

SHAKESPEARE'S TRANSCOLONIAL SOLIDARITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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The transformations Shakespearian drama has undergone within the global South allow us to glimpse the rich potential for subversion and renewal within his work. In travelling around the globe, traditional Shakespeare has been dismantled and reimagined, and the result is illuminating for cultural studies attuned to the dynamics at play in an unequal world. However, the temptation to view this capacity for revision as affirming, above all, Shakespeare's exceptionalism has the regrettable effect of obscuring the mutuality of creative innovations that work powerfully to renew Shakespeare and lend his work startling contemporaneity. As theatre-makers across the global South explore affinities between their worlds and Shakespeare's, they allow us to imagine, in sympathy with Shakespeare, the possibility of a transformed critical landscape. It is this capacity for mutual affinity across vast differences in time and space that provides the impetus for my article: the recent renderings of *The Tempest* into the creole forms of Sierre Leone and the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius demonstrate the powerful effect of creolization in this context. These adaptations allow Shakespeare to bear witness to the aftermath of slavery and to play a role in disabling the hateful logic that underpins rigid ethnic classifications.

Contemporary theatre-makers have drawn on Shakespeare in a manner that complicates the dichotomies of earlier cultural histories, that embed Shakespeare within an inimical colonial canon. But scholarship has tended to treat the creative work emerging from non-traditional centres of Shakespeare practice as tangential to

mainstream Shakespeare studies, as if it constitutes a welcome and engaging sideshow that affirms, ultimately, Shakespeare's immense appeal and influence. The field of Global Shakespeare has not yet done enough to demonstrate the transformative potential of this creative work and its significance for critical thought and cultural politics.

The conceptual framework of the global South helps to bring into view the connections and affinities between diverse contexts across the world without necessarily reproducing familiar cultural hierarchies. Instead of treating colonialism's abuses and post-colonialism's resistances as the defining moments for vastly different contexts, the framework of the global South opens to view the diverse modes of dominance that obtain across a multiply unequal world. It enables conversations across oceans of difference and points to affinities in terms other than those that were set in place by European colonialism. It invites us to look laterally, across the Indian and Atlantic worlds, for cultural and political resonances, by-passing the endorsement of northern cultural theory.

The global South thus potentially shifts the orientation within which readers might interpret Shakespeare's resonances across the globe. Shakespeare's rich afterlife in non-traditional (and non-English) centres of theatre-making becomes more evident and differently valued within a framework that can more readily acknowledge the texture of innovative cultural work apart from the legitimizing nexus of northern theory. What we understand as 'Shakespeare' is necessarily changed by this shift in perspective, and rendered

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irreducibly plural. This is not to say that the figure of Shakespeare, as a cultural phenomenon, does not remain one of Britain's most recognizable and marketable icons, represented variously with reference to his imagined person, his characters, his plays and his craft; indeed, it was with Shakespeare's words that well-known British actor Kenneth Branagh (dressed as nineteenth-century British engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel), invited the world to open themselves to the 'delight' of 'the isle' at the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games in 2012 and offered the islander's reassurance, 'Be not afraid. The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not', from *The Tempest*.¹ The quintessentially British Shakespeare, whom viewers around the world encountered in this moment as spokesperson for the British Isles, had been transformed by global anti-colonial politics: the speech with which the Olympic hosts welcomed their audience of 900 million² did not belong to the character from *The Tempest* most closely associated in times past with the playwright himself, Prospero, whom Samuel Taylor Coleridge described as 'the very Shakespeare himself'.³ Instead, it was Caliban's welcome that was extended in 2012 to the imagined visitors to an island world rendered magical and strange through the dreamscape conjured by Prospero's 'Abhorred slave' (1.2.354).

The effect of this foregrounding of Caliban is unsettling to the fantasy of world harmony, as Johann Gregory and François-Xavier Gleyzan have argued: 'The sentimental use of Shakespeare in the ceremony, thus, seems to have unconsciously raised the spectre of the colonised Caliban even as it attempted to silence this issue.'⁴ In drawing our attention to organizer Danny Boyle's programme notes for the opening ceremony, however, Jem Bloomfield allows us to see how this changing narrative works to transform colonization into something that can be absorbed into a narrative of 'revolution' and global prosperity.⁵ According to Boyle, at 'some point in their histories, most nations experience a revolution that changes everything about them. The United Kingdom had a revolution that changed the whole of human existence.' The 'revolution' to which Boyle

refers is a matter of innovation rather than political change but his message appropriates the idealism from the latter sense of 'revolution' to construct an ideal that can be imagined as creating a 'better world' in which all might enjoy 'real freedom and real equality', 'through the prosperity of industry'.⁶ Boyle's version of English global influence historically avoids any explicit acknowledgement of its legacy of imperial dominance and the anti-colonial revolutions it faced, but this history haunts the ceremony, not least through Shakespeare's contribution to it.

The fact that Shakespeare gets conscripted to underwrite this myth of global prosperity and well-being is not remarkable. Rather, what is noteworthy is that the world-making taking place on the Olympic stage celebrates, perhaps unwittingly, the power of the dispossessed to create magic and make strange the projection of hegemonic and commodified Englishness. The figure of Caliban-as-Brunel unsettles the attempt to transform a narrative of global domination into a supposedly shared ideal. The kind of unabashed celebration of the English kingdom that was possible in the 1612 Cotswold Olympics, described in Richard Wilson's account of 'Shakespeare's Olympic Game', is revisited in 2012 as a matter of 'pastoral'

¹ Quotations from *The Tempest* are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford, 1986), 3.2.138–9.

² Avril Ormsby, 'London 2012 opening ceremony draws 900 million viewers', *Reuters*, 7 August 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-oly-ratings-day-idUKBRE876oV820120807>.

³ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 1 (London, 1960), p. 119. The figure of Prospero, played by Sir Ian McKellen, did appear briefly in the opening ceremony for the Paralympics, speaking lines especially scripted for the ceremony.

⁴ Johann Gregory and François-Xavier Gleyzan, 'Thinking through Shakespeare: an introduction to Shakespeare and theory', *English Studies* 94.3 (2013), 251–8; p. 253.

⁵ Jem Bloomfield, 'Caliban and Brunel: Kenneth Branagh's speech at the Olympics Opening Ceremony', *Words of Power: Reading Shakespeare and the Bible*, 29 July 2012, <https://quiteirregular.wordpress.com/2012/07/29/caliban-and-brunel-kenneth-branagh-speech-at-the-olympics-opening-ceremony>.

⁶ Danny Boyle, programme notes, quoted in Bloomfield, 'Caliban and Brunel'.

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nostalgia rather than fierce competition: as Wilson argues, 'Boyle looked to be idealizing a disarmingly alternative genealogy, and a bucolic rather than heroic sporting culture that had lingered on Dover's Hill', the site of both the 1612 Cotswold Olympics and the 'Olympic Village' in 2012.⁷

This celebration of Englishness places Shakespeare centre-stage, to be sure, but what we encounter in 2012 is an outward-looking and resonant Shakespeare who addresses a global audience through Caliban's words of welcome and Miranda's expression of 'wonder' at this 'brave new world' (as occurred in the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games).⁸ In London's projection of national pride in the summer of 2012 we glimpse something of the haunting presence of the dispossessed within mainstream English culture and the transformation that even canonical Shakespeare has undergone in the face of globalization's cultural disseminations. This transformation is not adequately accounted for through the notion of the post-colony 'speaking back' to the centre, given the varied and uneven histories of cultural and political domination. The study of Shakespeare's changing iterations across the world today requires a more nuanced model of cultural engagement, one that can offer a global mapping of uneven power relations and, at the same time, attend to the texture of local particularities and the surprising affinities and dissonances they yield.

GLOBAL SHAKESPEARE AS SEEN FROM THE SOUTH

There is a case to be made for the global South as a category of analysis for Shakespeare studies, given its presence within cultural studies more broadly. I would like to take a moment here to make some tentative claims about what I consider to be the value, for revisionist scholarship, of the view from the South, not only for those who live and work in the South or who assert an affiliation or a commitment to the politics of the South, but also for critical thought generally. The term 'global South' has developed a certain theoretical purchase in recent years but it has a surprisingly clear

foothold in early modernity as well; early modern geographers wrote explicitly of the people of the 'southern climes' or 'southern nations', or sometimes simply, the 'south', installing as they did so subtle forms of racialization and legitimizing colonial exploitation, as the following two examples attest. Sixteenth-century English compiler Richard Eden writes in a generalized fashion about 'the south partes of the world' when flaunting the extractable wealth and exoticism of regions found 'betwene the two Tropikes under ye Equinoctial or burning lyne'.⁹ The seventeenth-century English cartographer Richard Blome sets up a distinction between the 'Southern Nations' of the world and the 'Northern People' in the epistle of his translation of Bernhardus Varenius's *Geographia* in 1682. According to Blome, body and mind are shaped by climate, which explains the unquestionable superiority of the 'Northern People' of the globe, who 'have always been Victorious and predominant over the Meridional or Southern Nations'.¹⁰ I have argued elsewhere at greater length that the distinction between 'South' and 'North' emerged during the early modern expansionist period as a key mechanism for establishing a racial hierarchy on a global scale.¹¹ The 'south partes' were regions whose natural resources seemed to invite exploitation and whose seemingly primitive peoples warranted the influences of the North.

The term's value for cultural studies today is related to this cultural geography; the global South enables an oblique angle on colonial

⁷ See Richard Wilson, 'Like an Olympian wrestling: Shakespeare's Olympic Game', *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 82–95; p. 83.

⁸ Actress Nicola Miles-Wildin delivered an excerpt from Miranda's speech from Act 5, scene 1.

⁹ Richard Eden, 'Epistle', in *A treatyse of the newe India* (London, 1555), sig. aa.vi.r–v.

¹⁰ Richard Blome, 'Epistle', in Bernhardus Varenius, *Cosmography and geography in two parts*, trans. Richard Blome (London, 1682), sig. A2r.

¹¹ See Sandra Young, *The Early Modern Global South in Print: Textual Form and the Production of Human Difference as Knowledge* (Farnham, 2015).

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modernity or, as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff have articulated it in their book on *Theory from the South*, an ‘ex-centric . . . angle of vision’.¹² The global South challenges the normativity of the view from the north, bringing into focus an alternative set of interests and material conditions. Even so, there is a degree of ambivalence surrounding the term, partly as a result of its paternalistic, if somewhat idealistic, early iterations in United Nations ‘development’ discourse (specifically, a 2003 United Nations Programme, ‘Forging a Global South’), even as it sought to encourage ‘South–South’ connections and self-directed strategies for growth. As Arif Dirlik explains, the ‘global South has its roots in earlier third world visions of liberation, and those visions still have an important role to play in restoring human ends to development’.¹³ Critics might argue that the term is misleading: the distinction it identifies between a putative ‘North’ and ‘South’ cannot in fact be mapped onto a fixed cartographic grid. But the crucial thing about the concept of the global South is that its usefulness lies in the cultural and economic *alignments* it signals, sometimes held in tension within a single nation or region.

The frame provided by the global South is therefore both limited and immensely useful for cultural studies. Arif Dirlik has outlined the ‘chaotic’ and surprising alignments that frustrate any attempt to map a geographical grid onto the economies of the world.¹⁴ Even so, he finds in the notion of a global South an effective rubric with which to identify the struggles and ‘affinities’ that potentially challenge the hegemony of a modernity rooted in coloniality: ‘There are certain affinities between these societies in terms of mutual recognition of historical experiences with colonialism and neocolonialism.’¹⁵ Most importantly, perhaps, the global South potentially allows for the inclusion, as Dirlik puts it, of ‘the voices of the formerly colonized and marginalized in a world that already has been shaped by a colonial modernity to which there is no alternative in sight’.¹⁶ It is this privileging of previously hidden stories that is compelling about the framework provided by the global South, as

well as the space it creates for critical perspectives on race and power. The framework of the global South potentially enables a different perspective on relations of domination and freedom within a world made complex through diasporic mobilities. It focuses on connections and affinities between diverse contexts across the South. It also opens up space for greater nuance as we seek to understand Shakespeare’s resonances today.

The emergence of Global Shakespeare has already helped to bring to scholarly attention some of the struggles around race and anti-coloniality across the globe. And yet, while Global Shakespeare thrives as a field of interest, it has not necessarily led to a revision of the critical landscape. While the field has drawn attention to Shakespeare’s ongoing presence across the globe, it is not clear to what extent it has transformed the cultural politics of ‘Shakespeare’. Certainly, interest in the ‘global’ has signalled critical openness to non-traditional centres of Shakespeare scholarship and theatre practice. But the value of a recognizably global and plural Shakespeare is not simply its accommodation of a richer variety or its celebration of difference, akin to what Ania Loomba dismissed as the ‘simplistic “all is hybrid and multicultural”’ approach to cultural studies in her critique of a certain mode of uncritical post-colonial scholarship.¹⁷ Rather, the expanded view and more encompassing methodology have the potential to challenge some assumptions underpinning the field and to liberate scholars, theatre-makers and Shakespeare himself to tell new stories

¹² Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder, 2012), p. 2.

¹³ Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (New York, 2016), p. 150.

¹⁴ Dirlik, *Global Modernity*, p. 138.

¹⁵ Dirlik, *Global Modernity*, p. 139.

¹⁶ Dirlik, *Global Modernity*, p. 147.

¹⁷ Ania Loomba, ‘Review of Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings / Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello’, *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010), 269–70.

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entirely, narrated from the 'undersides' of colonial modernity.¹⁸

SHAKESPEARE AS AN ALLY OF LIBERATION IN AFRICA

What would it mean for us to take seriously the critical frame of the global South and the lateral view it privileges, across the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds? Partly in response to that question, this section of my article explores Shakespeare's cultural and political resonances in contemporary Africa and beyond the oceans on either side of its coastlines. It is inspired by the conviction that it is important to resist the impulse to reach for the tired conclusion that Shakespeare's presence across the South affirms, above all, his pre-eminence. While it may be true to say that the creative latitude of contemporary engagements enhances Shakespeare's significance, this is a matter of mutual generation. Shakespeare's evolving presence in Africa speaks to the exciting renewal that is possible when he ceases to be thought of as 'our guru' (as Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer once put it) and when he becomes one of many potentially rich experiences of theatre from exciting new writers and theatre-makers.¹⁹

There is, of course, a long tradition within Africa of invoking Shakespeare as an ally. Despite the resistance to Shakespeare in evidence in post-apartheid and decolonized public culture, and the rise in visibility of new literatures since the Africanist literary movement of the 1970s spearheaded by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and others, Shakespeare has figured as an ally in oppositional politics for a number of African intellectuals during the last century. Shakespeare's language has found its way into the speeches of a number of post-apartheid statesmen, and a narrative has emerged in recent years suggesting that freedom fighters under apartheid felt a keen affinity with Shakespeare. The community of anti-apartheid freedom fighters incarcerated on Robben Island felt drawn to Shakespeare's works and the humanity he seemed to represent; the circulation of *The Alexander Text of the Complete Works of*

Shakespeare, disguised as Hindi scriptures, has recently garnered critical attention, with the publication of monographs by Ashwin Desai and David Schalkwyk.²⁰ The idea that Shakespeare's value was felt even in the space of the Robben Island prison amongst inmates and liberation heroes, and by Nelson Mandela himself, is compelling: Shakespeare seems to gain a new prescience. But in his moving account of the circulation of the *Complete Works*, Schalkwyk doesn't celebrate Shakespeare's exceptionism in being able to speak into even the dry land of apartheid South Africa. Rather, as Schalkwyk tells it, Shakespeare's words become a device for imagining our way into the lives of the Robben Island prisoners whose signatures next to key passages from Shakespeare's *Completed Works* attest to an imagined solidarity.

There is a long history to this sense of affiliation, for despite Shakespeare's central position within the English colonial canon – and perhaps also because of it – Shakespeare was available as a language for self-expression for an earlier generation of African nationalists, such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and writers, such as Sol Plaatje. But this deployment of Shakespeare as the mechanism of a form of self-assertion in a racist society is an ambivalent matter. It risks reiterating the standing not so much of the translation but of the putative original. Newer generations of African playwrights have tended to produce translations that rewrite, appropriate and transform, working alongside Shakespeare to create a new work. In West Africa, for example, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar was reimagined as a powerful figure of Krio democracy in Thomas

¹⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Nadine Gordimer referred to Shakespeare in this way during a public conversation held at the Centre for the Book in Cape Town in August 2011 in celebration of the publication of her collection of essays, *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1950–2008* (New York, 2010).

²⁰ Ashwin Desai, *Reading Revolution: Shakespeare on Robben Island* (Pretoria, 2012); David Schalkwyk, *Hamlet's Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare* (London, 2013).

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Decker's *Juliohs Siza*.²¹ Decker's play unravels the polarity represented by idealization versus resistance. Published just three years after independence in Sierra Leone, it has been praised for its audacity in asserting 'a sort of linguistic authority by means of a Krio appropriation and translation' and an 'African independent theatre'.²² Now the language of 'everyday life' in Sierra Leone, Krio is a language that has evolved from the multiple influences and traditions at play there. Furthermore, it is neither European nor, strictly speaking, indigenous. The use of Krio thus creates the conditions for a 'linguistic connection' across perceived 'ethnic boundaries'.²³ The possibility for 'linguistic connection' and the crossing of 'boundaries' depends on an engagement with the work that is both lighter and more robust, a veritable creolization of form.

More recently, Mauritian playwright Dev Virahsawmy has entirely refashioned Shakespeare's plays by inserting them into an Indian Ocean world. Virahsawmy's celebration of the language and politics of Mauritian Creole in works such as *Toufann* (an audacious rewriting of *The Tempest*) renders Shakespeare's world irrepressibly polyvocal.²⁴ This creolization of Shakespeare also has the effect of putting him somehow in relation to slave experience: it insists upon the relation between Shakespeare's world and slavery's traumatic dislocations, marked in the surprising cadences and idioms of Mauritian Creole, in its chaotic temporalities and in the inclusion of contradictory and contesting voices. In the final section of the article, then, I turn briefly to Virahsawmy's reimagining of *The Tempest* in the Indian Ocean world of Mauritius to reflect briefly on the way creole forms bring into view the struggles and the surprising affinities between contexts that differ significantly.

LATERAL AFFINITIES: A CREOLE
 TEMPEST IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Working in sympathy with Shakespeare's play, Virahsawmy's *Toufann* explores the anti-colonial and liberatory sentiments within *The Tempest*, while transforming it utterly in 'an irreverent and parodic rewriting', as Roshni Mooneeram puts it.²⁵

In Françoise Lionnet's reading, this sympathetic rendering of *The Tempest* is the result of Virahsawmy's sense of affinity, across time and place, between the worlds of post-independence Mauritius and Shakespeare's play. In the new work, the anti-colonial elements of the Shakespearian text are toyed with and reimagined, in an expression of what Lionnet calls 'a "transcolonial" form of solidarity'.²⁶

Virahsawmy's activism comes in the wake of the anti-colonial movements of the 1960s and 1970s — in particular, the creolité movement in the Caribbean and its Mauritian counterpart, Khal Torabully's 'coolitude' movement. Coolitude brings into view the more complex stratifications within Indian society and the suffering of the indentured labourers, with their journey across the 'Kala Pani', the black sea of Indian mythology which has frequently been used to refer to the terrifying oceanic crossing, for example in the work of Mauritian writer Ananda Devi.²⁷ As a cultural and political movement, therefore, coolitude emerges out of the context of the Indian Oceanic world, and the particular history

²¹ Thomas Decker, *Juliohs Siza* (1964), ed. Neville Shrimpton and Njie Sulayman (Umea, Sweden, 1988).

²² Tcho Mbaimba Caulker, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in Sierra Leone: Thomas Decker's *Juliohs Siza*, Roman politics, and the emergence of a postcolonial African state', *Research in African Literatures* 40.2 (2009), 208–27; p. 213.

²³ Caulker, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in Sierra Leone', p. 213.

²⁴ Dev Virahsawmy, *Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy*, in *African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics*, ed. Martin Banham, James Gibbs and Femi Osofisan, trans. Nisha Walling and Michael Walling (Oxford, Bloomington, and Johannesburg, 1999), pp. 217–54.

²⁵ Roshni Mooneeram, 'Literary translations as a tool for critical language planning', *World Englishes* 32.2 (2013), 198–210; p. 203.

²⁶ Françoise Lionnet, 'Creole vernacular theatre: transcolonial translations', *MLN* 118.4 (2003), 911–32; p. 917.

²⁷ For a discussion of the history and cultural legacy of Indian indentured labourers and a comparison between the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean island worlds, see Rohini Bannerjee's essay, 'The Kala Pani connection: Francophone migration narratives in the Caribbean writing of Raphaël Confiant and the Mauritian writing of Ananda Devi', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 7.1 (2010), article 5.

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of Mauritius, which occupies a key position along the Indian Ocean spice trade route. It was inhabited by a succession of European traders – the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and finally the French, who created permanent settlements from 1715 and 'a plantation economy reliant on the introduction of slaves mainly from various parts of Africa and Madagascar'.²⁸ Mauritian Creole is intimately connected to the history and aftermath of slavery in Mauritius. It carries that legacy in its rhythms and richly textured idioms, and in the diverse ethnic identifications of the people, evidence of human mobility over the past four centuries. However, 'coolitude' has been criticized more recently for its celebratory tone and inability to acknowledge the ongoing marginalization of the descendants of African slaves in Mauritius, the group historically associated most closely with creole linguistic and cultural expressions. Virahsawmy's commitment to standardizing Mauritian Creole as a national linguistic identity is not simply a rejoinder to colonial dominance; it also affirms the sense of renewal and inclusivity in the post-independence era, demonstrating the importance of 'notions of inclusion, as opposed to exclusion, of cultural creolisation (*métissage*), as opposed to (supposed) ethnic purity, of the empowerment of women, as opposed to their oppression', as Shawkat Toorawa has argued.²⁹

Shakespeare has become an unlikely accomplice in Virahsawmy's activism on behalf of what is known in Mauritius as Kreol Morisien (or Kreol, as I will refer to it, to distinguish it from other creole forms). Toorawa thinks of Virahsawmy's project as an attempt to 'redeploy' and 'wield Shakespeare in order to elevate Mauritian Creole – the language in which all his plays are written – to the status of a world language'.³⁰ The elevating effect is mutual, however. In his engagement with *The Tempest*, Virahsawmy makes Shakespeare an ally in unravelling assumptions about 'ethnicity' and in crafting a new, more inclusive basis for social cohesion in the post-colony.

Shakespeare's play is made to bear witness to the everyday challenges and injustices in Mauritius, in part, through the adoption of Kreol, as I aim to show as I turn to a brief discussion of some aspects

of the play for the remainder of this article. The idiomatic texture of the Kreol makes visible the texture of everyday life on the island in a way that the English translation of this adaptation flattens out somewhat. For example, the boat into which Prospero and his daughter are set loose is a tiny local fisherman's boat called a *lakok pistas*,³¹ which in the English translation appears blandly as 'a boat',³² when the description points to their vulnerability on the water in the face of the cyclone, it registers syntactically as a metaphor: 'in nothing but a nutshell of a boat'.³³ The Kreol, by contrast, recalls the precarity of the life of a fisherman on the waters during an Indian Ocean storm by using the local term for a fisherman's pirogue: 'dan enn siklonn dan enn lakok pistas'.³⁴ The Kreol idiom used to describe Prospero's prisoners refers to a local shrimp ('sevret') associated with madness or bewilderment, but is rendered as 'fish out of water'³⁵ in the English translation.³⁶ Earlier Prospero describes them as 'still infected with evil';³⁷ in the Kreol version, we are invited to picture their evil still dancing in their head: 'Zot move ankor pe fer bal dan zot latet' (8).³⁸ In another expression that is not included in the English version, when faced with the impending storm, a sailor warns that 'you pay for your sins on earth' – as the English translation puts it³⁹ – where the original uses a Kreol idiom ('Pa toulezour fet zako')⁴⁰ which warns that 'not every day is a monkey festival'.⁴¹ Even the ubiquitous

²⁸ 'Mooneeram, 'Literary translations', p. 200.

²⁹ Shawkat Toorawa, 'Translating *The Tempest*', in *African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics*, ed. Banham, Gibbs and Osofisan, pp. 125–38; p. 128.

³⁰ Toorawa, 'Translating *The Tempest*', p. 129.

³¹ Dev Virahsawmy, *Toufann: enn Fantezi an 3 Ak* (Rose Hill, 1991), pp. 3, 5, <http://boukiebanane.com/toufann>.

³² Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 220.

³³ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 219.

³⁴ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 3.

³⁵ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 229.

³⁶ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 15.

³⁷ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 224.

³⁸ Translation by Tasneem Allybokus.

³⁹ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 245.

⁴⁰ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Translation by Tasneem Allybokus.

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exclamation ‘Oh my god!’ in English⁴² carries the trace of a more complex social inheritance in the Kreol ‘Baprebab!’⁴³, a Bhojpuri expression within Kreol, derived from Hindi.

The language of the play – particularly, but not only, in the Kreol version – is scattered with details from everyday life in Mauritius. At the same time, it undermines any sense that contemporary Mauritian existence is located within an unchanging natural world, uncontaminated by global youth culture. To be sure, some images are drawn from an attachment to the natural world and hint at Kreol culture, but this cultural *mélange* is equally affected by contemporary globalized culture. Dammarro and Kaspalto sing traditional Kreol songs, or *sega*, by the *segatier* Alphonse Ravaton, or ‘Ti Frère’. The first of these mocks – and celebrates – the impulse to drink banana wine to excess.⁴⁴ The next song is also a paean to alcohol and island courtship.⁴⁵ The social anthropologist, Caroline Déodat, describes the impact of the *sega* as a cultural form initially practised by slaves and then post-abolition descendants of slaves; it is a form that evokes the quarrels and struggles of everyday life in Mauritius and subtly controls modes of sociality.⁴⁵ Though the *sega* is traditionally associated with the economically disenfranchised descendants of slaves, analyses of performances of the *sega*, she argues, present a more complex picture: they ‘undermine the essentialist categories inherited from imperialism and colonialism’ and ‘introduce a relationship with Indianness’, disavowing ‘a fixed notion of Mauritian creoleness’.⁴⁶

The invocation of the *sega* in *Toufann* would seem to affirm Déodat’s argument, and this is true of both English and Kreol versions of the play, in which both English and Kreol songs remain untranslated. For the English translators, the songs are significant only for the ‘folk’ elements they bring into view; their literal meanings are not worth clarifying. In a footnote, the translators explain their decision to leave the songs untranslated on the basis of ‘their folk quality’ and ‘the quality of linguistic confusion’ that the scene elicits.⁴⁷ However, one might equally argue that the ‘confusion’ is caused not so much by a quality inherent to the traditional genre of the quarrelsome *sega*, but by the play’s refusal to remain within

a coherent cultural field. Immediately after the *segas*, the characters break into a song associated with a very different popular tradition: the Beatles’ 1960s hit ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’. In loud exclamations, the characters celebrate a politics shaped by modern-day drug use: ‘Up the Republic of Ecstasy!’⁴⁸ – lampooning as they do so the earnest affiliations of contemporary political movements that depend on ethnic or nationalist identifications. This is evident in a comment by King Lir earlier in this scene, when he criticizes the ‘politicking’ of typical career politicians. In the English version, the critique remains hypothetical, but the Kreol includes an oblique reference to ‘*proteksion montagn*’, echoing a celebrated political speech from 1983 in which, as the translators explain, ‘Harish Boodhoo likened the various ethnic groups in Mauritius to monkeys defending their mountains from one another.’⁴⁹ In calling for a greater degree of socialist communalism, particularly amongst the marginalized rural communities, during a period of realignment in Mauritian politics, Boodhoo berated Mauritians for privileging ethnicity over class interests, saying it is

⁴² Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 234.

⁴³ ‘Charli O, Charli O. Aret buwar, aret buwar diven banann. Dan diven banan ena bebet sizò’, which would translate as ‘Charlie, oh, Charlie, oh. Stop drinking banana wine. In banana wine, you will find scissors bugs’: Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, 18. Translated by Tasneem Allybokus.

⁴⁴ ‘Ti mimi lav sa ver la. Lav sa ver la. Met zafer la, koko’, meaning ‘Little kitty, wash this cup. Wash this cup. Put the stuff in it, sweetheart’ (literally, ‘coconut’): Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 18. Translated by Tasneem Allybokus.

⁴⁵ See Caroline Déodat, ‘Troubler le genre du “séga typique”: imaginaire et performativité poétique de la créolité mauricienne’ [‘Disrupting the genre of “typical sega.” Imaginary and poetic performativity of Mauritian creoleness’], Centre for South Asian Studies, Paris, June 2016, as described in English in the *Centre for South Asian Studies Newsletter* 14 (Winter 2016/17).

⁴⁶ Déodat, ‘Disrupting the genre of “typical sega”’.

⁴⁷ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 254.

⁴⁸ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 232.

⁴⁹ They are referring to a speech made by Harish Boodhoo, an outspoken Hindu leader of the Parti Socialiste Mauricien which had merged with a breakaway group from the MMM to form the Mouvement Socialiste Millitant (MSM) when contesting the elections in 1983.

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as if 'each monkey has to protect his mountain' (or, '*Sak zako bizin protez so montayn*').⁵⁰ In hinting at this critique of mindless ethnic chauvinism, Virahsawmy's creative innovations are thus aligned with the political movement that rejects the structuring logic of ethnicity over a more radical politics that seeks social justice.

A detailed exposition of the play is not possible in this more general discussion of the ways contemporary theatre-makers across the global South invigorate Shakespeare's works by involving them in the project of decolonization. However, I would like to observe that one of Virahsawmy's key strategies for forging a new ethics for the post-colony that is not structured by brutal social hierarchies is in the future he invites us to imagine for Kalibann. Like Shakespeare's Caliban, Kalibann is the figure who most clearly carries the history of slavery in his body and the structural position of servitude he occupies, and yet Virahsawmy's play imagines his speech as reasoned, establishing as it does so his suitability for a life of partnership in love and in political leadership. It is Prospero whose embittered relationship to power appears perverse.

Prospero explains his jaundiced version of their intertwined history to his daughter (who in this play is named Kordelia, invoking the intimacy and independence of Lear's youngest daughter). On this 'small inhabited island, very close to hell', Prospero tells her, '[t]here was a hut, where Bangoya was living with her half-bred batar'⁵¹ or, 'Bangoya ek so batar ti pe viv.'⁵² In Kreol, the word *batar* can be used pejoratively to refer to a person born to unmarried parents and 'a "person of mixed race"'; as the English translators note, 'both usages are applied to Kalibann throughout the play'.⁵³ However, the word *batar* only ever appears during the above exchange, which is the first account of Kalibann's parentage, followed by an explanation that evokes both senses of the word, left untranslated. In effect, this allows both senses to linger simultaneously, literally unhomed in the English version. To suggest this racial complexity, the playwright draws on a wider lexicon: elsewhere Kalibann is referred to as a '*metis*',⁵⁴ for example in the stage directions, where it is translated as 'of

mixed race',⁵⁵ and in Aryel's account to Polonious, where it is translated as 'a mulatto'.⁵⁶ The shadow cast by Bangoya's experience of rape, enslavement and abandonment by her pirate owner registers in the vocabulary with which Kalibann himself is presented. Prospero's language is marked by its offensiveness, the worst of which does not bear repeating, except to note his attempt to offer genetics as an explanatory framework for what the audience has already recognized as the power struggle on the island: 'That Kalibann has a very disturbing genetic make-up.'⁵⁷

However, this comment is not left unchallenged. Throughout, the audience is offered alternative perspectives, through Kalibann's own observations and in the responses of other characters. It is Aryel who undoes the spurious association between Kalibann and cannibalism: 'Kalibann is the name of a person', he corrects Polonious; 'His father was a white pirate, and his mother a black slave. He's mulatto . . . You don't have to feel sorry for him. He knows what he wants.'⁵⁸ The play allows us to see Kalibann begin to fulfil that vision. This involves gaining his freedom, but Kalibann requests it rather than claims it: after 'coming out' as lovers, Kalibann and the pregnant Kordelia confront Prospero with an image of his own abuse of power, 'A victim can turn into an aggressor . . . You got blinded by your own power, and stopped being able to tell the difference between justice and revenge.'⁵⁹ It is then that Kalibann reminds Prospero: 'You promised me my freedom. Since then I've come to understand exactly what that means. Can I ask you to keep your word?', to

⁵⁰ See Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Communicating cultural difference and identity: ethnicity and nationalism in Mauritius', *Oslo Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology* 16.

⁵¹ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 221.

⁵² Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 5.

⁵³ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 254.

⁵⁴ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, p. 39.

⁵⁵ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 219.

⁵⁶ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 248.

⁵⁷ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 221.

⁵⁸ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 248.

⁵⁹ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 251.

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which a bewildered Prospero answers, ‘Yes, yes’.⁶⁰ The elderly patriarch King Lir proposes to Prospero that ‘we can make Kalibann King’ – for ‘this is the way to solve our problem’.⁶¹

Thus, Kalibann offers not so much an image of a post-revolutionary future as an alternative route to a just future. Prospero emerges as undeniably partisan and manipulative, and racist, at a remove from the cast of younger players who are able to imagine a different kind of future entirely. Virahsawmy’s Kalibann presents an alternative, both in his championing of a feminist model of shared leadership with Prospero’s daughter, and also in his ability to conceive of transformed social relations without violent revolution. Received ideas of social hierarchy are ridiculed and overturned, and notions of family defined by normative ideas of race, gender and sexuality are rejected outright. This is true not only of Kalibann and Kordelia but also of Ferdjinnan and Aryel, for it is their vision that inspires the acknowledgement that dramatic, revolutionary change is within the grasp of those who seek it, regardless of how they have been positioned by the circumstances of their birth. As Ferdjinnan exclaims: ‘We’re free . . . nobody is going to save us’.⁶²

However, there is a blind spot in this radical reimagining of a liberated future within the post-colony. Caliban (as Kalibann) can conceivably forge a relationship of mutual love and respect with Miranda (as Kordelia) but the homosexual bond between Aryel and Ferdjinnan is doomed to remain without erotic consummation, despite their acknowledgement of desire and despite Ferdjinnan’s explicit rejection of the heteronormative, reproductive plot laid out for him by the patriarchs, as his retort to his father makes explicit: ‘You’re so obsessed with getting married and breeding. All this nonsense about inheritance . . . No!’⁶³

The play’s affirmation, articulated by the ageing King Lir to a contrite Prospero, that ‘The young can move life forward in their own way’ points to the dawning of a new age, as a result not of adversarial politics, but of the transformative power of a radical and liberated imagination. In fact, the play insists that there are multiple futures and that ‘a new ending’ could be scripted, with the comic figures Dammarro

and Kaspalto as kings, as per the fantasy they had been allowed to indulge in earlier in the play. Aryel promises Dammarro, the comic usurper of King Lir’s position, ‘I’ll get him to write a new story. One where you become king’.⁶⁴ Even those marked by the play’s comic logic as lowly and absurd are invited to imagine a different future. Their class aspirations are subtly validated and social hierarchy is rendered arbitrary, a matter of scripting rather than birthright, in a moment of irreverence and radical inclusion that extends even to the venerable old patriarchs. Polonious urges King Lir to take up his part: ‘Majesty – they’re writing the script now. Best to play your part in the comedy’.⁶⁵ We witness the uncertainties surrounding the scripting of a path for a new post-independence generation.

My impulse to describe the play’s ending as ‘radical’ is misplaced, given its demure treatment of class struggle and sexuality. Still, in inviting us to reflect on its own construction, the play stages (and even celebrates) the plot’s unravelling. It recognizes the aspirations of the serving classes and the enslaved from within a set of tensions and possibilities imagined initially in Shakespeare’s play, whose plot has been rendered multiple and unbounded.

IN CONCLUSION: RENDERING SHAKESPEARE MULTIPLE

The mode of creolization structuring this work is not one that locates the everyday of Mauritian life in a timeless folk traditionalism. Nor is it structured by defined ethnic or linguistic identifications. Rather, the cultural *mélange* we witness here acknowledges the global circulation of eclectic forms of contemporary culture and the irreverent mixing of cultural elements, ‘folk’ and contemporary, local and putatively ‘elsewhere’. Shakespeare’s work, too, is made subject to the multiple identifications of modern

⁶⁰ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 251.

⁶¹ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 252.

⁶² Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 247.

⁶³ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 247.

⁶⁴ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 253.

⁶⁵ Virahsawmy, *Toufann*, trans. Walling, p. 240.

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existence in worlds made more complex by globalization and mixed colonial inheritances.

Such wild reimaginings of Shakespeare do not constitute a disavowal of the Shakespearian text so much as a contribution to its ongoing coming-into-being. This is true even when the intertextual sympathies are only implicit and the new work is far removed from the old, not only in time and space but also in its poetic register, its language and its cultural imagination. The latitude adopted by an adaptation like *Toufann*, with its boldness in transforming the Shakespearian text, is both playful and deadly serious. Shakespearian scholar Christy Desmet challenges us to recognize the seriousness of the culture of 'play' at work in adaptation, even in the stitched-together texts of her analysis and the 'art' of what she calls 'remix': drawing on the terminology of Clifford Geertz, Desmet identifies a kind 'of "deep play" – entrenched in, informed by, and in response to core cultural imperatives'.⁶⁶

Virahsawmy's refashioning of *The Tempest* goes some way towards responding to the cultural imperatives at work in the post-independence Indian Ocean world of Mauritius, its legacy of slavery and settlement legible, nonetheless, in the

spaces of its most imaginative reinvention. That Shakespeare's work would provide a fertile place for thinking 'intensely and with freedom', as Stephen Greenblatt put it in relation to 'Shakespeare in Tehran', is of great interest to Shakespeare studies, as it continues to recognize the significance of Shakespeare's resonances within a wider world, and the solidarities that his works have garnered.⁶⁷ A creolized Shakespeare is much more than a celebration of multiplicity; to the extent that the aftermath of slavery is legible in creole cultural forms, it is an invitation to bear witness to slavery's brutal legacy of dispossession, dislocation and survival, and to imagine for the post-colony a more just future that resists the ethnocentric logic of colonial modernity.

⁶⁶ Christy Desmet, 'Appropriation 2.0', in *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (London, 2016), pp. 236–9; p. 239.

⁶⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Afterword: Shakespeare in Tehran', in *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (London, 2016), pp. 343–52; p. 352.