the World Heritage. According to José Rose and other Rastas I interviewed, this place is a lieu de mémoire for all those who claim affiliation to Africa, to those who accept their status of slave descendants.

![Map of Mauritius](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/mauritius/)

Nevertheless, due to weather and rats’ problems, after two failed attempts to colonise the island, the Dutch definitely left in 1710. As a result, the Maroons became the only inhabitants for several years and they built up a community of freed slaves.

The first “real” colonisers were the French, who arrived in the island in 1721 (Nagapen 1996: 13). They are referred to as “real” colonisers because they never completely left the island until today, where a small group of their descendants can still be found and though they are a minority group in the number, yet they represent a major economic group. The French was the first to develop the island economically, but those who really developed it were, in fact, the slaves they brought in. The French called the island “Isle de France”. They settled for around a century. Some of their slaves, who succeeded to escape their current situation without being caught, joined the other Maroons in the two places situated in the south of the island.

Therefore, during the French colonial era, the French colonisers were mainly white slave owners; the other French settlers were responsible for colonial administration; others were soldiers, adventurers, etc. Among the settlers, there were some poor indentured Whites, who came to Mauritius either to find a job or to make money. In both cases, they left their homeland to flee their poor situation in France. At that same period, there was also a community of some free people, including coloured, Indian, freedmen and Métis. The so-called coloured people were most probably the result of forbidden intercourses between masters and slaves as it was stated in the infamous Code Noir. In most of the cases, they were the results of rapes of female slaves by their white masters.

The colonial society of Mauritius before 1835 was a cleaved society like all Creole societies at that time. In Mauritius, slaves born outside, usually known as Bossales, did not mix up with the Creole slaves or with any
other groups. There were no social intercourses among the groups. This was true, especially for the Whites, who could be put to death if they were involved with Blacks. As a result, they did not mix with any other groups. This continues today, where hardly any White would get married with other communities’ members. I interviewed a woman from the White group in Mauritius, who told me that she was once married to a French sailor and that many people from her group would marry Europeans or members of their own group rather than members of any of the other groups of the island. During the colonial period that is before 1835 the Negro people were also subdivided into two categories, on the one hand, there were the so-called “yard Negroes”, who had to do the outdoor tasks, like taking care of the Whites’ gardens. On the other hand, there were the house Negroes, who performed various indoor tasks such as the housework, cooking or taking care of Whites’ children, like a kind of nanny. The two groups did not mix. Cleavage was also present between the “Negroes of talents”, who were slaves who have some specific working or creative skills, and the “pickaxe Negroes”, who were good at using pickaxes or any other tools to perform tougher works such as buildings or field labour. The latter were the group performing the hardest work. As a result, slaves were also divided among several groups according to their skills or to their uses in the colony. We can see that kind of division in modern Mauritius; most people who clean the streets have dark skin. There were other sub-division between the free slaves and the coloured. The latter were born either from freed slaves and poor Whites or those born from master-slave intercourse. This represented a complex class-bound division in an already multicultural society under French rule.

Then, for some strategic reasons, the British that had long fought to rule Mauritius, took possession of the island after an ultimate battle in 1810, and they remained the masters of Mauritius, until 1968, the year of its independence. They also helped in reshaping the community.

The Different Groups in Mauritius

Even though the British took possession of Mauritius, they did not bother to change the fate of the slaves by abolishing slavery. After some years of negotiation with the French settlers, where the British conceded almost everything to the French, allowing them to keep their religion, Roman Catholicism and to keep their way of life, which meant having slaves, the British finally succeeded in abolishing slavery in Mauritius in 1835. As a result, indentured labourers from India replaced the slaves. At the time of abolition, there were 66 613 slaves who were freed and about 15 000 to 20 000, who were already free or Maroons (Nagapen 1996: 69). The slaves who were freed were 26 830 agricultural slaves – who worked specifically for the sugar cane production – 7 594 as other agricultural slaves, 22 275 domestic slaves – who worked as servants inside the Whites’ house, 7 612 children under the age of 16 and 2 302 old and disabled slaves (Nagapen 1996: 69). Not all those slaves could represent a community in the proper sense of the word and they were far from being an ethnic group because of the division imposed by the slave owners and because they had no shared customs and cultures. A large number of the “liberated Africans”, as they were referred to by the British, were sent to populate the islands around Mauritius – the Seychelles, Rodrigues, the Chagos Islands and Agalega (Nagapen 1996: 71). The Indian labourers arrived in Mauritius in very large numbers never to go back again to India for most of them – only 169 693 out of 453 036 Indians who came as Indentured Labourers to Mauritius, from 1835 to 1910, went back to India after completing their contract (Nagapen 1996: 72). This large number of Indians helped disrupting a “community” that was completely disunited because of their different origins and because of the cleavage that the former slave owners established, probably to avoid slave’s revolt. Since all the Indians came from India, it explains that the persons of Indian descent, most of them Hindus now, still represent the major group and have grown as an economic and political force. The indentured labourers shared a common origin, so they were more likely to recreate a community in Mauritius – although there were, and still are, divisions of caste, regional origin, languages and cultural traditions, etc. Claims and activisms from the Indian descendants from the 1910s onwards helped forge the community, as well as the maintenance of its religious and cultural traditions. The second major group in the number, not in political or economic power, the Creoles, do not represent a united community as the immigrants from India, usually called Hindus do, because they were already split into sub-groups right from the beginning of the colonial period. They have very little in common if anything, so, that is where the malaise creole starts and it is one of the post-colonial traumas. To some extent, the Creoles share the same religion, but the colonisers imposed this religion on them, they do not have ancestral religions to cling to. One example underpinning the division that prevails within that group can be found during the pre-independent era. Some Creoles would follow a pro-Hindu party while others would follow a pro-Creole. The Labour Party founded by Anquetil and Rozemond, two creole activists, can hardly be called a pro-Hindu Party. It possibly evolved in this
direction during the pre-Independence period. The most clearly pro-Hindu party was the Independent Forward Block of Bissoondoyal in the pre-independent days. This might be explained by the lack of a powerful Creole leader, like Seewoosagur Ramgoolam for the Hindus. There were many Creole leaders though – Cure, Anquetil, Rozemont, Forget, Delaître at various periods – but possibly too many of them and with various degrees of skin colour. Among Afro leaders, of that independence period, there was for instance Augustic Moignac or Eliezer François. The advent of Duval, or later of Berenger and de l’Estrac seemed to unify a cleaved group.

There were also very few Chinese slaves and some free Chinese, who settled in Mauritius. The free Chinese became traders and shopkeepers. They came in very small numbers, mostly at the end of the nineteenth century. According to a businessperson and a teacher from the Chinese community of Mauritius, their people are respected as having been and are still hard workers. For both of them, this is one of the main reasons for their success in the economic field in Mauritius. The other big reason is that they still keep their ancestral customs. Little by little, the shape of modern Mauritius fell into place, however, with lots of consequences and huge traumas.

Mauritians, who are descendants from colonisers, slaves, indentured labourers, never asked to be in the same island, nevertheless, they have to cope and live together. Indeed, each group of Mauritians lives alongside in this tiny island but without really being mixed. That is to say, the various communities hardly know each other according to a survey I carried out in 2011 and 2012. Furthermore, even though there are more and more mixed marriages, there are still lots of suffering and several of them end up by a divorce. During my fieldwork, I interviewed several mixed couples and I met people, who told me that in some cases there is such a great pressure from the families, sometimes couples from different groups would rather commit suicide because their relation is forbidden by their relatives. Some couples would set themselves on fire according to a nurse who used to work in a hospital for burnt people. These are extreme cases, but it happens. It has to be pointed out that among all the groups living in Mauritius, the Creoles are more open to others and to mixed marriages. Among the testimonies I collected from mix-married couples, here are two examples, which I selected for the sake of this paper.

The first testimony comes from a Creole and Hindu couple. The woman is Creole and the man is Hindu. They both told me that they had difficulties from both families, but the hardest part came from the Hindu’s family. While they encountered difficulties convincing the Creole family to let them get married and were accepted after being married in both religions, the Hindu family would not give up their son. For example, after the birth of their children, the Hindu family wanted them to be Hindu, but the couple decided to let their children choose when they grow up. The Creole family agreed with that decision, but the Hindu family rejected their grandchildren, calling them mongrels. The second testimony came from a Creole woman, whose niece is married to a Muslim. She said that her niece had to adopt all the Muslim traditions and had to reject completely hers. She said that her niece hardly visited them because if she did so, her husband’s family would reject her.

Colonial Legacies

Inside the Creole group, the situation, which started during the French colonial era, still prevails today. This is a colonial legacy and at the same time, it is one of the various post-colonial traumas. We call them Creoles because they were qualified as such by colonisers, yet they do not feel like being part of the same group. Some of them would rather be called Catholic and not Creoles because this implies that they are part of African descendants. Indeed, the relationships between slaves’ and free coloured people’s descendants are undoubtedly complex in various ways today. For example, there are almost no mixed marriages between the two sub-groups, hence a lack of kinship. The ancestors did not have shared professions, so is it more or less still the case today among the various groups of Creoles. The groups do not share places of residence. This is still true today when we compare the places slave descendants can be found – Roche Bois and Cité la Cure, which are very poor suburbs of Port-Louis, the capital – in contrast to suburbs of Port-Louis known as Ward IV, where mostly coloured Creoles live in quite cozy houses.

Nevertheless, this situation does not apply only for the Creoles, for inside each ethnic group a kind of class hierarchy has developed, and this hierarchy spreads over the entire population. This is one of the colonial legacies.

For example, according to surveys and interviews carried out in 2011 and 2012, Chinese still give importance to trading and management. They are mostly businesspeople. Black Creoles, from slave descendants, keep doing the dirty work, the Whites are still at the head of private companies, mostly inherited from their ancestors when it
comes to sugar factories. The Indian descendants were cane cutters and worked in sugar cane factories. Some of them are still cane cutters and work in sugar cane factories, others are small planters, but they gave great importance to education, thus they are now at the head of all political sectors of the island. They are doing their best most probably because they came as free people, for indentured labourers were bound for a period of time to their masters, then they were free to stay and work in Mauritius or to go back to India. They did not endure the trauma linked to slavery. They practised a different religion from Roman Catholicism, brought with them Indian Culture and specific ways of socialising – the baitkas. The Muslims, who also came from India, mostly as indentured labourers, but who decided to be separated from the Hindus in 1962 (Emrith 1994: 119), prior to the island independence, are now traders or well educated, hence, according to a Muslim teacher, there is no real poverty in their community.

Since mostly the Hindus asked for the independence of Mauritius, pushed by the momentum of India's independence and of Gandhi's fights and visit to Mauritius, they started to control the country at the expense of the other groups. However, the major political party claiming independence was the Labour Party, which comprised creoles such as Forget, Rault, Delaître, Chaperon and others, the more educated and “gens de couleur” (coloured people) rather than Blacks. Mauritius' fight for independence has never been violent, since the United Kingdom was committed to give it away while keeping the Chagos Islands.

At the same period, that is from 1968 to 1972, to honour a contract with the British from the first Mauritian Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, a group of people from Diego Garcia was deported from their motherland scattered between the Seychelles and Mauritius while their domestic animals were gassed. Their island was the price paid to the former British colonisers for Mauritius independence. Britain and the US now share the island of Diego Garcia, which serves as a military base in the Indian Ocean. This was done in the context of the Cold War, and now it is used to keep an eye on the Middle East terrorist groups as well as on the countries there.

The Chagossians, away from their homeland, became wanderers in unknown lands and more than 40 years later, they are still fighting for their right to go back, though many Mauritians argue that they are just asking for more money and that they are not willing to go back to their previous life. Unfortunately, their island is in a strategic position. This is one of the big traumas for Mauritius, directly linked to post-colonialism. The Chagossians are classified as Creoles for government census of the population, but the Mauritian Creoles do not acknowledge them as Creoles. They are somehow rejected by Mauritians and they are accused of willing to become British citizens (Marimootoo 2012), for they have a British and not a Mauritian passport. This social division inside the Creole's community is a trauma closely related to post-colonialism.

Not only the Chagossians but also many Creoles are living in extreme poverty today as shown in the picture below. José Rose, the chief of the Rasta, a sub-group of the Creole community, said that this situation prevails.
mainly because their ancestors underwent identity thefts because of slavery. This is undoubtedly one of the biggest traumas linked to the colonial and postcolonial period. I discovered this in a former slave cemetery I visited in 2011 for my PhD, while I was in Mauritius.

Picture 3

Slave cemetery in Pamplemousses, in the north of Mauritius (Picture: Sylvie Maurer).

I wanted to have visual proof of what Alain Romaine talked about in his book called “Les noms de la honte” translated “Shameful names”. Like Roger Cerveaux, Alain Romaine is a Mauritian priest who studies the situation of Creoles and the malaise creole in Mauritius. This is pure legacy of colonialism and today the group, where these names can be found, is the Creole group. This reflects a part of the so-called malaise creole. Today, there is still a lot of slave descendants. According to José Rose, many people have to bear these names today and although it is an everyday suffering for most of them, they would not get rid of their “shameful name” because these are legacies of what their ancestors underwent.

Some of the names engraved on tombstones suggest negative and sexual connotations according to gender and to the way masters used to see their slaves.

Hence, female slaves were called:

![Tombstones from the slaves cemetery of Pamplemousses (Picture: Sylvie Maurer).](image_url)
- Belle Jambe like on this tombstone, which is translated into ‘beautiful thigh’ or ‘beautiful leg’.
This was not the only example, there are also:
- Bellepeau meaning beautiful skin;
- Lapuante meaning stinking;
- Belle oie meaning beautiful goose;
- Lafolle meaning lunatic or madwoman.
Slaves were also given surnames in relation to animals, to vegetables, to the way the masters perceived them:
- Lacide on the picture meaning acid;
- Cabri meaning goat;
- Potiron meaning pumpkin;
These are surnames for the slave descendants and are still in use today in Mauritius. The French colonisers gave these names to their slaves for the latter were considered as objects according to the Code Noir. According to the Article 40 of the latter, it is specified that slaves were to be treated as furniture and as such, they can be bequeathed to the master's heirs (Anonyme 2006: 58). The tombstone and the people bearing these names are here to testify this legacy.

What is worse is that because of their names today, which some Creoles bear like balls and chains, some of them cannot move forward leaving that legacy aside. Because this is part of them, their identity. Besides, as José Rose put it, it is best to keep these names because it is the live history of a people who have been robbed of his identity. However, children bearing these names are mocked at school and adults feel ashamed for people make fun of them when, for example, they are called by nurses in hospitals (Romaine 2006: 4). This situation tends to change although there is still much suffering.

The family names are not the only postcolonial legacies, there are all the nicknames given to sub-groups of Creoles, mainly those from African descent. For example, sub-groups that have African features are often called ‘Mazambic’, related to their frizzy hair, ‘Gro Feil’, directly related to their features, meaning that they have thick lips and big nose. These words are used to express disdain to this sub-group. It is important to put forward that in this context of multi-ethnic society, each group and sub-group are given names. For example, the Tamils are often called ‘Madras kalin’ in relation to their dark skin; the Hindus are called ‘Malbar’, related to the place they came from in India; the Muslims are referred to as ‘Lascar’, maybe due to their ancestors’ work as sailors. The Chinese are often called ‘Sinoi Makao’, from the place where their ancestors came from. Although these names are a way to refer to the sub-groups’ or groups’ ancestors, they have turned into pejorative terms today. The only group that has no pejorative name are the Whites, descendants of the settlers.

However, it is difficult for the Creoles to live in community unlike the Hindus. Some Creoles are from slave descendants, especially the Rastas, who claim their affiliation to the Maroons and slaves, while others have free ancestors. Not all the Creoles share the same origin, contrary to the Hindus; this is a direct consequence of colonialism and slavery. As a result, the country’s governance is now almost locked by one major ethnic group leading several Creoles I met to confess that it is worthless to encourage their children to study further. They said they are limited by glass ceiling because whatever they do they will not find a job according to their qualification. Here are two testimonies, which might explain the malaise creole in Mauritius. Both situations occurred on workplaces. However, racial discrimination against the Creoles happens also elsewhere in the Mauritian society. The first testimony I chose is from a woman who is a Creole with a Muslim surname. She testified that when she applied for a job, people thought that she was Muslim and that she got the job, mainly because of her name and secondarily thanks to her qualifications. Of course, she would not have got the job without her high qualifications because it required high degrees, but she discovered that there were other people with the same qualifications. She said that her colleagues from other ethnic groups later told her, that they were somehow stunned because, generally speaking, people do not expect Creoles, better some categories of Creoles she is part of, to be so highly qualified. There is a popular idea in Mauritius concerning the Creoles of slave descendants, it is said that, ‘The Creole is either boastful or burglar and undoubtedly lazy (Romaine 2010, back cover). This belief may derive from the fact that after being freed, the slaves refused to work in the sugar cane field or anywhere else because work reminds them of their former situation. Therefore, today their descendants bear this legacy like balls and chains. Alain Romaine explains this situation in his book and he writes that this idea is a misinterpretation or a misjudgement of the Creoles and that there is nothing true or to be taken for granted in this say.

The second situation is about a Creole woman who has a good position in government service and whose
surname sounds Malagasy. Her ancestors were from Madagascar, but she said that they were not slaves since they kept their Malagasy surnames. She asked for her name and her position to be kept secret for fear of losing her job. She testified that there was an investigation around her because the government security is supposedly at stake whenever somebody of her position is hired.

During the investigation at her friends', relatives' and neighbours', the investigators asked traditional questions on herself and her behaviour, then suddenly, the investigators who were at a Hindu's house, said, “The lady is qualified for the job, but she is Creole”.

Fortunately, the Hindu family is very close friends to her. As a result, the Hindu woman replied that her friend might be a Creole, but that she would wear the sari to follow the Cavadee¹ and that she practises the Hindu religion.

The investigators, who were of Hindu community, were pleased by this answer and a week later, the Creole woman received a letter saying that the job was hers.

Conclusion

Meghan Vaughan gave a definition of Mauritian Creoles and this may shed lights on the reasons for the so-called malaise creole and shows at the same time how post-colonialism is definitely responsible for their situation today. She wrote: [...] “Creoles” is both a racial category (those who allegedly look most “African” in their features are members of it, though their descent is likely to be very mixed) and a residual category, and therefore, one that signifies a lack. The Creoles in contemporary Mauritian terms are those who are not: they are neither Hindus nor Muslims nor Tamils nor Chinese nor “Whites” of either the Franco or the Anglo variety. The Creole community is the residue of these racial/ethnic/cultural categories, a residue that purportedly lacks a distinct culture and suffers from what is known as “le malaise creole,” a “disease” not only of poverty, but also of social marginality and abjection. In Mauritius, culture has a very specific meaning closely tied to a narrative of origins. For while every other ethnic and religious group in Mauritius traces its origins, somewhat obsessively and with a great deal of imaginative inventions, to an “elsewhere” in India, China, or Europe, Creoles have little in the way of remembered origins. Their origins in West or East or Central Africa, in Madagascar, and in India, China, and Europe have been forgotten. They have no “authentic” culture, since authenticity can come only from origins elsewhere, as if nothing which the island had produced itself, though its own complex history could be real (Vaughan 2005: 3).

Mauritius is advertised as a paradise for tourists but that is so, if we set aside the post-colonial traumas to which it is related. The malaise creole is a disease that is devouring the Mauritian society from the inside and it is now spreading to the whole society becoming a malaise mauricien. At least, this is what I gathered from surveys and interviews carried out through a period of 5 months spread among 2008, 2011 and 2012. These are only some of the post-colonial traumas that today’s Mauritius has to face but there is also the trauma linked to skin colour, where dark-skinned people are seen, in some places, as inferior to white-skinned. Of course, these are only some examples of the post-colonial traumas and we should not say that every issue in the Mauritian society is linked to post-colonialism, but in order to face its future, Mauritius should first know and accept its past and its history no matter how shameful and awful it might be. Knowing their history, focusing on mastery and empowerment (Bloom 1999: 4), especially in traumatising events like slavery, will help overcome the traumas and might as well solve the malaise creole. Without any shared cultures and customs to cling to, it might be delusional to hope for a Creole community in the very near future. However, some people are working at it, trying to get the Creoles to acquire their empowerment.

¹ Thaipusam Cavadee is a Tamil celebration when devotees generally take a vow to offer a kavadi to idol for the purpose of tiding over or averting a great calamity.
Work Cited