

Ernest Moutoussamy's *Aurore* and the Construction of a Split-level Home

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Abstract

In his novel *Aurore*, Ernest Moutoussamy, Guadeloupean politician and author, seeks to simultaneously recover the history of Indian indentured laborers in the French West Indies and promulgate a political and cultural program for their modern-day descendants. However, this paper will demonstrate that the narrative of *Aurore* exhibits the problematic contradictions inherent in Moutoussamy's contemporary program, wherein the Indian community is exhorted to seek greater integration into French West Indian society via the maintenance of inflexible binary relationships between their community and the larger Creole community. Indeed, Moutoussamy effectively posits a center/periphery dichotomy within the heart of the periphery. Through the lens of Homi Bhabha's discussions of hybridity, this paper will examine Moutoussamy's text as an ambivalent space of mediation between politics and theory, which incorporates a strategy of "splitting," wherein two contradictory and independent attitudes occupy the same place. Moutoussamy's strategy will then be compared to that of Créolité, which conversely, promotes the adoption of a hybridized identity for all Caribbeans.

In his novel *Aurore*, Guadeloupean politician and author Ernest Moutoussamy seeks to simultaneously recover the history of Indian indentured laborers in the French West Indies and promulgate a political and cultural program for their modern-day descendants. By telling the story of a young Brahmin man who embarks on a new life by migrating from the southeastern Indian city of Puducherry to Guadeloupe in the 1880s, Moutoussamy provides in historical narrative an example for the contemporary Indian community of Guadeloupe to follow today to achieve his political and cultural goal of the preservation of *Indianness*. The narrative of *Aurore*, however, exhibits the contradictions inherent in Moutoussamy's program, wherein the Indian community is exhorted to seek greater integration into French West Indian society via the maintenance of inflexible binary relationships between their community and the larger Creole community.

Currently the mayor of the Guadeloupean commune of Saint-François and a former député for Guadeloupe in the Assemblée nationale of France, Moutoussamy has produced a number of political studies regarding the history and current situation of French overseas departments. He is also the author of several collections of poetry,

two other novels (*Il pleure dans mon pays* (1979), *Chacha et Sosso* (1994)), and various books and articles that examine the role of the Indian community in the French West Indies.

Published in 1987, the novel *Aurore* recounts the plight of Indian workers recruited by colonial agents to fill the plantation labor gap in the West Indies once slavery was abolished in the mid-nineteenth century. With one-third of the narrative taking place in India, Moutoussamy demonstrates that conditions of dire poverty amongst the lower castes, as well as trickery carried out by colonial recruiters, drove thousands of Indians to undertake the perilous journey across the Atlantic to become indentured laborers in the Caribbean. Drawing parallels with the Middle Passage endured by African slaves, he dedicates the central portion of the narrative to the depiction of the inhumane conditions suffered by the migrants during their voyage, which resulted in the death of many passengers. Finally, Moutoussamy illustrates the physical and mental struggles faced by the Indian migrants once they arrived in the Caribbean, illustrating the demoralization experienced by those who survived as they found themselves living in a regime of pseudo-slavery. In this way, Moutoussamy's text recovers the history of Indian indentured laborers, injecting traditionally underrepresented voices into the scope of Caribbean history and providing a more nuanced perspective on the history of slavery in the Americas. Through the storyline of the protagonist Râma, however, Moutoussamy seeks to leave open the possibility of a better future for Indians in the French West Indies.

Thus far, Moutoussamy's novels have garnered little critical attention. Both Pierre Gamarra in his review "De L'Esclavage" and Frederick Ivor Case in his article "The Ideology of Social Discourse" laud the text for having brought into focus a lesser-known aspect of history, with Case arguing that Moutoussamy also successfully demonstrates the historical roots of current socioeconomic challenges faced by Indo-Guadeloupeans. Literary critic Ute Fendler has taken a closer look at the identity politics involved in *Aurore* in her article "Indianité in der Créolité—eine Minderheit in der Minderheit." Although Fendler notes that Moutoussamy advances the possibility of some sort of collective identity for West Indians of both African and Indian descent via class solidarity, she neglects to scrutinize his insistence on cultural segregation between the two groups, a motif further emphasized in his other texts (118).

With *Aurore*, Moutoussamy has carved out a unique space in twentieth-century Caribbean literature. Unlike many other contemporary Francophone Caribbean writers, who frame their discussions through the traditional postcolonial lens that examines the relationship between the French Métropole and French West Indian societies, Moutoussamy focuses his attention more locally, examining the social and power dynamics at work within the French Antilles. With a nod to "coolitude," Moutoussamy uses this text to exhort contemporary descendants of Indian indentured immigrants to resist the process of acculturation within French West Indian Creole culture, effectively positing a center/periphery dichotomy within the heart of the periphery.

In this text, Moutoussamy represents the Indian community that migrated to the Caribbean as a relatively cohesive group that values hard work and, despite the hardships that propelled them to migrate abroad, the ancient traditions of its homeland. Casting them as victims of the mistreatment and injustice of their colonial masters on one hand, and victims of discrimination and resentment from the black community on the other, the narrative constructs multiple binaries of contestation, with the Indian community playing the role of the underdog. Sidelining the larger issue of the global colonial system as led by European powers, Moutoussamy instead examines power relations within the realm of the Indian-Caribbean axis. By the end of the narrative, Moutoussamy presents a disenfranchised people on the verge of mobilizing itself to demand its rights as equal citizens, with a portion of the community following the protagonist's lead to assert its identity through the preservation of *Indianness*.

In light of Homi Bhabha's discussions of cultural negotiation in *The Location of Culture*, Moutoussamy's text indeed functions as an ambivalent space of mediation between politics and theory. By depicting Râma's campaign to promote *Indianness* in nineteenth-century Guadeloupe, Moutoussamy presents a theory for contemporary social change, which turns on cultural difference to renegotiate the terms by which the Indian community defines itself and its place in West Indian society. In this way, Moutoussamy's text advances a strategy of defense and differentiation that Bhabha designates as "splitting," wherein two contradictory and independent attitudes exist simultaneously (132). Moutoussamy's stated objective is the Indian community's greater integration into French West Indian society, but proposes that this happen through the maintenance of a distinct, minority culture and the continuation of a Self/Other binary, in which Indo-Guadeloupean identity is constructed in opposition to Creole identity. Although such a structure of resistance may result in greater legal and political equality, Moutoussamy stops short in his texts of demonstrating how continual rigid cultural separation can promote social integration. Described as a coping strategy, Bhabha underscores that such splitting emerges amongst subjects living and functioning across a problematic process of identification, in a space of ambivalent social relations. By making cultural difference, here in terms of race and custom, the crux of his strategy, Moutoussamy attempts to disarticulate Creole social norms and give greater agency to Indian values, as he defines them (Mitchell 82).

The fundamentals of Moutoussamy's contemporary program can be found in his political and cultural texts. In his essay "Indianness in the French West Indies," presented at the York Indo-Caribbean Conference in Toronto in 1988, Moutoussamy asserts that Guadeloupeans of Indian descent continue to suffer discrimination in contemporary West Indian society and calls for greater mutual respect as well as the strengthening of "Indian values":

May Indianness be the sap which, through consolidation and mutual acceptance of values, through the abolition of prejudices and complexes, and through reciprocal and fraternal acknowledgement of one another, rises above

social taboos, in order to ensure a more complete integration of the Indian and French West Indian Society!” (35).

In this statement, and indeed, throughout the essay, Moutoussamy argues for fuller integration, yet maintains that Indian and French West Indian societies are distinct. Although questions of social integration must inevitably involve power relations within the sphere of politics, Moutoussamy proclaims that *Indianness* is not a political ideology, defining the concept as:

The expression of our connection with India, with its traditions, cultural values and with all those features which characterize Indian life in the French West Indies. It is a cultural and historical movement rising above national boundaries and racial lines to serve humanity (30).

Here, Moutoussamy frames his discussion of daily life for those of Indian descent in the Caribbean in terms of their continual tie with the Asian subcontinent, arguing, though not developing the point, that this link is also beneficial for humanity at large. The Indian community is fully committed to the French West Indies, he asserts, but they cannot function without strong ties to India. He further states:

The Indian in Guadeloupe and Martinique belongs to his island. Neither can he, nor does he want to go back to India. India for him remains a far away solace. It is the point of reference without which his life would otherwise be meaningless, or become assimilated to the life of the Other (30).

Although Moutoussamy does not specifically define the Other in this essay, his argument regarding the need to preserve Indian tradition is similarly underscored by other Indo-Caribbean theorists who have firmly situated the Other as the Caribbean Creole identity, which they define as a primarily African identity resting upon a Eurocentric structure. In his essay “Toward National Unity in Multicultural Societies,” Prem Misir defines *Créolité* as a continuum with Afro-Creoles and White Creoles on opposite ends of the spectrum. With regard to the African end of the continuum, he states that “racially constituted by ‘pure’ descendants of Africans, its creolization is the product of a syncretic mix of traditional African culture with the cultural forms of the dominant European overlords” (190). By contrast, the Indian indentured laborers arriving in the late nineteenth-century are situated outside this spectrum and Misir argues that “their ‘outsider’ status still persists” (190). Similarly, Patricia Mohammed, writing about the status of Indian women in Trinidad argues that “a derivative of the word ‘creole’ used in Trinidad to refer to descendants of African slaves to distinguish them from indentured Indian immigrants, ‘creolization’ was viewed as synonymous with the absorption of black culture at the expense of one’s own- a process referred to as acculturation” (41).

Mohammed, like Misir, argues that Creole culture is “black culture,” thus alien to the Indian community. Moutoussamy does not counter their view, arguing that “today the combined assaults of assimilation and consumerism are shaking its [Indianness] foundations” (“Indianness” 35).

To support his argument that the Indian community of the French West Indies is distinct and needs to preserve its uniqueness, Moutoussamy presents a, perhaps

strategically, essentialist portrait of the community. According to him, the Indian population of the French West Indies is a rural one with close ties to agriculture and animal farming. Estimating their numbers at approximately sixty-five thousand people, with the vast majority inhabiting the island of Guadeloupe, Moutoussamy states that sixty percent of these households “depend on farming” for their livelihood, citing the examination of family names, electoral lists, and field work data as his source (27). Continuing his depiction, he asserts that they tend not to move about much, but rather settle in one area with the objective of acquiring land (28). They are also thrifty and reluctant to join social organizations (29). The “Indian woman,” according to Moutoussamy, marries young and devotes herself to her family life, thus participates little in political or social groups (33). The effect of his essentialist portrait of the Indian population is to valorize an agrarian, patriarchal social structure, characterizing the community as uniformly conservative, and leaving little room for variation in values amongst its members or the potential for social and economic change.

Moutoussamy depicts the Indian community as only reluctantly engaging in the social fabric of French West Indian society at large, but gradually equaling other communities in terms of education and economic development. He underscores the Indian community’s connection with the West Indies as that of a strong connection with the physical land, shared side-by-side with the African “Other,” rather than a deep connection with West Indian society per se: “Theirs is a concrete existence in which they weed out bushes, and work and plant crops in solidarity with their brothers of African descent. The degree to which Indians love their country is in direct proportion to their love for the land” (30).

Although Moutoussamy emphasizes that the Indian community has been hesitant to mingle with Creole society, he undermines this argument elsewhere in his article. Acknowledging that “Indians have gradually become part of the mixing of races in the area,” he can only describe this fact as problematic for his program:

Even though physical features still remain a fairly accurate yardstick, cultural identity stands out as the most accurate criterion to identify people of Indian descent. It goes without saying that this task is made more difficult by the uncertain nature of cultural boundaries in an area of such great racial interaction. (27).

Despite his claims to the contrary, this statement indicates that the present-day Indian community has voluntarily fused to some degree with Creole society.

In describing what cultural mingling has taken place, Moutoussamy limits his discussion to food, language and religion. He lauds the contribution of Indian cuisine in the French West Indian diet, noting that the curry dish *colombo* has become the “national dish in Guadeloupe” and that *moltani* and *roti* brought by immigrants from the Calcutta area are popular on the islands. He further remarks that the Creole lexicon has been enriched through the introduction of Tamil and Hindi words. Cultural influence stemming from the opposite direction, on the other hand, is

described in negative terms. Conversion to Christianity and religious syncretism, for example, is viewed as yet another symptom of oppression:

The dominant Catholic Church launched a fierce battle against the cultural and religious influence of Hinduism. However, the latter was able to survive under the protection of the vatalous, by incorporating local values and adapting itself to the landscape (30).

In these instances, Moutoussamy's evaluation of cultural exchange privileges Indian influences as having enriched Creole culture, but casts reciprocal movements as a threat to the Indian community. Attempting to add a sense of urgency to his call to action, Moutoussamy, perhaps inadvertently, makes clear that many in the Indian community do not see his project as imperative, and may not consider Creole influence as a menace to their identity: "Such a task is a historical necessity. That passive attitude which would surely bring to an end the cultural contribution of Indians in the West Indies has to be resisted" ("Indianness" 30).

Another of Moutoussamy's texts, *La Guadeloupe et son indianité*, surveys Indian traditions as they are maintained in Guadeloupe and similarly argues that the Indian community has been at risk of dissolving into Creole culture, thus losing its cultural heritage: "Certes, après un si longue période d'assimilation coloniale, l'Indien a été amputé de l'essentiel de ses apports d'origine." Again, he exhorts the community to take deliberate action to thwart this trend: "Aujourd'hui, il convient d'assumer ce précieux héritage, de le revaloriser et de lui donner sa place dans la culture nationale" and places the Indian community on equal, but separate, footing with the black community: "L'indianité, à côté de l'africanité est un autre paramètre de la culture guadeloupéenne" ("Guadeloupe" 18, 20).

Throughout his novel *Aurore*, the protagonist Râma, is depicted as a community leader, seeking a way to obtain justice for his compatriots on the plantations of Guadeloupe by following the modern-day prescriptions set out by Moutoussamy in his non-literary writing. Recounted through a third-person omniscient narrator, the text focuses primarily on the thoughts and actions of Râma. Since the protagonist is a young man, he is depicted as having the energy necessary to forge a new path for the Indian community, yet needs the guidance of a mentor, which he finds in the character of Gopi. Having arrived on the first boat from India in 1854, Gopi acts as the witness to thirty years of Indian servitude in Guadeloupe and serves as the elder of the community and their oral historian: "Dans la matrice servile de Guyot, il était une source pour tous ceux qui échouaient dans le désert de carcasses. Chargé d'histoire, il arpentait toujours le même sentier jalonné de spectres, de fosses et de croquis en guettant une lueur d'espoir pour sa race" (124). He takes Râma under his wing and plunges him into Indian rituals, asserting that deepening his connection to his cultural heritage is the key to resist oppression: "À son école, il apprit les chansons, les légendes, et les prières pour résister à la dépersonnalisation et à l'assimilation culturelle ... il se réfugiait presque chaque nuit chez le vieux, pour alimenter sa flamme intérieur et comprendre vraiment les mécanismes du système d'exploitation" (128). Here, assimilation is linked with exploitation as a destructive force to combat.

The second component of Gopi's advice for Râma is that he should collaborate with the black population of the island to assist the Indians in their mutual fight against colonial oppression: "Cherche à réconcilier les nègres et les Indiens, rends tes frères à eux-mêmes, lui recommanda Gopi et n'oublie pas ton pays" (129). Solidarity with the black community is encouraged in terms of class, but the preservation of cultural distinctiveness remains essential. As Râma forges a partnership with Vitalien, a member of the black Creole community, and they invite each other into their respective communities, neither is warmly welcomed by the other side. Vitalien appeals to class consciousness to encourage his community to accept Râma: "Il n'est pas un frère de race, mais un frère de classe!" Vitalien continues,

De toutes parts dans notre île, dit-il, se dressent des morts venus d'Afrique, d'Europe et d'Asie. Notre chant funèbre est universel. Nous refusons de nous serrer la main, mais nos poussières de cadavres se mêlent pour ensemençer nos espérances. Frères, les travailleurs sont tous des frères! (150).

Despite his call for class brotherhood, Vitalien also underscores the idea that their two communities are inherently separate by race. Although his discourse encourages a connection between them by emphasizing their similar plight as workers, this character does not dispel the notion that, between blacks and Indians, each group should maintain their status as the "Other."

Although a certain amount of cultural change is portrayed in the text an accommodation necessary for survival, deliberate assimilation of Creole culture is thoroughly frowned upon. Those migrants who passively accept "creolization," such as the servants Râma encounters when he is assigned to work in the planter's villa, are portrayed as simply lacking proper class and cultural consciousness (159). Voluntary adoption of Creole culture, however, is rebuked in stronger terms through the depiction of the character Maya. A young woman who has been in the colony for seven years, she became the servant of a plantation owner and his family and is represented as having willingly embraced the planter worldview. She converts to Catholicism and fully aligns her interests with those of the owner and his family, doing whatever she can to increase the production of sugar on the plantation, thus the family's wealth. Like the owner class, she shows only contempt for the black and Indian plantation workers. Maya, in stark contrast to Râma, is depicted as having completely relinquished her *Indianness*, thus, her soul: "Esclave avec un titre d'engagé, elle avait liquidé sa dignité pour la cause du sucre" (122).

As Râma consolidates his leadership position and decides that he wants to remain in Guadeloupe and start a family, with the goal of continuing Indian traditions in the Caribbean, he attempts to woo Maya and proposes marriage. However, she has placed her bets firmly on the side of the plantation owners and has disassociated herself from her community of origin, thus, Maya turns down Râma's offer and refuses to support his project. The voice of the narrator explains her negative response by asserting that "elle était l'autre" (145). By depicting any character that voluntarily rejects the premise of *Indianness* as the "Other," Moutoussamy disallows the possibility of voluntary cultural hybridity amongst the Indian community of the

French West Indies and advocates a rigid system of binaries: colonized/colonizer, Indian/African, Self/Other. In the case of Maya, she had already been depicted as having lost her honor by taking the side of the colonial masters. Her refusal to re-evaluate her connection to the Indian community now relegates her to full “outsider” status.

The narrative concludes with Râma chancing upon Aurore, the high-caste fiancée he chose to leave behind in India. She had journeyed to Guadeloupe in search of Râma, hoping to find a way to honor her father’s wish for her arranged marriage. Desperately searching the island to locate him, Aurore is reported to have attracted the attention of a plantation owner and unwillingly became his mistress, their relationship resulting in a daughter. Râma ultimately reunites with and marries Aurore. Her name, signifying the dawn of a new day, is featured as the title of the text, stressing the proposition that the Indian community’s future lies in its abandonment of its oppressive Creole lover to return to the sanctity of an Indian alliance.

By traveling across the world to find Râma with the objective of honoring her parents’ wishes, Aurore clearly values Indian custom and will go to great lengths to fulfill her perceived duties. Although Aurore has had a daughter of “mixed race,” the child’s existence is the outcome of a forced, not a chosen, relationship. In this final scene, Râma dismisses Aurore’s claims of no longer being worthy of him and grabs her and her daughter to flee the plantation villa, symbolically reclaiming physical control over her in place of the colonizer. With Râma situating himself as the leader of this new family, it can be assumed that Aurore’s daughter, despite her mixed heritage, will be raised to fully embrace her Indian patrimony. Whether her Creole heritage will also be valued is left unclear.

The precipitous ending of the text, leaving questions of exactly how Râma, Aurore, and her daughter will insert themselves into Guadeloupean society, mirror the discussion missing from Moutoussamy’s political writing. Although a cultural connection with India is touted as a “far away solace,” the narrative neglects to demonstrate if Râma and his new family manage to simultaneously preserve their *Indianness* and make a place for themselves within Guadeloupean society. The focus for both Moutoussamy’s literary and political texts is what the Indian community should avoid—namely, economic exploitation, discrimination, and diminished cultural ties with the Indian subcontinent. Integration is assumed to take place through the preservation of cultural roots with India; however, how this brings the Indian community deeper into the larger sphere of Creole culture is unexplored.

Through his texts, Moutoussamy is following the path of the Fanonian native intellectual, attempting to develop greater cultural consciousness by setting “a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people.” Fanon warned, however, that such fetishization of culture can result in a “banal search for exoticism” and that “the desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one’s own people” (221, 225). By placing *Aurore* firmly in the past, Moutoussamy succeeds

in maintaining the focus on the first generation of migrants whose ties to the Indian subcontinent are direct, avoiding a closer examination of the modern-day community as generations removed from their ancestors. To avoid entrapment in the past, Fanon encourages the native intellectual to recognize the current “realities” of his nation (225). In this case, Moutoussamy is attempting to construct a fortress of cultural difference in the midst of a society far removed from its roots, both in terms of geography and time. In fact, Moutoussamy’s concept of *Indianness* strongly echoes early twentieth-century calls for Négritude, wherein inhabitants of the New World were called upon to tie their identity with the land of their ancestors and to minimize the cultural changes that have occurred in the intervening period of separation. In this way, Moutoussamy’s program thoroughly opposes the Caribbean theories that have since succeeded Négritude as well as much recent postcolonial critical work that privileges the possibilities of cultural hybridity.

In stark contrast to Moutoussamy’s vision, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, for example, urge all French West Indians to adopt a new hybridized identity, in their cultural and political manifesto, *Éloge de la Créolité*, published just two years after *Aurore*, in 1989. Recognizing the theoretical groundwork laid before them by Aimé Césaire, whom they label an “anté-créole,” and Edouard Glissant, these authors seek to build upon the previous movements of Négritude and Antillanité in order to produce a more practical and present-focused path for the West Indian population. In a bold step, they declare a new vision of humanity in the Caribbean, one which does not hinge upon the cultural origins of their forefathers: “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles” (75).

Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant underscore that Créolité differs from both Americanization and Antillanité in that Créolité is not simply the transplantation of another culture to the Caribbean. Rather, Créolité is promoted as the celebration of all constituent cultural elements in the region, blending the European, African, and Asian into a new identity, formed from multiple cultural influences and distinct from that of the French métropole: “Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history” (87). The Créolistes’ project consists of five specific goals: 1) the valorization of orality, 2) the refusal to consider history and literature as separate disciplines, 3) the use of literature to expose every aspect of Caribbean life, 4) the search for a new, progressive aesthetic, and 5) the privileging of the Creole language. Above all, the proponents of Créolité aim to dismantle the false premise of universalism in order to appreciate the multiplicity of Caribbean culture.

The proponents of Créolité and Moutoussamy agree on several aspects, specifically the valorization of orality and the fusing of history and literature. The Râma and Gopi characters both privilege the preservation of oral tradition for the purposes of maintaining and handing down Indian tradition to future generations. Furthermore, similar to works written by the theorists of Créolité, a major element of the project of *Aurore* is to recover the history of the Indian community through fiction

since the Indian voice is largely underrepresented in official views of Caribbean history.

Unlike Moutoussamy's vision of *Indianness*, however, the Créolité project thoroughly deemphasizes the preservation of individual cultural influences from ancestor societies. These theorists consider such a focus on maintaining the traditions of cultures of origin to fall under the rubric of Americanization, i.e. cultural transplantation, which would ignore the specificity of the Caribbean experience. Although one can argue that Indian and Levantine cultural contributions are unjustly overshadowed by their focus on African and European traditions, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant nevertheless argue that each cultural influence is consequential and an inseparable part of what constitutes Creole culture for all contemporary inhabitants of the West Indies despite individual affiliation.

Written a few years before the publication of Homi Bhabha's more globally-framed *The Location of Culture*, the authors of *Éloge de la Créolité* describe their goal of cultural hybridity within the specific space of the Caribbean. In conjunction with Bhabha's interest in exploring the "in-between spaces," which "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood ... that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration," the Créolistes advocate a new sense of self that privileges plurality (Bhabha 1). Their project, although also critiqued for not fully acknowledging present effects of globalizing forces in the Caribbean, maintains that inhabitants of the French West Indies can no longer see themselves as part of any one cultural sphere, but must work within the cultural overlapping that has taken place (Condé 159).

Although Moutoussamy grudgingly acknowledges that, indeed, cultural hybridity has occurred to some extent, depicting it as a benefit for Creole culture, but a threat to the Indian community, his quest ultimately seeks to impede hybridity. Arguing that the descendants of Indian indentured laborers suffer a feeling of incompleteness regarding their sense of self, he advocates that they relieve this pain by returning to roots located far away, both in terms of geography and time, instead of finding solace within their present multicultural context.

Both Moutoussamy, in present-day Guadeloupe, and Râma, in the nineteenth-century seem to be fighting an uphill battle against seemingly unbeatable circumstances. Although a return to India is deemed impossible, the Indian community is urged to cultivate a split existence, dealing on one hand with the daily realities of a Creole society that, itself, is politically and economically tied to the French métropole and beyond, and on the other hand, creating a prominent space in their lives for their grandparents' or great-grandparents' connection with nineteenth-century India. How long a community can continue to identify itself as displaced, yet at home, remains to be seen.

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