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Belonging to the moment: Carl de Souza's Les Jours Kaya

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CHAPTER ONE

Belonging to the Moment

Carl de Souza's *Les Jours Kaya*

Belonging – or, more precisely, the problem of belonging – is central to Carl de Souza's 2000 novel *Les Jours Kaya*. As its title suggests, the novel was written as an immediate response to the sudden outbreak of violent unrest which swept across Mauritius in February 1999, following the suspicious death in police custody of the popular Creole singer Kaya. As Souza reveals in an interview, he wrote the novel as an attempt to convey and to comprehend the profound *bouleversement* that the Kaya riots represented to Mauritians' sense of attachment to their island.[1] He also wrote it as a more personal response to the death of a close colleague who was killed when the roof of a shop he was looting collapsed, and who, Souza supposes, sought in the riots 'un moyen de se distraire à l'ordinaire'.[2] From its very conception, therefore, *Les Jours Kaya* sought to understand both the destructive and the more creative, ludic dimensions of the violence. Souza's novel grapples with the urgent, interrelated issues of belonging and exclusion, stasis and movement, separation and encounter, simultaneously expressed through this exceptional outpouring of civic violence. The first instance of significant unrest since independence, the Kaya riots are widely viewed as marking a watershed moment in recent Mauritian history,

1 In interview with Suzanne Chazan-Gillig, Souza claimed that his inspiration for *Les Jours* Kaya came from a conviction that 'au-delà des différences, le Mauricien connaît le prix symbolique et réel de son attachement à son île'. Chazan-Gillig, 'Les fondements du pluriculturalisme mauricien', p. 146.

2 See interview with Thomas C. Spear, 'Cinq Questions pour Ile en Ile' (2009), http://ile-en-ile.org/carl-de-souza-5-questions-pour-ile-en-ile/ (accessed 24 February 2014).

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 51 01/11/2018 15:37:47

revealing in devastating fashion previously occluded cracks in the young nation's façade of harmonious multicultural coexistence, 'unity in diversity' and 'miraculous' economic prosperity, and so destabilising confidence in the country's previously lauded peaceful transition from colony to postcolonial nation state.

In highly metaphorical fashion, Souza's novel traces the causes of the Kaya unrest back to the divisive 'politics of belonging' that underpin Mauritius's dominant community system, based on ethnic allegiances and diasporic origins, and tentatively ponders the kinds of more just and inclusive society that might be imagined to emerge from the ashes of the Kaya fires.[3] The novel tells the story of Santee, a 16-year-old girl from a small rural Hindu village who is sent to town to collect her younger brother, Ram, when his school is closed early because of the riots. As she wanders around an initially alien urban environment, Santee meets a series of characters drawn from discrete, ethnically delineated sections of Mauritian society: a group of Chinese prostitutes, who dress and make up Santee, so instigating the first stage of her transformation; the ethnically ambiguous owner of a Rastafarian bar, Shyam, who attempts to rape her following a series of tragi-farcical, intercultural misunderstandings; Robert de Noir, the ironically named white taxi driver, who projects onto Santee the erotic, exotic, Bollywood-inspired persona of Shakuntala, and whose working-class occupation confounds Santee's own socio-racial stereotypes; and finally, the Creole youth 'Ronaldo', as his football-inspired tattoo leads her to call him, with whom Santee becomes romantically and sexually involved. As this series of boundary-crossing, multi-ethnic encounters progresses, the novel's dizzying forward momentum at first reflects the protagonist's confusion and disorientation, as she finds herself caught up in a maelstrom of seemingly incomprehensible violence, but later mirrors the frenetic pace of Santee's active involvement in the riots and looting.

As Santee becomes an increasingly knowing participant in the unrest, both she and the novel undergo profound, realistically

3 I am conscious that my Fanonian reading of the positive, transformative potential of the riots, as represented in Souza's novel, may well not reflect Mauritians' real-life experiences of and responses to the 1999 riots. I am grateful to Bruno Jean-François for his frank and helpful feedback on this point. I am keen to emphasise that my interpretation in this chapter is based, first and foremost, on close textual analysis of Souza's complex and provocative novel, and not on analysis of the causes, nature or effects of the riots themselves.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 52 01/11/2018 15:37:47

implausible transformations: from *ingénue* Santee to powerfully seductive, all-knowing Shakuntala; and from realist, Mauritian-based *Bildungsroman* to multiply inspired, intergeneric fantasy. As Marcus Arnold remarks, 'pendant ces "Jours Kaya", en effet, les dualités "stables" – réel *vs* onirique, peur *vs* fantasme, bien *vs* mal, vie *vs* mort – se dissolvent' as, on a formal level, 'l'opacité [de l']écriture [...] joue de différents types de discours'.[4] Souza uses and subverts the *Bildungsroman* form to explore the implications of the Kaya riots both for present-day Mauritian society and for possible future senses of collective attachment to the island and each other. As we shall explore, the transformations that both characters and novel undergo reflect a broader societal shift, from closed and reified forms of ethnic, communalist identity, to more open, mobile but ultimately transitory senses of belonging – a shift which is brought about by violence. Far from being nihilistic and meaningless, as might first appear, the violence of 'ces jours sans loi avec beaucoup de feu'[5] is increasingly portrayed by Souza as being motivated by 'des règles du jeu',[6] to which the diverse participants are drawn, and with which they cohesively identify.

On both thematic and formal levels, *Les Jours Kaya* is a complex and often opaque text, which requires readers to work hard to interpret its highly metaphorical and ambivalent engagements with the pressing questions that it and the riots raise: What do the Kaya riots reveal about the state of Mauritius's young, multicultural, postcolonial, rainbow nation? What meaningful, symbolic significance might be accorded to the seemingly unforeseen violence that so shook Mauritians' sense of attachment to their island and to each other? If, as we shall explore, the riots can be seen to mark, or at least to call for, a radical break with the communalist divisions and socio-economic inequalities of the past, what other forms of collective belonging might instead be imagined for the future? Written 'très rapidement' in response to the Kaya riots, Souza's thought-provoking and disturbing novel does not offer any hasty, easy answers to the many urgent, unresolved questions it raises about the state and the possible future of the Mauritian nation. Instead, as I shall argue, it attempts to bear witness to a defining moment in recent Mauritian history and, in so doing, warns against the danger of squandering this unique but fleeting opportunity for positive social change.

4 Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, pp. 422, 444.
5 Carl de Souza, *Les Jours Kaya* (Paris: L'Olivier, 2000), p. 123.
6 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 114.

Existing studies of *Les Jours Kaya* – and there are remarkably few – have interpreted Souza's representation of the riots and, particularly, their possible causes, in strikingly divergent ways. Emmanuel B. Jean-François emphasises the ethnic roots of the violence, arguing that the novel 'met parfaitement en scène […] le soulèvement ethnique et le décalage entre les communautés créole et indienne'.[7] Srilata Ravi's analysis of *Les Jours Kaya* also focuses on the ethnic dimension of the conflict, albeit from a rather different theoretical perspective, arguing that the novel's narration of a Hindu-Creole romantic encounter problematises officially sanctioned conceptions of essentialist ethnic difference.[8] Julie Peghini and Suzanne Chazan-Gillig, on the other hand, each argue that the riots, and Souza's representation of them, were sparked less by ethnic tensions than by economic inequalities, exacerbated by the uneven distribution of profits from Mauritius's recent modernisation programmes.[9]

Where critics diverge most, however, is in relation to the broader message to be drawn from the novel's portrayal of the riots. Jean-François sees in the novel's representation of 'l'autre île Maurice, dans toute sa laideur et dans la réalité de ses violences sociales' an attempt to refute erroneous depictions of the island as an exotic paradise.[10] Emphasising the 'authentic' and 'ethnographic' realism of Souza's portrayal of violence, and so overlooking the novel's many fantastic and imaginative elements, Jean-François does not consider what the possible consequences of such violence, either 'real' or imagined, might be for future Mauritian society. Peghini and Chazan-Gillig both argue that the rioting signals a definitive break with the social and ethnic divisions of the past and hence the creation of a more egalitarian future society. Whilst briefly acknowledging the ambivalence of the novel's ending, Peghini ultimately sees in Santee and Ronaldo's interethnic relationship the symbolic 'fondation d'un nouvel ordre'.[11] Chazan-Gillig similarly states that the riots represent 'l'occasion d'une libération globale – par les jeunes en particulier – des contraintes sociales chargées de maintenir

7 Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, 'L'expérience de la violence dans le roman mauricien francophone de la nouvelle génération', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4 (2010), pp. 513–29 (p. 517).

8 Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians'.

9 Chazan-Gillig, 'Les fondements du pluriculturalisme mauricien'; Peghini, 'Narrations de l'altérité à l'île Maurice', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, p. 435–50; Peghini, *Île rêvée, île réelle*, pp. 287–90.

10 Jean-François, 'L'expérience de la violence', p. 516.

11 Peghini, 'Narrations de l'altérité à l'île Maurice', p. 445.

les barrières raciales et ethniques qui les justifient'.[12] Arnold and Ravi are more circumspect about the conclusions that might be drawn from the apparent transgression of entrenched ethnic boundaries in *Les Jours Kaya*. As Arnold stresses, the novel 'ne vire pas [...] à un romantisme interculturel à travers le couple Santee-Ronaldo'.[13] Whilst the depiction of the growing sexual and emotional intimacy between the Hindu Santee and Creole Ronaldo may indeed problematise official discourses of ethnic difference, Ravi similarly argues that ultimately the novel 'does not seem to suggest that hybridity is a solution to the island's racial or economic crisis'.[14] She does not, however, consider what other solutions to this crisis might be postulated, however hypothetically, in Souza's novel. Nor does Arnold draw any broader social lesson from the depiction of the couple's brief interethnic encounter: 'il n'y a pas de véritable revindication sociale qui saurait émaner de la scène'.[15]

With the notable exceptions of Arnold's brief analysis and of Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's excellent article on 'désancrage' and 'déréalisation',[16] to which I shall refer later, most existing studies of *Les Jours Kaya* tend to emphasise the realist dimensions of Souza's literary response to the Kaya riots. Whilst this is indeed part of Souza's project, a realist approach underplays both the novel's highly fictional character and the ways in which its fantastic elements intersect with, and undercut, its more realist narrative. In addition, all of the existing studies of *Les Jours Kaya* analyse the novel in association with other works by Mauritian authors, and so as illustrative of a more general argument or tendency: in some cases, little more than a paragraph is dedicated to Souza's complex and important text. As a result, analyses have tended to be highly selective in approach and findings, neglecting the many productive ways in which the different realist and metaphorical elements of the novel interact. This chapter's analysis of the diverse ways in which Carl de Souza's novel engages with the *problem* of collective Mauritian belonging in the immediate aftermath

12 Chazan-Gillig, 'Les fondements du pluriculturalisme mauricien', p. 10.
13 Arnold, *La littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 427.
14 Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians', p. 41.
15 Arnold, *La littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 428.
16 Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, 'Le "désancrage" et la déréalisation de l'écriture chez trois écrivains mauriciens, Ananda Devi, Carl de Souza, Barlen Pyamootoo', in Martine Mathieu-Job (ed.), *L'Entredire francophone* (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2004), pp. 67–100.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 55 01/11/2018 15:37:47

of the Kaya riots, aims to overcome some of the critical gaps and seemingly contradictory findings of existing studies. It is hoped that a more focused and sustained examination of *Les Jours Kaya*, read in the light of Fanon's analysis of anti-colonial violence, will grant this important watershed work more of the sustained critical attention it richly deserves.

A profound, narrative and emotional ambivalence underlies the novel's depiction of the unstoppable, boundary-crossing forward propulsion of the 1999 civil unrest: on the one hand, an anxiety at the loss of old fixed social structures, however pernicious, combined, on the other, with a precarious but powerful *longing* to belong to a new but as yet ill-defined social order. This fundamental ambivalence, at once anxious and hopeful, epitomises Elspeth Probyn's assertion, in her analysis of the 'threshold' qualities of belonging, that 'the desire that individuals have to belong [is] a tenacious and fleeting desire that is […] performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging [is] forever past'.[17] In contrast to the fixity of the logic of ethnic identity which continues to order the Mauritian society depicted at the start of Souza's novel, the destructive but potentially regenerative movement engendered by violence can be seen to embody, in extreme form, the movement of and between categories which, according to Probyn, underlies the universal desire to belong. Probyn's theorisation of belonging as longing, and therefore as both movement and impossibility, is useful for understanding Souza's narrative investigation of the liberating, ludic sense of 'belonging to the moment' – or of a 'distraction à l'ordinaire' – which he sees as being associated with participation in the Kaya riots. Yet the novel's specific focus upon violence – and on the causes, context and internal momentum of that violence – also brings to mind the work of a very different thinker, Frantz Fanon, whose seminal analysis of anti-colonial violence in *Les Damnés de la terre*[18] is pertinent to our exploration of the problem of belonging, and of the impossible, violent longing to belong, in *Les Jours Kaya*. At first glance, violence might more readily be seen as motivated by feelings of exclusion and disaffection than by a longing to belong. Yet Fanon's conception of violence as cathartic and unifying, as well as necessary for the creation

17 Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 8.

18 Frantz Fanon, 'De la violence', *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), pp. 29–70.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 56 01/11/2018 15:37:48

of a new and inclusive postcolonial nation, has particular resonance for Souza's fictional exploration of both the destructive and creative dimensions of 'les jours Kaya'.

Evidently, one major difference between Fanon's theoretical discussion and Souza's fictional depiction of popular violence is the context: *Les Damnés de la terre* was written in 1961, at the height of, and in response to, the Algerian war of independence. *Les Jours Kaya*, on the other hand, was written nearly half a century later, at the dawn of a new millennium and more than three decades after Mauritius gained its independence from Great Britain (in 1968). Furthermore, Fanon's investigation of colonial discourse's hierarchical division of the population into different species ('espèces') – civilised European colonisers, on the one hand, and animalistic, colonised 'autochthones', on the other – cannot, without significant extrapolation and creative licence, readily be applied to the situation in independent Mauritius. Nonetheless, there are certain revealing parallels between the binary, colonial world of Fanon's critique and the postcolonial but still divided society of Souza's novel, which make Fanon's work particularly useful for our investigation of the theme of belonging in *Les Jours Kaya*. Such parallels include, most notably: the depiction of a highly divided, mutually exclusive society, segregated along racial lines; the description of an unequal, rigorously policed context in which retaliatory violence becomes inevitable; and the methodical anatomisation of the cathartic, unifying and revolutionary workings of popular violence. It is pertinent to note, in different vein, that Fanon was also conscious of the dangers and limitations of would-be revolutionary violence, particularly if not accompanied by an inclusive plan for societal change and nation-building. While Souza could not, at the time of writing, have known that the violence of the 'jours Kaya' would fail to bring about the enduring social change it sought, the ambivalent ending of his novel nonetheless hints at just such an inconclusive, non-transformative outcome, once the moment of cathartic violence has passed.

In 'De la violence', Fanon makes the central argument that 'le monde colonial est un monde compartimenté' and that, as a result, 'ce monde rétréci, semé d'interdictions, ne peut être remis en question que par la violence absolue'.[19] Fanon's identification of different spatial 'zones' inhabited by different social and racial 'species' (European colonisers and indigenous colonised), and of the Aristotelian logic of 'exclusion

19 Fanon, 'De la violence', pp. 30–31.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 57 01/11/2018 15:37:48

réciproque' that maintains their geographic and social separation, in many ways prefigures the ethnically divided society depicted at the start of Souza's *Les Jours Kaya*, and against which the violent unrest is shown to be an inevitable reaction. Divided into highly segregated class and ethnic, rural and urban enclaves, the pre-riots island of Souza's imaginary has no 'contact zones' in which meaningful interethnic encounters or cultural *métissage* might naturally occur. The characters of Souza's novel are drawn from discrete, mutually exclusive ethnic communities and hence, despite the island's small size, from quite separate geographic locations: Santee from the rural Hindu village of Bienvenue; Ronaldo from a Creole *quartier* of the capital, Port Louis; and Robert (originally, at least) from an affluent Franco-Mauritian suburb of the interior Plaines Willhems region. In addition, Chinese prostitutes and sweatshop workers inhabit the interstitial spaces of Mauritius's nocturnal economy. Given the predominantly male, urban and Creole roots of the Kaya riots, Carl de Souza's choice of a female, rural, Hindu-Mauritian protagonist from whose perspective events are largely seen is crucial to the novel's interrogation of the deep-seated divisions which preceded and provoked the riots, and of the huge social *bouleversement* that they marked. That is, it is precisely because the rural, Hindu-Mauritian Santee is (perceived as) an outsider to other (urban, non-Hindu) Mauritians, and because she is wholly ignorant of Mauritius beyond the narrow geographic and social confines of her ethnically delineated village community, that her perspective is so revealing of the context – both 'rétréci' and 'semé d'interdictions' – in which, and against which, the 'violence absolue' of the 1999 riots erupts.

Prior to 'les jours Kaya', Santee's view of broader Mauritian society had been shaped by the insularity, isolation and exclusion that defined Hindu communal life in her rural home village – a context to which the reader gains access by means of her, and her brother Ram's, intermittent narrative flashbacks. Situated in the middle of cane fields and dependent upon the nearby sugar mill for work, Bienvenue is portrayed as a typical plantation village where colonial-era hierarchies between white masters and Indian labourers still pertain, and where the officially sanctioned politics of distinctive ethnic belonging are still rigorously maintained.[20]

20 This insular world is reminiscent of the national narratives of *emplacement* via adherence to Hindu values that Ravi has compellingly analysed in twentieth-century, pre- and post-independence 'coolie romances'. See Ravi, 'Coolie Heroism' and 'Indo-Mauritians'.

Santee's and Ram's recollections of close-knit, familial village life serve to contextualise their initial feelings of confusion and disorientation when caught up in the current, urban-based upheavals. These recollections do not, however, serve simply to emphasise a binary contrast between idyllic past and turbulent present, between rural tranquillity and urban disorder, between the familiar or familial and the unknown. They also serve to highlight the segregation, ignorance, prejudice and suspicion that underpin village and family life, and hence continue to structure – or, indeed, prevent – interactions between those who 'belong' there and those who do not. When Ram meets his sister's Creole lover for the first time, for instance, he asks, 'd'où sort ce Ronaldo Milanac qui prête autant d'attention à ce que dit Santee. Ce n'est pas quelqu'un que Ma connaît, Ma a fait la connaissance de bonnes familles chez qui Santee, mariée, serait heureuse, on ne lui a pas dit mais il sait'.[21] Whilst reflecting Ram's incomprehension of the present situation, this memory of family life also reveals the persistence in their community of cultural practices – such as traditional gender roles, caste system, arranged marriages and endogamy – which maintain his community's separation from, and ignorance of, ethnic 'others'. Similarly, in her encounter with the taxi driver Robert de Noir, Santee's consternation at his humble profession and his casual clothing is explicitly linked to her limited past experience of Franco-Mauritians: 'Elle n'avait jamais vu personne habillé de la sorte, à la propriété sucrière, tout près du village de Bienvenue, les Blancs s'habillent en kaki même quand ils ne font pas les champs, et puis, ils ne sont pas chauffeurs de taxi'.[22] In the rural Mauritius of Santee's upbringing, whiteness is stereotypically associated with wealth and social prestige: hence her confusion, on meeting a working-class white man, at his subversion of her community's seemingly immutable neocolonial, ethnic and class rules.[23]

The novel follows Santee's transformative journey of social as well as geographic discovery, as she visits places and encounters individuals from different sections of Mauritius's multi-ethnic society with which she had previously had little or no contact. Studies of *Les Jours Kaya*

21 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 112.

22 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 49.

23 Indeed, the taxi driver's liminal social identity on the threshold of different ethnic and class groups is reflected both in his inherently mobile profession and in his ironic surname, combining the aristocratic prefix 'de' with the racially contradictory 'Noir'.

have tended to focus on the transgression of social and racial boundaries represented by the 'love story' between Santee and Ronaldo who, as Hindu and Creole respectively, come from the two communities most violently pitted against each other during the unrest.[24] Yet such an approach overlooks the many other interethnic encounters brought about by the upheaval of 'les jours Kaya' which, attesting to much more widespread ethnic divisions, portray pre-riots Mauritius as a world that is, indeed, deeply 'compartimenté' and 'semé d'interdictions'. Mutual ignorance and stereotyping can be seen to influence all of the interethnic encounters in the novel, whatever the ethnicity of characters and whether they are from rural or urban areas. Just as Santee views Robert through the colour-coded lens of plantation life, so too does Robert view Santee through the distorting prism of Bollywood cinema, as he projects onto her the stereotypically erotic and exotic persona of 'Shakuntala'.[25] When Santee first meets the Creole youth with whom she goes on to participate in the riots and to form an emotional and sexual connection, her ignorance of both the urban Creole community and global youth culture leads her to call him by the name that she sees on his tattoo, 'Ronaldo Milanac' – a name which, much like 'Shakuntala', continues to designate the otherwise unnamed character throughout the rest of the novel. In return, when 'Ronaldo' sees 'Shakuntala' washing in, and drinking from, the stream in Rose Hill's Jardin de Balfour – actions which in fact mimic those of Robert de Noir the previous evening – he presumes that 'C'était peut-être un rite, […] une chose que leur religion impose aux Malbars, comme marcher sur le feu ou se piquer les joues d'aiguilles. L'explication suffit pour qu'elle prenne la place qui lui revenait tel le ruisseau dans son lit, et les tortues de terre dans leur enclos'.[26] Rather than seek to discover the real motivation for Santee's actions, Ronaldo is content unquestioningly to interpret them in facile, highly pejorative ethnic terms. Thus ignorance and stereotyping – with their roots in Mauritius's dominant community system and its divisive

24 See Ravi, 'Indo-Mauritians'; Peghini, 'Narrations de l'altérité à l'île Maurice'.

25 As Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo pertinently points out, the 'Shakuntala' with whom Robert associates Santee is the heroine of Bollywood cinema, and not the original figure from classical Hindu mythology. Such 'désancrage' from original context, according to Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, contributes to the character's – and the novel's – metamorphosis, as Santee is progressively invaded by others' unrooted 'discours social' ('Le "désancrage" et la déréalisation', p. 80).

26 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 73.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 60 01/11/2018 15:37:48

structures of belonging and exclusion – are seen to inflect all of the interethnic encounters in *Les Jours Kaya*. Prior to the riots, the various characters had either no experience or only secondhand, stereotypical experience, of their fellow Mauritians from other ethnic groups: hence their initial unease – or, in the case of Robert, his suicidal despair – when others fail to conform to deeply held and enduring essentialist presumptions. Against this backdrop of deep ethnic divisions, violence – and the movement it engenders – is portrayed, as we shall now explore, not simply as mindless and destructive, but as a unique and necessary means of bringing previously segregated groups together.

The progression of violence portrayed in Souza's novel reflects many of the same stages identified by Fanon in *Les Damnés de la terre*. In the 'monde compartimenté' of colonial society, for instance, Fanon asserts that: 'la ligne de partage, la frontière en est indiquée par les casernes et les postes de police'.[27] As frontline representatives of the official *status quo* and the 'porte-parole du régime d'oppression', the *gendarme* and the soldier thus become, according to Fanon's analysis, the logical first targets of violent, anti-establishment retaliation. In *Les Jours Kaya*, as in the real-life riots that the novel depicts, police stations and road blocks, army barracks and a prison are the initial targets of the rioters' anti-establishment violence, reflecting Fanon's claim that 'le développement de la violence au sein du peuple […] sera proportionnel à la violence exercée par le régime […] contesté'.[28] The imprisonment of the fictional gang leader Augustin, like the real-life death of Kaya in police custody, similarly conform to Fanon's assertion that 'ce que le colonisé a vu sur son sol, c'est qu'on pouvait impunément l'arrêter, le frapper, l'affamer',[29] a realisation which renders mass violence inevitable. The rioting, triggered by Kaya's death, and the storming of the prison to liberate Augustin thus confirm, in fictionalised form, Fanon's warning that 'il est très dangereux' for those in power 'de priver les masses de leur leader'.[30]

As well as attacking sites symbolic of institutional power and oppression, the violence of Souza's novel is also portrayed as a response to the striking economic inequalities which underpin and cut across ethnically delineated social structures in late twentieth-century

27 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 31.
28 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 66.
29 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 35.
30 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 54.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 61 01/11/2018 15:37:48

Mauritius. *Les Jours Kaya* meticulously plots the various stages of the island's descent into violence: starting with localised clashes with the police, escalating to broader interethnic and anti-establishment clashes, and descending into widespread destruction and looting of Western-style businesses and shops displaying unattainable consumer goods. This pattern conforms to another of Fanon's prescient assertions: that 'le colonisé est un envieux' and 'le regard que le colonisé jette sur la ville du colon est un regard de luxure, un regard d'envie. Rêves de possession'.[31] Setting aside the specific, colonial vocabulary of Fanon's statement, its broader applicability to the Mauritian context of Souza's novel is compelling. The world that *Les Jours Kaya* depicts is a highly Manichean world, divided not between *colons* and *colonisés* but between 'haves' and 'have-nots', between those who have prospered during Mauritius's rapid economic development and those who have been left behind. What unites the otherwise diverse and ethnically divided mass of rioters is their common poverty and disaffection and, thus, their common desire to claim for themselves a share of Mauritius's unevenly distributed material gains. Thus, as Santee becomes an ever more active participant in both the political and ludic dimensions of the riots, she takes vengeful pleasure in looting the shops where she had previously been made to feel an outsider. When Ronaldo, Santee and others help themselves to trolleys full of food and clothes in Rose Hill's shopping centre or, later, the crowd loots the Western-style stores of Port Louis and Coromandel, the chaotic free for all of their looting is contrasted with Santee's recollections of previous shopping trips with her mother to some of the very same shops, when: 'Ce n'était pas à vendre, les vêtements qu'on vend, on les met en ordre en vitrine, il y a le prix dessus, on les empile pour gagner de la place'.[32] Now, however, such artificially regimented and inaccessible order has been replaced by the following absurd, joyously colourful, seemingly natural disorder: 'À un arbre mort pendaient des tee-shirts multicolores et sur un lit de sciure de bois figurant une plage, comme jetés par une marée, des chaussures et des escarpins roses, verts, jaunes, des lunettes de soleil. En toile de fond, le bouillonnement figé d'une mer émeraude'.[33]

Far from being mindless and incomprehensible, as it first appears, the violent *bouleversement* of 'les jours Kaya' can be seen to adhere

31 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 32.
32 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 62.
33 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, pp. 61–62.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 62 01/11/2018 15:37:48

to rules – both of context and of internal development – previously identified and analysed, in anti-colonial situations, by Frantz Fanon. The violence is portrayed as an inevitable response to highly divisive, mutually exclusive societal structures; as a targeted and proportionate reaction to an oppressive and discriminatory regime; and as the manifestation of a 'rêve de possession' by society's 'have-nots', in the face of striking economic inequalities. Like Fanon's pre-independence Algeria, the pre-riots Mauritius of Souza's novel is depicted as a society in which an atmosphere of suppressed and unacknowledged 'agressivité sédimentée' prevails, awaiting 'sur le qui-vive'[34] a trigger, such as Kaya's death, to unleash a wave of inevitable revolutionary violence.

As Souza's novel progresses, the depiction of the spread of violence increasingly breaks free from its realist bases to convey, in ever more fantastic, metaphorical form, the unstoppable forward momentum of the unrest. Indeed, it is arguably in this, much freer and more imaginary engagement with real-life events, that *Les Jours Kaya* most strikingly reflects Fanon's controversial conception of the 'caractères positifs, formateurs' of extreme violence.[35] Fanon's broadly positive interpretation of mass violence is based on his observation that, for the previously oppressed and divided individuals involved,

> Cette praxis violente est totalisante, puisque chacun se fait maillon violent dans la grande chaîne, du grand organisme violent surgi comme réaction à la violence première du colonialiste. Les groupes se reconnaissent entre eux et la nation future est déjà indivise. La lutte armée mobilise le peuple, c'est-à-dire qu'elle le jette dans une seule direction, à sens unique.[36]

'Au niveau des individus', therefore, Fanon claims, 'la violence désintoxique', since it rids the oppressed individual of his prejudices and internalised 'complexe d'infériorité'.[37] Yet the truly revolutionary power of violence, as a collectively unifying as well as individually cathartic force, is underlined in Fanon's assertion that: 'la mobilisation des masses […] introduit dans chaque conscience la notion de cause commune, de destin national, d'histoire collective'.[38] By destroying old social divisions and by inculcating a sense of common purpose and common destiny,

34 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, pp. 40, 41.
35 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 69.
36 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 69.
37 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.
38 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 63 01/11/2018 15:37:48

violence is seen by Fanon and, I contend, by Souza, as a necessary first step in the creation of a more collective, just and inclusive sense of national belonging: 'La violence dans sa pratique est totalisante, nationale. De ce fait, elle comporte dans son intimité la liquidation du régionalisme et du tribalisme'.[39]

The cathartic potential of violence is reflected in *Les Jours Kaya*, for instance, in Santee's casting off of her ossified ethnic identity as a rural Hindu girl and the entrenched stereotypes associated with this, in favour of a highly performative and empowering identification with the free-floating, transcultural figure of Shakuntala. Violence's unifying potential is reflected in the progressive coalescence of a multitude of previously segregated, ethnically diverse individuals into a coherent group capable of collective action: conducting attacks on sites of institutional power, liberating prisoners and looting multinational corporations and Western-style capitalist stores. Initially swept along by the frenetic pace of events, Santee/Shakuntala later becomes proactive, mobilising the rioting mob and propelling their collective actions forward, 'dans une seule direction, à sens unique'. Rather than fighting each other, the now unified anti-communalist, anti-exploitative community of protestors is portrayed, as the novel approaches its conclusion, as fighting with a common purpose. As a puzzled Ram comments, 'C'est bizarre, ils ont l'air de tous se connaître, ils s'interpellent, se renseignent',[40] reflecting Fanon's observation that, in a chain reaction, 'les groupes se reconnaissent'. The profound but realistically implausible transformation undergone by both Santee and the rioters is similarly highlighted in the following extract, depicting Ram's bewilderment at the words and actions of his now unrecognisable sister:

> Santee entraîne Ronaldo et Ramesh dans la procession qui débouche sur la route Royale. Augustin est celui qui a poignardé l'amant de sa sœur il y a cinq ans, il était encore au collège, Augustin était dans son droit, sa sœur se faisait battre chaque soir par son amant, […] c'est ce que raconte Santee à Ronaldo Milanac, d'où sort-elle tout ça. Ramesh voudrait poser des questions, en savoir plus […] Elle reste pendue au bras de [Milanac], lui dit des choses qu'il reçoit avec le plus grand sérieux, des choses qu'Augustin lui a peut-être révélées.[41]

39 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.
40 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 113.
41 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, pp. 109–10.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 64 01/11/2018 15:37:48

Now intimately acquainted with key members of 'le grand organisme violent', and having in-depth knowledge of their life stories, Santee is henceforth portrayed as truly 'belonging to the moment', as she mobilises the spontaneous coalition of ethnically diverse but now unified, like-minded rioter-actors, all working together for a common if still ill-defined cause.

From the moment Santee is sent to town by her mother in the midst of the riots, the impossibility of her ever returning, literally or metaphorically, to her point of departure is inscribed in all levels of the narrative. Leaving behind the reified ethnic identity of her home village, and carried along by a series of positive, transformative encounters with characters from different, previously unknown sections of Mauritian society, Santee becomes a 'maillon violent dans la grande chaîne, du grand organisme violent'. As the *ingénue* Shantee gradually metamorphoses into the all-knowing Shakuntala, so too does Souza's novel shift generically from realist narrative, depicting Santee's adventures in riot-torn Rose-Hill, to magical-realist fantasy: first, in Santee and Ronaldo's *mise-en-scène* of a Bollywood love scene in the Jardin de Balfour; then, in Ram and his schoolfriends' metamorphosis into a horde of playful monkeys; and finally, in Santee-Shakuntala's magical flight into the ravine and into the geological origins of the island. The rubbish-strewn Grande Rivière Nord-Ouest on the outskirts of the capital is transformed, in this last instance, into a magical, primal landscape of legends. Previously unable to swim, Santee is magically carried downstream by the force of the river where, like the legendary Shakuntala of the *Mahabharata*, she communicates with the birds, fish and insects of the ravine. At the end of her fantastic journey, she emerges, seemingly reborn, as 'une créature qu'il [Ram] ne connaissait pas, avec les traits de sa sœur mais qui s'épousaient bizarrement'.[42] The reader, like Santee, is propelled from encounter to encounter, from place to place, from event to event and, formally, from genre to genre, in a relentless forward surge that is mirrored in the frenetic, free-flowing, hallucinatory style of Souza's prose, and in which 'ce qui avait précédé ne comptait pas'.[43]

In addition, punctuating the narrative at intervals like a refrain, are phrases that self-reflexively emphasise the relentless momentum – of characters, events, natural phenomena and of the novel itself – towards an inescapable but ultimately uncertain future: 'on ne pouvait pas revenir

42 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 94.
43 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 89.

sur ses pas dans la ville de Ram'; 'on ne pouvait pas rester longtemps au même endroit dans le pays de Ram'; 'il ne faut pas revenir sur ses pas'; 'une des règles du jeu est de ne jamais revenir sur ses pas'.[44] Experienced by, or addressed to, first Santee and then Ram, the subtle modifications of these phrases plot a progressive spatial expansion from the specific ('la ville') to the general ('le pays') as the unrest inexorably spreads. Whilst this unrest seems incomprehensible to external onlookers such as Ram – 'il imagina toute une vie secrète qui avait eu lieu à côté de lui'[45] – the very repetition of the above refrain indicates its own internal logic, as confirmed, in the final instance above, by references to its underlying 'règles du jeu'.

Yet a paradoxical effect of the very repetition of the refrain 'ne pas revenir sur ses pas' is that it reinforces the patterns of repetition and return that it explicitly refutes. In 'protesting too much', the text tacitly signals the danger of not truly escaping the habits and structures of the past. A similarly paradoxical tension between forward momentum and repeated return underlies the following extract from the scene in which Santee awakens alone in the back of the taxi, the morning after the first night of rioting. Disorientated, she tries to remember the route she had taken the night before and the name of the taxi driver: 'la veille, elle avait fait exactement le même trajet, ce ne pouvait être le même, dans le taxi de comment qu'il s'appelait déjà, c'était un temps qui ne retenait rien, un temps sans mémoire où, chaque matin, tout était à recommencer sur des parcours différents'.[46] According to the 'règles du jeu' of 'les jours Kaya', it is impossible to 'revenir sur ses pas' or to 'rester longtemps au même endroit', and so those caught up in the unrest are compelled constantly to

44 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, pp. 65, 66, 99, 114. Peghini briefly discusses the 'temporalité active' of *Les Jours Kaya* and 'la réalité vécue comme un temps suspendu' in her discussion of recent 'narrations de l'altérité' ('Narrations de l'altérité à l'île Maurice', p. 443). In this, she emphasises the novel's 'dimension métaphorique du rêve' which contrasts with the emphasis placed by the media on the ethnic and racial dimensions of the riots. Similarly, Arnold emphasises the disorientating temporality of the novel: 'le temps de l'histoire est […] accéléré à l'excès, mais aussi rendu dans un enchaînement temporel arbitraire étrange, défiant toute logique'. While Arnold asserts that this arbitrary temporality 'rend le récit presque illisible', my own reading of the cathartic and unifying potential of the riots emphasises instead their internally logical forward momentum. See Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 425.

45 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 99.

46 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 69.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 66 01/11/2018 15:37:48

'recommencer sur des parcours différents'. Yet, as Santee herself suspects here, and as the plot of the novel confirms, much of her *parcours* with 'Ronaldo' – around Port Louis, Rose Hill and the Jardin de Balfour – follows 'exactement le même trajet' as the one taken previously in Robert de Noir's taxi. On one level, the novel presents the riots as representing a definitive break with the ethnic structures, stereotypes and inequalities of the past, propelling participants and onlookers alike ever forward, 'dans une seule direction, à sens unique', along new paths. As such, as Arnold asserts, 'cet accent mis sur un espace contemporain condamné aux trous de mémoire ou à la perte de la mémoire est aux antipodes de toutes les perspectives mémorielles qui dominent une partie importante de la production romanesque à Maurice'.[47] Yet this forward propulsion is undercut by numerous repetitions and returns, at the levels of both content and form, which implicitly indicate the strong hold still exerted by pre-existing patterns and behaviours that the riots, perhaps vainly, attempt to break. As Paul Ricœur points out, in his discussion of the etymology of the term 'amnésie', 'l'*ana* d'*anamnēsis* signifie retour, reprise, recouvrement de ce qui a été auparavant vu, éprouvé ou appris, donc signifie en quelque façon répétition'.[48] The evocation of 'un temps qui ne retenait rien, un temps sans mémoire' subtly indicates that Santee and the riots' constant forward momentum might in fact, at least in part, be the result of individual and collective amnesia rather than a definitive *tabula rasa* – that is, the result of being forced continually but unconsciously to repeat the same actions and to return to the same places, but always experienced as if anew.

As we have already discussed, in writing *Les Jours Kaya* as a response to the extraordinary upheaval of the 1999 riots, Carl de Souza eschews realist analyses of the unrest's causes or development. Readers are plunged *in media res* and, like Santee or Ram, are often left disorientated and 'sans repères', as they are carried along by the unstoppable unidirectional force of violent events and of the narrative. Yet, underlying the apparent disorientation of this forward momentum, *Les Jours Kaya* implicitly but insistently critiques the deep divisions and inequalities that beset contemporary Mauritian society and, like Fanon before him, Souza presents the riots as the inevitable and necessary consequence of, and reaction against, this 'monde compartimenté'. Santee's transformative journey from intra-ethnic isolation and ignorance to interethnic

47 Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 426.
48 Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 33.

solidarity, camaraderie and knowledge, brought about by the upheaval of the Kaya riots, is portrayed as a journey that Mauritian society at large must also undergo in order to do away with the enduring divisions and prejudices of the past and to instil in the mobilised masses 'la notion de cause commune, de destin national, d'histoire collective'. *Les Jours Kaya* insistently articulates the need and the desire to break down old barriers – between different ethnic groups, rich and poor, urban and rural – that still structure modern-day Mauritius's community system, and to form a more just, equal and inclusive 'destin national' to which all Mauritians might feel they belong. Contrary to many existing critical readings, however, the novel does not present this desire as having yet been realised. Whilst violence is portrayed as potentially cathartic and unifying, it is also shown to be only a means to a still profoundly uncertain end, rather than an end in itself. In this, Souza's novel reflects Fanon's own anxiety about the dangers of gratuitous violence. As an immediate response to a particularly acute moment of crisis, *Les Jours Kaya* raises urgent questions about the future of Mauritius's multi-ethnic society. In particular, it asks: What alternative kinds of enduring, collective belonging might emerge in place of the 'monde compartimenté' that the riots sought, violently but fleetingly, to destroy? As we shall see, it does not propose any easy, reassuring answers.

The scene of Santee and Ronaldo's romantic picnic in the Jardin de Balfour is central to previous critical analyses of *Les Jours Kaya*, which read the couple's interethnic union as symbolising the transgression of socio-ethnic boundaries and the formation of a more inclusive, 'creolised' society. Yet, if we examine this scene more closely, a far more circumscribed picture of Mauritian society's hypothetical future emerges. On one level, the meeting of cultures and destruction of old divisions that this scene depicts could, indeed, be read as a *mise-en-abyme* of the novel, and of the riots as a whole. Parodying the multicultural mix of Mauritian culture, this scene of interethnic communion is composed, pell-mell, of figures from Hindu myth and Indian films, ghosts from French and British colonial histories, looted Western clothes, exotic zoo animals, romantic literary clichés and the debris of an improvised, stolen picnic. Shedding old gender and ethnic stereotypes – which had defined the two characters according to their respective 'communities' and so had kept them apart – the couple here fully embrace their new, appropriated personae of 'Shakuntala' and 'Ronaldo'. As the characters' initial feelings of mutual suspicion and even repugnance are shed, Santee and Ronaldo metamorphose into

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 68 01/11/2018 15:37:48

the romantic leads of a Bollywood-style love scene: 'Il s'embrouillèrent dans des figures inconnues des chorégraphes indiens de Bollywood'.[49] As Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo notes, these new identities, borrowed from the 'uprooted', global 'social discourse' of Bollywood cinema and international football, 'permettent de dénoncer l'absurdité [des] enfermements [communautaires]'.[50] Yet the instability and transience of these non-communalist, non-compartmentalised identities and, indeed, of the couple's romantic communion are repeatedly underlined, so as to debunk any facile, celebratory interpretations of the scene as embodying the realisation of meaningful social creolisation. As Arnold points out, Souza 'ne vire pas […] à un romantisme interculturel à travers le couple Santee-Ronaldo. Leur manque de communication est flagrant autant que la connaissance qu'ils ont de l'identité culturelle de l'autre, s'inscrivant dans le décor d'une île où les communautés, curieusement, s'ignorent'.[51] Positive readings of the wider symbolism of the couple's transformation in this scene are already pre-emptively undermined by Ronaldo's self-reflexive comment that: 'Chez lui, dès les premières notes tremblotantes d'un sitar, on zappait sur les séries américaines, il ne saurait pas la poursuivre entre les bassins aux lotus à la manière des acteurs de Bombay, lui la rattraperait trop vite, lui gâcherait l'effet'.[52] In addition, rather than symbolically embodying the culmination of the riots' destruction of old ethnic boundaries and the forging of a new social order, Santee and Ronaldo's sexual union is represented as being profoundly divorced from the ongoing reality of the riots: 'c'était un jardin de rires dans un faubourg de la ville en feu, les mains étaient douces sur la peau, les souffles s'épousaient, c'était des jours sans histoire et sans lendemain, et nul ne sut lequel prit l'autre'.[53] Emphasis is placed upon the geographic separation between the transformed 'jardin de rires' where the couple's love is consummated and 'la ville en feu' where the riots continue apace. Stylistically, the overblown, sentimental language used throughout the

49 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 77.

50 Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo borrows Marc Angenot's definition of 'le discours social' as 'l'immense rumeur de tout ce qui se dit et s'écrit dans un état de société; tout ce qui s'imprime, tout ce qui se parle publiquement ou se représente aujourd'hui dans les médias électroniques' (Angenot, *Un État du discours social* (Montreal: Le Préambule, 1989), p. 83; cited in Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, 'Le "désancrage" et la déréalisation', pp. 80–81).

51 Arnold, *La Littérature mauricienne contemporaine*, p. 427.

52 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 76.

53 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, pp. 77–78.

love scene, climaxing here in the stereotypically euphemistic 'nul ne sut lequel prit l'autre', intentionally jars with the often brutal language used in the more realist sections of the narrative. Indeed, the exaggeratedly clichéd nature of this scene's intertextual borrowings from Bollywood cinema – and hence only indirectly from Hindu mythology – contributes to what Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo has called its 'désancrage' from both the forward momentum of the plot and any direct, representational relation with Mauritian reality.

A fundamental disjunction between this intimate scene of interethnic communion, on the one hand, and the violent and widespread unrest elsewhere, on the other, is signalled in the ambivalent temporality of the phrase, 'des jours sans histoire et sans lendemain'. Whether the plural 'des jours' refers, by metaphorical extension, to the possibilities opened up by the couple's lovemaking or, by linguistic association, to the social upheaval of 'les jours Kaya' more broadly, a note of caution is here introduced as to the feasibility of durable future change. The interethnic love scene, like the riots, is portrayed as taking place in an impossibly suspended present – a brief and illusory interlude of performative communion and fictional solidarity that is cut off from both past and future, as it is from the present of 'la ville en feu'. Just as a clichéd Bollywood love scene provides a moment of escapist entertainment that holds up the teleological plot of the film, so too is Shakuntala's union with Ronaldo, in its hyperbolic fictionality, shown to be little more than a distraction or an as yet unrealisable dream, preceded and circumscribed by entrenched ethnic and gender stereotypes. If we read the phrase 'des jours sans histoire et sans lendemain' in association with the similar 'un temps sans mémoire'[54] that is applied elsewhere to the dizzying forward momentum of the riots, Souza's novel again warns readers keen to interpret this scene or the riots generally in positive, socially inclusive terms, of the dangers of amnesia – of failing to learn from history or, more specifically, from the common desire for change expressed through collective violence, and so of constantly but unconsciously repeating the same entrenched patterns of exclusion, division, exploitation and inequality.

Les Jours Kaya portrays the riots not just as a reaction to Kaya's death, therefore, but as an expression of a widespread *desire* for change, of a common 'longing to belong'. The outbreak of violence – and the spontaneous encounters that it occasions – embodies a shared wish

54 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 69.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 70 01/11/2018 15:37:48

to cleanse society of its deep-rooted social divisions and economic inequalities and so to break the stranglehold of internal, communalist constructions of belonging. Nonetheless, social creolisation, seemingly symbolised by the interethnic union of Santee and Ronaldo, is itself portrayed as the stuff of fiction – detached from everyday reality and, for now at least, 'sans lendemain'.[55]

Given the novel's probing of the economic as well as ethnic inequalities behind the unrest, might instead greater openness to the forces of globalisation be seen as an answer to Mauritius's social ills, offering alternative, non-communal forms of aspiration and identification? Images and artefacts from global youth culture – jeans and tee shirts, football stars, Bollywood films, reggae and marijuana – uprooted from their original locations of production (the United States, Europe, India, the Caribbean) litter the cultural landscape of *Les Jours Kaya*. The pervasive influence of these free-floating global cultural signifiers is most striking, as already discussed, in the central Mauritian couple's adoption and transformation of the 'global' identities of Shakuntala and Ronaldo Milanac, and in their performative enactment of a Bollywood-style love scene. In appropriating her new, initially externally imposed identity of 'Shakuntala', Santee could be seen to transform both it and herself, so creating a new, local manifestation of the mythical-cum-Bollywood Shakuntala at the same time as a new, more open and globally conscious Santee. In this, her transformation seems to reflect Stuart Hall's contention that 'the more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places, and images [...] the more identities become detached – disembedded – from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear "free-floating"'.[56] Yet, as we have discussed, the free-floating 'global identity' of Shakuntala adopted by Santee ultimately offers only a temporary form of liberating identification, rather than a more enduring, locally grounded sense of belonging. In the novel's exposition of a sudden, violent shift from communal to more open, non-ethnic, global identities, there is no form of meaningful and lasting

55 Such a reading confirms Ravi's assertion that 'even if the text underlines the persisting existence of ethnic tensions on the island, it does not seem to suggest that hybridity is a solution to the island's racial or economic crisis' ('Indo-Mauritians', p. 41).

56 Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert and Kenneth Thompson (eds), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 595–634 (p. 622).

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 71 01/11/2018 15:37:48

identification with a *national* culture, however defined, that might form the basis of a potentially enduring sense of collective belonging to Mauritian place and people. Whilst the riots have violently forced individuals out of their introspective, mutually exclusive communities, no 'strong local institutions and infrastructures' are shown to take their place: institutions and infrastructures that Kevin Robins, in his analysis of 'cultural homogenisation', has identified as essential to the success of globalisation on a local basis.[57] In the Mauritius of Carl de Souza's novel, there are no enduring 'relations of trust based on face-to-face contact', no '"productive community" historically rooted in a particular place' and no 'strong sense of local pride and attachment', on the basis of which a 'new global-local nexus' might, according to Robins, productively and enduringly be established. Instead, as Robins argues and as *Les Jours Kaya* eloquently depicts, what results is 'the creation of a world of instantaneity and depthlessness'.[58]

In the novel's closing scene, as Ronaldo loots the Dino Store in a hyperbolic parody of the labours of Hercules, the fruits of his consumerist and materialist desires and of others' very real labours – 'des frigos, des bancs de jardin, des Cocotte-Minute'[59] – are ultimately shown to be crass, hollow and meaningless. The scenes of systematic looting in boutiques, supermarkets, designer outlets and furniture stores could be read as the ironic embodiment of Hall's observation that 'the spread of consumerism, whether as reality or dream, [...] has contributed to [a] "cultural supermarket" effect'.[60] Or they could be seen as an ironic riposte to (a slightly adapted version of) Benedict Anderson's question in *Imagined Communities*: 'If people imagined the [nation] *merely* as a group in hot pursuit of refrigerators, holidays, or power, how far would they [...] be willing to die for it?'[61] Such an underlying message is a far cry from Fanon's positive, revolutionary interpretation of the colonised masses' appropriative 'rêves de possession'. Despite the evident economic inequalities that have largely triggered, and been revealed by, the unrest,

57 Kevin Robins, 'Tradition and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context', in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 21–44 (p. 34).

58 Robins, 'Tradition and Translation', especially p. 33.

59 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 115.

60 Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', p. 622.

61 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), p. 144.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 72 01/11/2018 15:37:48

the novel's underlying message seems to be that a new society cannot be founded solely on materialism, individualism or the accumulation of worthless, free-floating global tat. As recurrent references to Chinese prostitutes and sweatshop workers, to Ma's poorly paid work in a textile factory, to illegal migrants or to Port Louis's nocturnal economy imply, the darker, exploitative side of global capitalism is also ever-present in Mauritius.[62] The patterns of greed and exploitation that underlay the island's plantation economy are being repeated in global capitalism's treatment of the workers, both local and foreign, in Mauritius's Export Processing Zone. Whilst the riots are portrayed as an inevitable reaction against long-standing, entrenched, ethnic divisions and against the profoundly unequal distribution of profits from Mauritius's globalised economy, no viable or durable alternative is posited – yet –as the basis for the creation of more just and inclusive forms of national belonging.

In responding to the extraordinary upheaval of the 1999 riots, and to their expression of a desire to destroy the social divisions and hierarchies of the past, *Les Jours Kaya* asks urgent questions about the possible shape that a more just and equal future society might take; but, as we have seen, it gives no clear answers. A few days of intense violence may have served to bring into contact individuals from previously segregated groups and to begin to erode old prejudices and ignorance. Yet more enduring forms of social mixing, hybridity or creolisation, as seemingly symbolised by the interethnic union of Santee and Ronaldo, are portrayed as still the stuff of fiction. The desire for a more even distribution of the wealth acquired through Mauritius's 'economic miracle' may have contributed to the escalation of violence – but rampant consumerism and easy financial gain are shown to be morally vacuous; global capitalism is critiqued for repeating the exploitative and divisive practices of empire; and the adoption of 'free-floating', disembedded global identities is portrayed as offering only a temporary and inherently superficial alternative to reified ethnic identities.

62 The eloquent juxtaposition of sites associated with globalisation, on the one hand, and with imperial power, on the other, in the following description of night-time Port Louis, underlines Souza's implicit comparison of global capitalism with imperialism throughout his work: 'L'autoroute avait longé Port-Louis sans jamais s'y hasarder. Santee en avait retenu le bruit de quelques usines sans voir beaucoup de monde – qui travaillait jusqu'à des heures aussi tardives? –, les parkings déserts étaient éclairés par des projecteurs. Au fond de la place d'Armes, le vieil hôtel du gouvernement, sinistre, et en face, ancré dans le port, un chalutier chinois, tout seul' (*Les Jours Kaya*, p. 40).

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 73 01/11/2018 15:37:48

The novel does not end with the sexual and emotional coupling of Hindu Santee and Creole Ronaldo, nor with the multi-ethnic crowd's liberation of Augustin from prison, nor with the pillaging of stores and the redistribution of the trappings of ostentatious wealth, nor with a metaphorical return to the geological and mythical origins of the island – any of which could be interpreted in positive terms, as forms of transgression, liberation, empowerment or appropriation. The *Bildungsroman* plot with which *Les Jours Kaya* begins, the romance plot which evolves between Santee and Ronaldo, or the regenerative return to origins later symbolised by Santee's flight into the ravine, are all debunked, undermined and ultimately peter out before the novel reaches its conclusion. Instead, the novel ends, symbolically but highly ambivalently, with a frightened young Ram perched precariously on top of an absurd pile of looted consumer goods, alone in an empty industrial estate, abandoned by Santee and her band of multi-ethnic rioters, by his mother and Hindu village community, and by the state institutions which are meant to protect him. As the free indirect narrative shifts seamlessly from the perspective of Ram to that of the police officers who have come to arrest the looters, we see, in the latter's prejudiced and uncaring attitude towards him, the threat of a return to the old order that the riots have – all too briefly – sought to overturn:

> [M]ême petits, ils sont parfaitement capables de voler, d'allumer un incendie, de lancer des pierres et des cocktails Molotov, ils ont grandi dans des cités ouvrières, mais non tu vois bien que celui-là n'est pas un Créole, finalement, créole ou pas on l'a laissé combien de nuits avec les autres gars plus grands que lui qui se racontaient de grands feux, des casses et des saccages.[63]

Without cohesive and enduring structures to turn the solidarity, camaraderie and desire for change expressed by the riots into reality, the danger, *Les Jours Kaya* suggests, is that a moral vacuum of nihilism, egotism and entirely mindless violence will ensue – that is, a future without hope, 'des jours sans lendemain'. Ultimately, Souza's novel shows that it is pointless to assume complacently that violent unrest will, in itself, bring about positive social change. In this again, *Les Jours Kaya* reflects Fanon's warning that (anti-colonial) violence constitutes only the first, albeit essential, phase in a much longer project of nation-building. 'Aussi', Fanon comments, 'la deuxième phase, celle de la construction

63 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 124.

Waters, The Mauritian Novel.indd 74 01/11/2018 15:37:49

de la nation, se trouve-t-elle facilitée par l'existence de ce mortier travaillé dans le sang et la colère'.[64] Having dismantled the divisive and oppressive structures of the pre-existing 'monde compartimenté' by means of violence, the second phase of national construction requires an ongoing struggle against other forms of social injustice and inequality, during which the people must 'lutter contre la misère, l'analphabétisme, le sous-développement'.[65] Whilst the cathartic, cleansing nature of violence may be potentially regenerative, it may also lead to an amnesiac repetition of the same actions and behaviours, and a return to the same, familiar people and places, 'tel le ruisseau dans son lit, et les tortues de terre dans leur enclos'.[66] As the ambivalent ending seems to intimate, the amnesiac quality of 'les jours Kaya' – 'des jours sans mémoire' – means that, rather than forgetting the past and starting afresh, society is in danger of forgetting to learn from past mistakes and, therefore, of constantly repeating them.

Contrary to many critical readings of his thought,[67] Fanon was painfully conscious of the limitations of anti-colonial violence, and of its potentially negative, dehumanising consequences. Even in *Les Damnés de la terre*, in which Fanon's theory of anti-colonial violence is most fully expounded, he does not advocate gratuitous violence: anti-colonial violence is portrayed as a justifiable response to colonial violence and so as a means to an end, but not as an end in itself. As well as being potentially cathartic and unifying, violence can also cause physical and mental damage to perpetrators as well as victims, as Fanon had seen first-hand in his work as a psychiatrist in colonial Algeria. At a broader, societal level, Fanon warns that anti-colonial violence can lead to seemingly inescapable cycles of violence, with one system of (colonial)

64 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.
65 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.
66 Souza, *Les Jours Kaya*, p. 73.
67 For balanced readings of Fanon's views on violence which avoid such over-simplifying tendencies, see *inter alia*: Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich, 1969); Gail M. Presbey, 'Fanon on the Role of Violence in Liberation: A Comparison with Gandhi and Mandela', in Lewis R. Gordon et al. (eds.), *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 283–96; Peter Hudis, *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades* (London: Pluto Press, 2015). As Hudis notes, 'Many have attacked [Fanon's] discussions for eulogizing violence as an end-in-itself [*sic*], while others have defended it on the grounds that it simply defends the right of victims of violence to respond to it in kind. Neither view is accurate' (*Frantz Fanon*, p. 118).

oppression merely being replaced by another system of (postcolonial) exploitation. Fanon stresses the need for everyone – and not just the postcolonial political elite – to be included in the ongoing project of creating a new society and national culture. If not, he warns, 'on assistera à des mutilations psycho-affectives extrêmement graves. Des gens sans rivage, sans limite, sans couleur, des apatrides, des non-enracinés'.[68] words that hauntingly presage the ambivalent, open-ended conclusion of Souza's *Les Jours Kaya*. While violence may briefly cause a euphoric sense of unity, of 'belonging to the moment', what happens, Fanon and Souza urgently ask, once that moment of unifying violence passes and the rioters disband?

As Souza's complex novel eloquently suggests, the violence of 'les jours Kaya' was motivated less by anger and nihilism than by a shared desire and commitment to forge a more just and equal society. Mauritius's past is portrayed as profoundly divided and unequal, and its future as uncertain: instead, there emerges in the novel's depiction of 'les jours Kaya' a strong sense of collective belonging to the present moment, and to the transformative potential that this all-too-fleeting moment of potentially regenerative violence embodies. In its many parallels with Fanon's analysis of anti-colonial violence, Souza's literary portrayal of 'les jours Kaya' seems to suggest that Mauritius's project of post-independence nation-building remains unfinished, leaving many individuals and sections of society 'without an anchor'. Whilst offering no easy answers to the problem of belonging that the riots so violently raised, *Les Jours Kaya* urgently warns of the dangers of squandering the unique opportunity for positive social change that the riots offered, and of failing to harness their cathartic and unifying potential in forging a new, inclusive society. As Fanon presciently observed, and as Souza's thought-provoking novel confirms, as far as the creation of a collective sense of Mauritian national belonging is concerned, for now at least, 'la lutte […] continue'.[69]

68 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 163.
69 Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 70.