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# **Identity formation in La Réunion**

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### Abstract

La Réunion is an island society shaped by racial and cultural contributions from Africa, Asia, India, Europe, and Madagascar. Most of the ancestors of today's Réunionnais came to the island before and after the abolition of slavery in 1848. As the island itself has passed from being a colony to being a *Département* of metropolitan France, its inhabitants have passed from being slaves and then colonial subjects to being French citizens. Contemporary La Réunion is marked by radical Interculturalism and multiculturalism, the ethnocultural crossover known as *métissage*. This *métissage* is played out in daily life through the paradigmatic phenomenon of *créolisation*. *Créolisation* and *métissage* refer not only to ethnicity, however, but also to crossovers in food, religion and belief, music, language, behaviour, norms, values, and so forth. The situation of La Réunion is unique. Moreover, as a former French colony and, since 1946, a *Département*, the island plays a key role in the Indian Ocean politics. Its geo-political location and creolised character have enabled it to serve as an entrepot in the region; *métissage* itself has been marketed as a cultural good. What I would like to ask in this paper is how cultural events and expressions contribute to the process of identity formation in La Réunion. What is of interest here is examining identity formation in relation to the processes of Diaspora of Indian Ocean people at large, particularly with reference to cultural factors (music, religion).

### GLOSSARY

**Réunionnais:** people living in La Réunion.

**Réunionese:** is the adjective referring for instance to Réunionese society, Réunionese identity and so forth.

**Département:** Main administrative divisions of France, there are 96 *Département* in the mainland (*Métropole*) and 4 overseas *Département*: Guadeloupe, French Guyane, Martinique, Réunion. These 4 *Département* are also call by **DOM**: *Département Outre-Mer*. (Overseas *Département*).

**Départementalisation:** It is the process of becoming a *Département*. Previously La Réunion island had the status of a Colony and from the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1946 it became a French *Département* at the same time as Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guyana.

This status differs from the **Territories** (Mayotte, Nouvelle Calédonie, Tahiti, St-Pierre et Miquelon, Polynésie Française, etc.). These islands are also call **TOM**: *Territoire Outre Mer*. (Overseas Territories). A territory does not have the *Decentralisation* rules but it is administrated by a governor. Prefecture,

Regional council, County council are not in the territory status and there is also no administration but just few civil services.

Identification in the following components making up sub-cultures in Réunionese society: all those Creole terms and identity markers are still commonly used in everyday speech. The estimation of ethnic is evaluated by myself. Ethnic identification is not allowed official statistics by law in the French Republic. I refer then to some data from the slavery statistic period, Census 1999 (for the number of Zorey, Komor, and Malgaches) and from some few researches done by other Réunionnais researchers.

**Créole or Métis:** Christian, they can also have several religions and are mainly mixed-race between *Kaf*, *Malbar*, *Yab* and few *Chinese*. They come from all class backgrounds but are generally from the working and middle class of La Réunion. *Créole* and *Métis* live everywhere in La Réunion and are also effected by unemployment and violence. They represent about 35 % of the population.

**Kaf:** Christian and animist believers, black people descendants of the African and Malagasy slaves who arrive in La Réunion three centuries ago. The term *kaf* is originally from the Arabic *kaffir*. They are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in La Réunion and are effected by racism, unemployment and violence like the *Malbar*, *Créole-Métis* and *Yab*. They were living around the sugar cane factory and are now live mainly in social housing with those ones and predominantly affected by this poverty and social exclusion. They are not manager or any influenced status. The only *Kaf* who was a chief executive of an administrative office (Regional Health Service) was sacked 3 years ago by the administration board (composed of *Gros Blancs* and *Zorèy*) after a year in post. They represent about 18 % of the population.

**Malbar and Tamoul:** Tamil Hindu Indian and mostly Christian. A few of them were among the slaves and the majority arrived as indentured labours in La Réunion after the abolition of slavery in 1848. They started to split up in two class groups in the last 8-10 years. *Malbar* tend to be attached to their créolised religions inherited from the first indentured labours and they are from the working class and are also effected by unemployment and violence. *Tamoul* also want to return to their original religion values and abandon their dual religiosity in favour Hinduism. *Tamoul* are now generally from middle and upper classes. They are very involved in local politics. They represent about 15 % of the population.

**Yab or Petit Blancs:** Christian, descendants of the first white French who arrived in La Réunion three centuries ago, former landowners of small plots, ex-masters of a small number of slaves (1 to 10 slaves). After the worldwide sugar and coffee crisis at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century precipitated by the widespread availability of sugar beetroot, they went up to live in the highlands with the runaways. The *Yab* have a farming although many came down to the urban city after *Départementalisation* in search of employment. Those who still live in the highlands are among the poorest of La Réunion are usually called *Petit Blancs des hauts*. They represent about 15 % of the population.

**Zorèy:** Christian and white Metropolitan French. They are mostly civil servants but are also represented among gendarmes, police officers, the military, GPs and especially magistrates sent from mainland France since *Départementalisation* as qualified staff. Many occupy senior positions as chief executives and general managers of local government and big companies. Originally they were 200 plus family at the end of 1950s now they represent about 10 % of the population according the Census 1999. They are more and more involved in the local politic.

**Chinois:** Buddhist and mostly Christian. Descendants of the first Chinese indentured labours (mainly from Canton and Macao) who arrived in La Réunion from a few years after the abolition of slavery to beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are mostly from the middle and upper class of the population. *Chinois* stopped being indentured labours due the failure of the masters to respect the contract and they subsequently became the first corner shops, grocers and restaurants owners of La Réunion in the cities. They are increasingly represented among GPs, dentist and managers and represent about 2,5 % of the population.

**Zarab:** Muslim from Gujrat, India. They arrived in La Réunion end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Zarab* are for most of them upper class of La Réunion and are the only ethnic group to have retained their ancestors' religion. They tend not marry with other ethnic groups in La Réunion. *Zarab* live in the city centre of all the towns in La Réunion. They dominate the city business market and are more and more involved in the local politics. They represent about 2,5 % of the population.

**Komor:** Black Muslim emigrants from the independent Comoro archipelagos

and Mayotte island (French territory in Indian Ocean which will become soon a Département). They arrived in La Réunion from the end of 1970s and are still migrating to La Réunion. *Komor* are effected by racism from all the other ethnic groups in La Réunion and they are also touched by unemployment and more and increasingly by violence. *Komor* and *Malgaches* are in a similar situation as North Africans in France in what the Réunionnais reproduce the same racist behaviours as the French. They represent 1.4 % of the population.

***Gros Blanc:*** Christian, also descendants of the first white French who arrived in La Réunion three centuries ago in the same time that *Yab*, still landowners, ex-masters of big numbers of slaves (10 to 400). Came from the French bourgeoisie and aristocrat about 10 aristocratic families. They are one of the richest ethnic groups in La Réunion, along with the *Zarab*. They invest now in tertiary sector and are owners of all the supermarkets and car dealerships. But they are also employed as GPs, dentist, lawyers and also occupy seniors positions in local government and civil service. They were the first magistrates and politicians of the island until 1970s and 80s. They represent 0,5 % of the population.

***Malgaches:*** Animist belief. They are emigrants from Madagascar and also touched by racism like the *Komor*. They represent about 0.1 % of the population.

## Introduction

Society Formation within the Creole world is closely linked to colonisation and slavery, according to the observation of anthropological and sociological data (Chali, 2001). The proslaver plantation economy developed in a colonial capitalism phenomenon, played a determining role in connecting civilisation with the formation of identity. Today, the heritage of slavery stays present in the cultural landscape and Creole mentalities. Situated in the south-west of the Indian Ocean, La Réunion covers a surface of 2,500 km<sup>2</sup>, and is a mountainous with *Piton des Neiges* reaching its highest point at 3,069 meters. This island is situated 200 km west of Mauritius, 800 km east of Madagascar, 2,500 km from the African costs and 9,500 km from its capital, Paris. The island was uninhabited until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There was, therefore, no indigenous population prior to colonisation. This is a fundamental dimension in the problematic issue of identity. Until today, this absence of any autochthonous past establishes a quest for group identity within Réunionese society. The populating of the island was formed by successive waves. The current society of La Réunion has been therefore created *ex nihilo* by French colonial rules. Today, the actual population of La Réunion is about 740,000 inhabitants. On the one hand La Réunion is composed of slaves descendants and indentured labours coming from Africa, Comoros archipelago, India, Madagascar and Asia. On the other hand, it is formed by plantations owners and ex-slaves masters, as well as civil servant in the French administration coming from Europe (see glossary). On the 16<sup>th</sup> March 1946 when La Réunion underwent *Départementalisation* (see glossary), the island was characterised by strong socio-economic development, especially through the multiplication of infrastructures imposed by the French *assimilationist* system. From an under-developed colonial environment, La Réunion suddenly shifted to an OVER-developed system, as compared with others countries of its geographical zone, which give the regional exchanges difficult and unilateral. In considering the history of population, the question needs to be asked whether the idea of a Créolisation, defined as a local identity formation phenomenon, is viable in a context of globalisation and assimilation. We shall focus on Réunionese identity formation through its cultural exchanges and in its status, economical and political

context rather on Identity building. At this stage, we have to underline that the plural character of the Réunionese Creole society problematises the analysis of the identity evolution. In the first part we shall recount the identity evolution in this society from an historical dimension. We shall trace the chronological progress of Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and Transculturalism and will try to relate these to the local, national and international environment. In a second part we will trace the difference that Jean-François Bayart establishes between the building and formation historical identities notions. We shall try to illustrate this through several Réunionese cultural exchanges phenomenon in the musical, gastronomy or clothing field.

### **The evolution of the identity of Réunionese society**

From the perspective of various historians having studied La Réunion, such as Chane-Kune, Combeau, Eve, Fuma, Gerbeau, we can note that in the course of its history, the Réunionese identity has experienced several successive stages that we can identify through the notions of Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and Transculturalism.

#### *Multiculturalism*

We can consider multiculturalism as the primary stage of créolisation. This mean that multiculturalism has been present in La Réunion since the beginning of its population in 1663 until 1890-1900. The mechanism was very slow, because of the lack of communication, which is different from the actual context of western megalopolis and a globalisation of communication. Let us come back to the chronological chain of different stages of peopling in La Réunion. In 1642, Richelieu took possession of the island, which he successively called Mascarin, Bourbon, Bonaparte, England Forest, and La Réunion. At the beginning of the peopling, the island was not easy to colonise, nor to exploit. With only a few bays and without a natural harbour, the island is difficult to access, as opposed to Mauritius. If we add the volcanic activity, the mountains, ravines and crevices, we may easily understand how the island's topography contributed not only to the belated settlement of the island but also to its economic development which was slower than its 'sister island' Mauritius. In 1663, ten men and women from Madagascar, came along with two French men and triggered the period emigration of slavery and also *maroonage*. La



Réunion gradually filled with people and in parallel in an international level is coming the early beginnings of a period that Jorge Larain (1989, p3) calls 'the Age of competitive capitalism' which is situated between 1700 to 1860. At the beginning of this period, Africans, Malgache, Europeans and a few Hindus in close contact intercommunicated in a new language: Creole. Tolerance and a sense of solidarity existed between the different slaves and ethnic groups, this ineffect occurring in opposition to the 'white masters'. It was at this time that a new cultural identity was formed: this was the beginning of Réunionese Multiculturalism. According to Thual (1996, p332), 'pluriethnic multiculturalism lies originally on the notion of ethnicity', introduced by the American sociologist David Riesman. This notion indicates the feeling of ethnic belonging which results in the revalorization by a minority of its particularities of colour, religion, language. Two generations after the beginning of peopling, different ethnic groups cohabited without establishing deep cultural exchanges. The only mixed couples formed were between Malgaches and Africans slaves and few Indians. It was rare to find couples between blacks and whites.

In 1764, following the first world economical crisis, the Company of India lost the possession of the island which was bought back by France and its Kingdom. In La Réunion this crisis affected the coffee industry most significantly. In consequence, this resulted in the impoverishment of the majority of the population, who from that time were given the derogatory names of *yab* or *ptit blanc* (see glossary). The changing economical and juridical statute of the island drove forward the democratisation of the *métissage* between whites and slaves (or blacks). From these *métissages*, were born what Homi Bhabha has referred to as the 'Third Space' (1990), which adds to the spaces present, that is the space of the slaves and that of the masters. According to Brathwaite, 'the concept of a plural society seems to be a colonial concept rather than a Creole contribution'. 'Creole society of the slavery period did not conceive to itself as plural but rather as made of two separate cultures' (superiors and inferiors) (Brathwaite, 1971, p311).

### *Interculturalism*

Industrials powers, enriched by technical progress returned to the

conquest of unexploited territories with military forces brought by the European industrial revolution. Mutations born from this latter led directly to the abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848. During that time, La Réunion was still commanded by France with the sending of Sarda Garriga, the new governor in the name of the King, who announced the 'good news' of liberation. Larain (1989, p3) calls this period situated between 1860 and 1945 'the Age of imperialism', which coincides with the beginning of the global colonialism. It is precisely at this time around 1850-1860, that arrive indentured labourers (*engagisme* or *indenturism*) first from South India then, followed by the Chinese, and finally first Indian Muslims coming from Bombay and Gujrat. It seems that it is at that moment that the inhabitants lost their African, Malagache, Indian and European identity and culture to become Réunionnais. Christian Jalma A.K.A. Pink Floyd claims that the abolition is one of the last faults committed by the proslaver State in term of identity because the State 'stole from the slave their African identity'<sup>1</sup>. However, according to Jalma, the abolition of slavery refused the ex-Afro-Malgache slave total integration into the Réunionese society. Furthermore, religion played an important role in the formation of identity in La Réunion. Sonia Chane-Kune claims that religion was a 'factor of unification of different ethnic groups and a pillar of the social order in the slavery society' (Chane-Kune, 1991, p15), as Catholicism was introduced very early on the island ; and had been adopted by the majority of the population. On the other hand, the struggle of the clergy against the proslaver system permitted the gathering of all the ethnic groups, hence reinforcing the abnegation of the people's original identity. Belonging to a common religion marks the first step of profound cultural exchanges in a federative ideology. Then starts the formation of cultural identity to distinguish with this building of this same identity, because it makes oneself by the 'bottom', by the mass popular, in an unconscious way, in the middle of this multiculturalism. (We will see in the second part the difference between formation and building). Social interactions between indentured labours led directly to an 'undefinable métissage'. Which brings us to the beginning of Interculturalism defined by Patrick Denoux (2001) as 'sharing and mingling' whereby intercultural relationship is determined by the

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<sup>1</sup> Pink Floyd in Le Jir, 12 Mars 2001.

fusion of one culture and another. We can stipulate that the birth of Réunionese Creole people and the Réunionese cultural identity date from this era between 1900-1940 which marks the beginning of cultural interactions. Cultural actions or social process are defined through the context of créolisation process. It is from this period, at the Eve of the Second World War that the Réunionese people know what we can call Transculturalism or social créolisation.

### *Transculturalism*

The period from 1945 to today sees La Réunion bound up with what may be termed the Transculturalism phenomenon. This corresponds to what Larain (1989, p3) called 'Late Capitalism'. In just a few days after the end of the Second World War, the Réunionnais saw their island transform in a French Department. Full French citizenship was much desired by the people because it led to the end of local plantocracy monopoly in economic and political life. Réunionese communists and Antillean progressists sought social equality in their fight for the French Department status. Following this, *Departmentalists* from the right wing, asked for the assimilation of La Réunion to France, a process more quickly achieved through the intervention of Michel Debré<sup>2</sup>. French values began to be integrated into the Réunionese créolisation process. Since the arrival of first metropolitan civil servants in 1950's, a parallel society was developed and this had the effect of providing a new trade infrastructures of goods and services. It was this diffused sociocultural model that continued to raise the question of precisely what the local cultural life was. Images reinforced by the media where undeniable factors that inspired youths to imitate a mode which was sometimes inaccessible for economical reasons. The *Zorey* and the media play a significant role in the acculturation of the Réunionese Creole society with influences from western and industrial society (Gilbert, 101). *Départementalisation* was originally intended to bring about a radical internal transformation, but came to be limited by the structure of the capitalist society itself. Within that structure the centre-periphery relationship continues to ensure that 'La Réunion remains even more dependent than it was in the colonial period' (Houbert,

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<sup>2</sup> Served as an MP in Réunion between 1962 and 1987. Michel Debré was white French, one of the creator of the fifth republic, former prime minister to General de Gaulle, and ex-foreign and home affairs minister.

1980, p10) which is, according to Larain, a particular explanation of underdevelopment. (Larain, 1989, 80). In La Réunion, créolisation is defined as a *métissage* process leading to a new identity. This process may be approximated through the use of the term: Transculturalism. This according to Jean Louis Amselle, is the appropriate term to describe this contact of cultures involving 'a circulation of practices which creates a constant interweaving of symbolic forms and empirical activities among the different interacting cultures' and *métisses*. In the period of Transculturalism and during the *Départementalisation*, secular education became accessible to everyone. It is the gathering of different ethnic groups and cultures around a second federative value which is the republican value.

In 1979-1981 Réunionnais became Europeans and, the Left took power in France. It took until 1981, one hundred and thirty three years after the abolition of slavery in 1848, for the 20<sup>th</sup> December to finally become a public holiday. This recognition draws forward the recognition of the right of each ethnic group in La Réunion to be different (see glossary). These groups celebrate their differences through various cultural and religious organisations as of the end of 1980s. These populations reconstitute a lost identity during the assimilation in the constitution of the Réunionese society aiming, at the same time to share this common history with other groups. The lost identity that those groups seek more closely related to an imaginary and a nostalgic one, due to the lack of contacts, between the groups in La Réunion and their respective origin countries, the idealised identity does not correspond to a tangible reality but rather a collective fantasy that Carpanin Marimoutou qualify of 'fragmented identity' (1995). Today we challenge the *primordialist* thesis (which could be debated with the instrumentalist thesis) and the idea of *Malbar* or *Zarab* or *kaf* or others identities. These identities were fabricated at a given time and since the last 5-10 years, they also include with for instance the *Renouveau Tamoule* and *Yab, Kaf, Zarab, Chinois* communities. This evolution does not even explain why people carry on to be refer and to recognise themselves in terms of these identities. Thus, the interest in resorting to the idea of 'cultural re-appropriation'. This is the 'glocality' and the identity awakening to which Arjun Appadurai refers. In La Réunion the upper class and some middle-class of these ethnic groups evade the process of créolisation through the community, class and religious pressure, for the choice of the spouse for instance. In

these ethnic groups the *Gros Blancs* and the majority of *Zarab* and *Chinois* do not mix in marriages. Perhaps we can hypothesise that this is due to the economic wealth of the island that is in the hand of these three ethnic origins and also in that of a few *Malbars*, because wealth constitutes some endogamy groups<sup>3</sup>. The case of the *Zorey* is particular, because we can find them in all the strata of the population, it is a phenomenon which is of the order of post-colonial alienation. On the other hand, créolisation is still in action in the majority of middle class and all popular social class and lumpen-proletariat, to take the term of Gramsci. All these lowest social classes are principally joined in social housing and in the highlands of the island. In La Réunion we find all groups ethnic in this popular and middle class but specially a big part of *Kaf*, a majority of *Malbar* and *Yab*. We can point out that this créolisation, which differs through the various social classes is also illustrated through the practice of Creole language. This phenomenon goes in the sense of Robin Cohen when he expresses that 'social identity [is] reduced to class identity. (Cohen, 129). In the Réunionese case we see that créolisation and *métissage* are done first and foremost by the lower and middle classes of society.

#### *Future : return to multiculturalism*

After having experienced the various stages of Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and Transculturalism, one can only speculate as to the next stage of the evolution of créolisation in La Réunion will be. According to Edouard Glissant in discussing 'the créolisation of the world', he notes that within fifteen years, La Réunion case seems to contradict the idea, according to which the world tends to change and become like the present situation in the West Indies (or in La Réunion). On the contrary, it appears that La Réunion tends to emulate the European lifestyle, or even the American lifestyle, more accurately the predominant *conter-culture* black American. Teenagers take part into this cultural globalisation by adopting a black American culture: clothes, rap music, sports, ghettos, violence and obesity. They identify themselves with teenagers's values who live in the French or American suburbs. However their behaviours and their mentality remain paradoxical: the Negroid type is still perceived negatively in La

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<sup>3</sup> See the work of Lucette Labache on 'Ethnicity in Réunion'.

Réunion. This is particularly due to colonial and postcolonial education. The Negroid part of the population denies their African origins with a complex of superiority, which can be psychologically explained as an automatic response to an aggression. There is a kind of antiphony between the two types of speech, which corresponds to a serious conflict in the system of the ethnic values of people in La Réunion. They identify themselves with the black American people, to the black American man, to the fight against the white man, but they tend to identify themselves more with a man like Malcom X and Luther King rather to a man like Nelson Mandela or Lunumba, because they have grown up with the negative vision of the African man and of his cultural values. Glissant seems to underestimate the development of the values and of the norms of American consumption in the West Indies, caused by the situation of economic dependency, since they are located in a peripheral zone of the United States. We can observe the same phenomenon in La Réunion.

Contrary to Arjun Appadurai, we argue that globalisation did not begin in 1989, but earlier, at about the time of slavery. Nevertheless, the present context of globalisation, due to the diversity of its exchanges and of its progress for the means of communications, do not allow to reproduce the evolution, which led to Transculturalism in La Réunion. Indeed, it is important to note that many ethnic groups in the island, did not manage to stay in touch with their native country during the period of the formation of cultural identity. Moreover, since the time of slavery, the predominant occidental model, in terms of economy, culture and society had been radical and official, and this model had been reinforced with the *Départementalisation*. This was not the case in a European or occidental context, which did not have an economic system based on the colonial plantation. The world will never be like La Réunion from 1900 to 1998<sup>4</sup>.

Globalisation was implemented in order to abolish slavery, firstly, in England, in the United States, and secondly in France, for pure economic reasons, such as the need of commercial exchanges and of satisfying the consumers's demands. Today, the context of the globalisation is also characterised by the predominant model of the liberal American economy. In this respect, it seems that the cultural

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<sup>4</sup> 1998 : the year of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery which coincides with the arrival of Canal Satellite and Mc Donald in La Réunion

influence of the Americans continues to contribute to the return of multiculturalism that La Réunion experienced three hundred years ago. A new form of multiculturalism, like that of the Americans, a liberal multiculturalism is on the way to flourish, with the references of identity claims. So, Identity and Culture could be cyclical? The evolution of identity and culture are to be related to the economic and political context, which, in the present context of globalisation, nearly reproduces the economic structures of domination during the colonisation. We can note that most families who ran the colonial exploitations are now to be found at the head of private enterprises in La Réunion. Likewise, some ethnic groups, except the *Gros Blancs* and those belonging to the well-off class, have managed to be powerful economically and politically speaking. We find also the same group of people, which accepts their original identity, but this very group is reluctant to take part to the process of créolisation.

In line with Arjun Appadurai's idea about the 'glocality', capitalism brought by a globalisation with an ultra-liberalism tendency- has changed the behaviours in relation to identity and culture by turning them into identity strategies. So, we could talk about a formation of identity and not about the building of identity. The formation of culture and class structure in La Réunion can be seen as a consequence of the colonial relationship. The colonial and class structures determine the interest of a small part of the ruling bourgeoisie, which implement different policies leading to underdevelopment. The articulation of the production style and the problem of dependency are the results of the formation of social classes (Larain, 1989, p124).

### **Formation and building of identity**

The distinction between formation and construction appears to be interesting for Bayart, whose considers the situation from the point of view of the sociological and historical aspects of the State. He introduces this issue in France, in terms of construction and of formation of the State by giving a synthesis of Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale's book. The distinction is quite simple. On one hand, all that refers to the State-building is 'a conscious and willful creation to have a system of political control' (Bayart, 1994, 137, Lonsdale, 1992). These are the public policies of the State, implemented by the public factors, the politicians, or the administrators. Bayart shows that a State

is not only built by public policies, but one must also understand its formation, and take into account the unconscious influence of anonymous factors. On the other hand, State-formation is 'an involuntary and historical process, with conflicts, contradicting negotiations, which, in this clash climate leads to compromises by the anonymous mass between the different groups' (Bayart, 1994, Lonsdale, 1992). Thus, the State-formation represents all the social practices, which interfere with public policies, hence a sort of tension, clash, contradictions or sometimes, on the contrary, synergies of the public policies. The State-building is represented by the *Gros Blancs* and *Zorey*, who face the State-formation, represented by the action of the anonymous people, that is to say the slaves, the indentured labours, and now the mass of the population. Thus, it exists processes of the formation of these identities, that are much more secret and complex within which we find *créolisation*. These concepts of State building and formation, of power leads us to the analysis of the colonisation, as a system of historical action (Bayart, 138). Here, the crystallisation of particular identities', the one we know nowadays, took place when there was slavery, added to the action (but eventually a conflicting action), of the foreign settlers.

There are many lifestyles, which shape the State-formation in matrices, for instance the invention of the Réunionese tradition. Identity is cultural, political and ideological, but also historical, traduced by the idea of 'identity strategies'. The identities, where lay the identity strategies of La Réunion, were born during the slavery period. Bayart notes that 'in a postcolonial context, one need to use the terms of the formation of identity, not the terms of building' (Esprit, 1993, p98). The political side of the construction of identities, for example is inherent in public and nationalist policies. In La Réunion, it is the public policies of colonials rules followed by the French Republic embodied in the notion of *Francitude* since *Départementalisation*. The practices of the formation of identities can be explained by the very way people adopt the policies of building identities, rejecting them, or by their attitudes towards other identity references. These references have nothing to do with the '*Jacobinitude*' or '*Jacobinism*' of the State, references originated from policy of assimilation (or imposition) since the *Départementalisation*.

In La Réunion, the people at the 'top' and those at the 'bottom' exclusively acknowledge and define their identity according to those



spaces of domination and participation. La Réunion can be a school case, because much social behaviours (alcohol consumption, rum, drug see even violence) has its causes in identity. This confirms the idea that the origin of identity is fictive and the official is of course built, but it is still fictive, as we live at 6,500 miles away from France. Some people in La Réunion, of whatever ethnic origins, seem to look for a mystic root in an unknown place, as the *Rastafarism* for example, and they reject the official identity altogether. This the quest for the Promised Land, the land of Freedom, the return to Africa, the dream of finding at lost nation and the hope of finding the roots. But it is above all, the Black Man, who 'takes the initiative to go and meet the land of the ancestors' (Desrosiers); but we do not understand how all the different ethnic groups can find themselves in this movement. After the rehabilitation of the African origins in La Réunion as a result of negritude, the affirmation of *Réunionité* comes to the forefront, as does a revival of the local and cultural forms. The willingness to revivify the Creole language and a kind of coming back to the 'African' music are of major importance in this process of awareness. This fact of becoming aware is to be more and more clearly observed nowadays, even if it is quite moderate, which would justify why it is considered to be a mere localism (Desrosiers, p146).

How has globalisation itself becomes creolised culturally? That draws us forward to propose that from the notions of 'glocality' (Appadurai) and of 'créolisation of the world' (Glissant), we suggest here the idea of a 'glocréolisation', which aptly characterises the actual situation in La Réunion. The evolutions caused by the globalisation, which allow the phenomenon of 'glocality' to take place, intervene in La Réunion in a context of créolisation.

### *Music*

Relationships between society and culture, between social organisation and musical expression remain the particular witnesses of the symbolical identity building. 'Music should be considered as a social fact' (Cherubini, p5) and it is certainly the most, cultural product in La Réunion. Music is most accessible as opposed to other artistic and cultural means (Cherubini, Desrosiers) and we can do nothing, but be the witnesses of the astonishing diversity of the musical creation on the Island. According to Desrosiers, for some youngsters living in lower

class areas, music has become a means which allows them to get recognition. Music is the main argument for La Réunion language. It used to be forbidden and absent from the media and public demonstrations. We need to clarify the situation with regards to the terminology, in order to avoid any confusions between *Séga* and *Maloya*. *Séga* used to be what we now call *Maloya*. The colonists wanted to change this slave music and dance by adding some Europeans rhythm, on so that it could become a Creole dance, a white music, mixed, a kind creolised version. We will then always have with this *Séga* rhythm, folks variety, *Séga* as saloon dance for white people (Desrosiers, 32). By extension, according to the defenders of *Maloya*, *Séga* is being associated to the white colonial domination, its practice was sometimes seen as a reaffirmation of a neo-colonialist spirit in the 50s. Later *Maloya* came back from a political claim in order for it to be separated from *Séga*, so that it could come back to its *Maloya* roots. *Maloya* is one the faces of an old form of primitive *Séga*. It was born from musical expressions, vocals, instrumentals, and was danced by African and Malagasy slaves; according to some historians and musicologist it had been fostered by the Indians indentured workers and later on by the sons of the colonists. *Maloya* is an example where it draws oneself 'sharing zones, locations of passages'. It originally was a dance which avowed to honour dead people to communicate with the spirits and the gods. As it is for the Creole language we are part of the society if we consider that *Maloya* also belongs to it. If we compare language to music the latter is more advantageous: it gives a voice to the denied Creole language, within a more worthy language which is musical language (Desroches, 2000). It is the typical language of this multicultural exchange and the acceptance of this music as the Creole language for the integration marked by créolisation now in the musical behaviour. Up until 1981, 'la fête *kaf*' of the 20<sup>th</sup> December celebrating the slavery abolition was not allowed. The social forbiddance also hits *Maloya* which an identity link for a major party of the population. It also recalls past times that now still marks the identities and entails closer relationships between individuals. The Réunionese Communist Party then widely relaunched *Maloya*, it used it to claim it social and political thoughts. The consequences of this are numerous. It accelerated the 'politicisation'. Debré and the plantocracy had stigmatised the *Maloya* as a counter culture and for a long time contributed to the forbidden of *Maloya* bands or any other 'claiming'

music (Desrosiers, 33). There is an evolution of literature, linked to the identity claim. *Maloya* is a song of the fields, of resistance, of refusal. It is a way to affirm the Réunionese identity. *Maloya* is a reality and a marker of identity. This discordant and contradictory speech should not be linked to musical reality but with social reality and its identity stakes. The notion of search for identity allows us to view the musical behaviours as 'identity strategies'. The mentioning of issues such as partnership/affiliation, the feeling of belonging and the recognition brings us back to the identity question. The individuals one's and by extension of the group (Gilbert, 106). Nowadays, there are speeches about *Maloya* and *Séga* as speeches for the search for identity (Desrosiers, Cohen). Even though some people link *Séga* with a more conservative state of mind and *Maloya* with a progressist thought, it happens that sometimes people play *Maloya* like if they were playing in *Séga* spirit and vice-versa. There used to be a distinction between *Séga* and *Maloya* but it is no longer the case. Words have moved even if the style and rhythm tend to go in the same 'musical direction'. 'People tend to mix them both' (Desrosiers, 40). *Maloya* is a modern expression of old customs that have been rediscovered. Its past is also the one of a major party of Réunionese people. It is also the history of its Malagasy and African origins.

#### *Cuisine/Food*

One should not underestimate the role played by food/cooking habits in the building and the formation of national identity. For a few years, the return to traditional culinary practices, has been going on with the regional protest movements in La Réunion. Food has become a 'strong identity symbol' (Bayart, 189). In La Réunion, cooking structure is divided as follows:

- *Cari*: distinguished by its South Indian seasonings and spices.
- *Rougail*: It is different to cari as tomatoes and hot chilli are added:
- coming from Madagascar as vegetables and stocks.
- *Le civet, la daube* : Juggled food, stew: close to French cooking, but
- also salads, soups, pate, roasts and desserts.
- *Rice*: Like in India, China and Madagascar constitutes the basis of
- every meals.
- *Tubercules* : Plant roots: Africa, desserts.

From the beginning, people in La Réunion have been able to include elements or new and diverse culinary traditional ways of cooking. Although cooking still carries its Asian origins in its main form, or more precisely Indian. Its European, or more precisely French heritage is also marked. (Cohen, 53) The African and Malagasy contribution is relatively weak. Cooking would then represent a typical case of 'métissage'. We may even talk about Créolisation. The traditional Creole food would be the result of the encounter, the confrontation between many different cultural groups on the Island who created a 'Creole' whole. In the Leblond's writings, Marimoutou shows that 'the master like the servant, the white man like the black would meet in a kitchen without any issue, no conflict, intercultural, 'métisse' a sort of identity curry' (Marimoutou, 35). This the reason why the non culinary confrontation is filled by another paradigm, which is the conflict between witchcraft [Formation] and Christianity [Building] (Marimoutou, 35). [True relationships between colonisation and civilisation though]. According to Marimoutou, the cooking practices then appear as expressions and identity claiming of a social and cultural group. La Réunion find itself marked by all the features that we have just been discussing, and also the culinary practices which contributes to the characterisation of the Réunionese identity (Cohen, 51).

## Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that the *Séga* is a matter of identity building, with in the background until 1980s assimilationist and *departementalist* discourse of the State, *Gros Blancs* and power remaining in the background. It results in lyrics which sing of blue seas, yellow sun, insouciance and eroticism. On the contrary, the *Maloya* is a matter of identity formation, marked by its demanding spirit. Being a communist, autonomist and independentist discourse, *Maloya* is the popular mass against the power which sings of frustration, anxiety and aggressiveness. French language is central part of the identity building process. The Creole language is deeply involved in this too. The Creole language forms the basis of Réunionese culture, of this formation of Creole society and our present social créolisation. Creole language plays a central role in all the present phenomenon which are mainly seen in La Réunion: social problem, education, representation, success, etc. Our French identity follows from La Réunion statute and rights.

Nevertheless, today we can notice that a synthesis is taking place between building and formation identity. Within the public space, identity building prevails, whereas in the private space, identity formation is of greatest importance. We might therefore ask if there is, in fact, harmonisation of *métissage* and créolisation, because *métissage* cannot be experienced in isolation. Albert Mémi, remarks that the majority does not merely impose its cultural law on the minority via any specifically disguised violence (Creole language, school, Education, media, music, catholic religion, etc.) In particular, given that La Réunion is a post-plantation society and not a post-industrial society, what it implies is that politics takes into account more specifically a past characterised by slavery which created trauma. Today the sequels are still visible when one examines the Réunionese population. We will not focus in any greater detail here on the socio-economical problems, but we cannot ignore the consequences of La Réunion's statute, notably the extremely high unemployment rate (40%) which causes inevitably a lot of stress, tension, alcoholic problems, domestic violence, sexual violence and murders. Can this violence be directly attributed to a shortage of work? Is globalisation a disguised and masked recolonisation which we call post-colonialism or neo-colonialism? The post-colonial process seems to have reached a stage described by Frantz Fanon where the dominated cannot even consider their life a separate from the presence of dominating forces. The fight between masters and slaves has given way, then, to a class struggle masked by the screen of 'colourist ideological discourse'. Behind the alibi of colour, another drama becomes prominent: the one of maintenance of dependence and alienation.

On the one hand, identity is not rooted. Rather it modifies all individual existence long and group in relation with State and Nation crisis: political crisis, economical crisis, social crisis and even 'cultural' crisis. Is identity cyclical? In La Réunion will there have a risk to come back to interethnic relations like 300 years ago? Post-modern society like we talk in western countries, was it not present in La Réunion 300 years ago? Thus the culture is not a statute but a process. Identity formation is therefore a dynamic and critical process, often led by the intelligentsia and by artists, subjects, poets, writers and performers. Research on cultural events and expressions is therefore an important part of probing identity formation in La Réunion. In the particular context of La Réunion, créolisation lies at the heart of identity

formation. (See Cohen). As Stuart Hall observes (1991, p47) 'Identities are never complete, never finished ; that they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process. Identity is always in the process of formation. Whereas Ulf Hannerz thinks that 'Créolisation continuum can be seen in its organisation of diversity to entail a political economy of culture'. (Hannerz, 1991, p127). Meanwhile Carpanin Marimoutou comments that today, we have thus, to go beyond of this discourse for asking identity there where it gives to see and product: in the reality of cultural and social practice (Marimoutou, 1991). Without neglect the fact that Réunionese society is structured around the social class rather around ethnic division.

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