

For it seems that no one in Europe or elsewhere wants to take responsibility for these people, who according to falsified documents are taken on as wage workers and officially paid for their work. But official history may also have shut them out: *The Dream of the Celt* attempts in the current globalization phase to meet this historical exclusion with an inclusion that, while it does not turn them into the subject of their own story, at least lets them again come to the fore as persons who have been misused by history. Like objects of history in scientific treatises, certainly, but at the same time as *living* subjects who confront us with their gaze, with their abused bodies by the Congo or the Putumayo, with the only possession they have: their very life, which cannot be defined away.

Just as Vargas Llosa's narrator figures at first look from the standpoint of the fourth phase of accelerated globalization back to the third phase and its exclusions, so too, since the 1980s, has the poet, filmmaker, and cultural theorist Khal Torabully,¹⁶⁶ who was born in 1956 in Port-Louis on Mauritius, been developing from a dual historical world-consciousness his project of *Coolitude*. It forms the poetic and poetologically reflected attempt to develop, on the basis of inclusion of all of those persons excluded by history, a vision and revision of historical and current globalization processes that seeks to bring to language, to expression as living subjects, all those who for the most part had to hire themselves out under miserable circumstances as wage and contract workers worldwide.

The subject here, as compared to Vargas Llosa's novel, is neither the Black slaves, whose enslavement, at least on a formally legal level, was abolished over the course of the long 19th century, nor the caoutchouc workers exploited under slavery-like conditions who, for the most part, were "extracted" from the indigenous groups along the Congo or Putumayo and pressed into forced labor. Certainly, on the edges of the action in *The Dream of the Celt*, smaller groups of wage workers brought in from more distant regions show up, to whom the return voyage at no charge, to Barbados or Trinidad perhaps, that was promised upon their recruitment is never provided, being refused for threadbare reasons so that they can continue to be held in absolute dependence. Such a destiny, such a life-experience, becomes the historical starting point for the concept that was developed by Khal Torabully and called "coolitude," but it is not uncommon that first migrations, from India to the Antilles for instance, form the beginning of further subsequent migrations within the wide belt of the tropics dominated by colonial powers. The coolies, also ubiquitous in Lafcadio Hearn's is-

¹⁶⁶ On the work of Khal Torabully, see Véronique Bragard: *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures*. Frankfurt am Main–New York: Peter Lang 2008.

land-texts, count among the actually transtropical protagonists of the third phase of accelerated globalization, a fact that was first brought to our attention in all its vitality in the fourth phase of accelerated globalization by the culture theory and poetic praxis of the writer from Mauritius.

Khal Torabully, who earned his doctorate at Lyon with a dissertation on the semiology of poetics and is one of the founding members of a group of French researchers concentrating on globalization (*Group d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Globalisations*, (this should be *Mondialisation*, right?) or GERM), has not only sought to create in his poetic and poetological texts a literary monument, a memorial place, as it were, for the coolies who originated primarily in India, but also in China and other countries, but has also developed a poetics of global migration, as was already expressed in his 1992 volume *Cale d'Etoiles—Coolitude* (“Stardock—Coolitude”):

Coolitude, to lay the first stone of my monument of all monuments, my language of all languages, my part of the unknown that innumerable bodies and innumerable stories have again and again deposited into my genes and into my islands. [...]

This is the song of my love to the ocean and to the journey, the odyssey that my people who took to the sea have not yet written. [...]

And I know my crew will perform in the name of those who wipe out the limits to enlarging the *Land of People*.¹⁶⁷

In this song of love with its Homeric tones, an unmistakably prospective dimension appears at the side of the memoria of all of those who have been forgotten and swallowed up by history, whom we first encountered in the present work in the descriptions and photographs of the island-nomad of Greek-Irish extraction, Lafcadio Hearn. For to this *poeta doctus*, who comes from a family that once had left India to come to Mauritius in search of work, it is not a matter of a concluded past, the sealed grave which one must honor with little stones carried to it in the name of dutiful remembrance. Proceeding from both the collective and individual experiences that the largely disenfranchised wage and contract laborers were forced to endure, especially in the third phase of accelerated globalization, a poetics is developed that is turned to the future and also newly illuminates current globalization with its migrations, a poetics that, early in its global relationality, manifests itself squarely in the region of the tropics. It is stated (originally in French):

¹⁶⁷ Khal Torabully: *Cale d'Etoiles—Coolitude*, p. 7.

You from Goa, from Pondicherry, from Chandannagar, from
 Cocane, from Delhi, from Surat, from London, from Shanghai,
 from Laurient, from Saint-Malo, you people of all ships
 who took me to another I, my stardock
 is my travel plan, free space, my vision of the
 ocean that we all cross, even if we do not
 see the stars at the same angle. [...]

If I say coolie, I also say every pilot without
 registration on board; I say every person who set out
 for the horizon of his dream, whatever ship he took or
 had to take. For when one crosses the ocean, that he might come
 to another place in the world, then the seaman on a trip of no return loves
 to sink into his stories, into his legends and into his dreams. The
 time of an absence from memory.¹⁶⁸

The idea of the coolie is historically anchored, but not thought of as excluding: it is also used by Torabully in a figurative sense and illuminates specific phenomena of a globalization “from below,” a globalization of migrants who cross oceans in search of work. In lyrical compression, a truly world-wide network of such “travelers” arises, who as the objects of extreme exploitation connect the islands and cities of India, China, and Oceania with the European colonial harbors.

With the example of the changes to the lyric “I,” it is clearly demonstrated how, in every *Übersetzen* (“crossing over”) and every *Übersetzen* (“translation”), in every transfer there is always a transformation included that changes the “I” into another and in so doing, always opens new spaces to move and angles of view. The ocean becomes a simultaneously binding and separating element that also transforms the cities of this network of colonial exploitation into islands that develop their own “angle,” their own perspective. The “odyssey”¹⁶⁹

168 Ibid. p. 89: “Vous de Goa, de Pondichéri, de Chandernagor, de / Cocane, de Delhi, de Surat, de Londres, de Shangäi, / de Lorient, de Saint-Malo, peuples de tous les bateaux / qui m’emmenèrent vers un autre moi, ma cale d’étoiles / est mon plan de voyage, mon aire, ma vision de / l’océan que nous traversions tous, bien que nous ne / vissions pas les étoiles du même angle. [...] // En disant coolie, je dis aussi tout navigateur sans / registre de bord; je dis tout homme parti vers l’horizon / de son rêve, quel que soit le bateau qu’il accosta ou / dût accoster. Car quand on franchit l’océan pour naître / ailleurs, le marin d’un voyage sans retour aime replonger / dans ses histoires, ses légendes, et ses rêves. Le / temps d’une absence de mémoire.”

169 C.f. the Chapter “The Coolie Odyssey: a Voyage in Time and Space” in Marina Carter / Khal Torabully: *Coolitude*, pp. 17–34.

of the contract laborers that we already encountered in Lafcadio Hearn's work and which was otherwise, for the most part, omitted from all identity discourses over a long period of time, follows its world-wide course between these islands. But a return voyage to Ithaca is not provided in the ship's logs or travel plans.

Accordingly, the Indian coolie is precisely perceived and reconstructed in his historical form, but does not remain restricted to the concrete figure of history insofar as he is instead metaphorically and, even more, *figurally*¹⁷⁰ expanded, as all of those who have made a journey under inhuman conditions and mostly with no return are drawn into the focus of a lyric poetry and a theory. That which was never written down, that which has slipped away from recollection and memory, that which no one wished to integrate into their respective identity construction is concentrated in Khal Torabully's writings both poetically and poetologically into a rational understanding of historical processes which cannot be viewed as territorializing and centering on one point, but instead must be understood movement-historically—and no longer spatial-historically—from an oceanic perspective (or from a perspective of Oceania). The *figura* of the coolie then, once "discovered," is *present* everywhere. For it is far more than a *figura* of memoria: it brings word in multiple senses from another time.

Even if the tropics in their dependence on outside powers remain a burning wound—"I will one day discover another new world. / From it I will burn the tropics / And damn Columbus for his damned economics."¹⁷¹—they still remain fixed in a wide network of movements, whose founder, Christopher Columbus, is representatively accused. This short, inserted look back at the first phase of accelerated globalization with its world-wide economic system throwing its net opens on something yet to come, on a "new world" in a different sense, in which the new possibilities are plumbed for building another world. For another, in this sense new, world based on future coexistence in diversity is possible. Khal Torabully's aesthetic is ethically based, its gesture postcolonial.

In his 1999 volume of poems *Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies* ("Coral Flesh, Coolie Fragments"),¹⁷² the Mauritian poet (who has meanwhile also stepped forward as a filmmaker, having been recognized with the "Golden Award" at the Cairo Film Festival in 2010 for *La Mémoire maritime des Arabes*) introduced a metaphorology directed not toward the rhizome, as in the case of Deleuze and

¹⁷⁰ C.f. Erich Auerbach: "Figura," pp. 55–92.

¹⁷¹ Khal Torabully: *Voices from Indentured*. Unpublished manuscript 2011.

¹⁷² Khal Torabully: *Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies*. Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge Editions 1999.

Guattari,¹⁷³ but toward the coral, this symbiotic life form of the sea: “In my memory there are tongues too / my coolitude is not a stone / It is coral.”¹⁷⁴ Coolitude is no dead monument stone, but living, tonguing, speaking coral—except: “What is the poet trying to say here?” Is the language here not too obscure, too difficult?

Let us accommodate this stimulus. The diversity of language so important to Torabully’s writing and both the *Übersetzen* and the *Übersetzen* to other shores depict unceasing transfer procedures that again and again become transformation processes: “no longer the Hindu person from Calcutta / but coral flesh from the Antilles.”¹⁷⁵ From these mutations, from these metamorphoses, arises a praxis of writing and at the same time a culture theory that are both constructed in an unmistakably transarchipelagic manner. It is thus programmatically stated in Torabully’s contribution to a conference hosted by the University of Potsdam in 2011:

The coral imagery based on coolitude constitutes a suggestion to archipelize these diversities that are so necessary to humanity (*une proposition d’archipéliser ces diversités si nécessaires aux humanités*). It very concretely places our imagery from the polylogical, archipelagic India into the contemporary reality where economy, culture, and ecology cannot be separated from one another, as is substantiated by present day globalization with its repeated breakdowns filled with violence.¹⁷⁶

This transarchipelagic view, based historically upon the painful experiences of millions of Indian coolies who in their desperate search for work signed five- and ten-year contracts that could just as easily spirit them away to the islands of the Indian Ocean or to Oceania, as easily to the British West Indies as to the French Antilles, is tied to the theorem of coral so crucial to Torabully’s writing, that he established in 2011 as follows:

The coral is observable in its living habitat, quite unlike the rhizome, that lies under the earth. Beyond this, it affords me an agglutinating cohesion that builds itself, similar to a palimpsest, with layers, with concretion, with sedimentation, and not only for the sake of

173 See Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari: *Rhizom*. Translated from the French by Dagmar Berger, et al. Berlin: Merve Verlag 1977.

174 Khal Torabully: *Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies*, p. 82: “ Dans ma mémoire sont des langues aussi / Ma coolitude n’est pas une pierre non plus / elle est corail.”

175 Ibid. p. 108: “non plus l’homme hindou de Calcutta / mais chair corail des Antilles.”

176 Khal Torabully: “Quand les Indes rencontrent les imaginaires du monde.” In: Ottmar Ette / Gesine Müller: *Worldwide/weltweit. Archipiélagos como espacios de prueba de convivencia global*, Ms., p. 12. See also the explanations by Khal Torabully at http://www.ialhi.org/news/i0306_8.php.

developing an erratic cohesion whereby it maintains the egalitarian aspect of the connection does it stand open to every current. The coral is, by its very essence, a hybrid, for it is born of the symbiosis of a phytoplankton and a zooplankton. In the object metaphors of diversity, it simply could not be better. It is root, polyp, and flattening, it is self-changing form, pliant and hard and even multicolored. Though it is rooted, it sets loose the greatest migration on Earth, that of the plankton, that can be seen from the moon like the Great Barrier Reef that was classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This archipelago of coral is quite simply the most widely spreading living sculpture on Earth, and it too can be seen from the moon.¹⁷⁷

The recurrence of the lexeme *vivant* (living) at the beginning and end of this passage emphasizes the great degree to which life processes are also of crucial significance for Torabully in the theorem of coral. Though the poet and theorist did not include the fact that no less than Charles Darwin himself once played with the idea of making coral “the symbol of all natural development” and to use it as a “model of an evolution that anarchically grows in all directions and does not—as in the tree model—see man as the crown at the end of development”¹⁷⁸; the coral does not just become a life-theorem for Torabully, but *embodies* in its vitality a knowledge for both survival and coexistence that allows this community of living beings in their *sym-bio-tic* form of existence to grow into artworks of tremendous dimensions. Even Darwin’s “coral inspiration”¹⁷⁹ was already able to ensure itself of a long artistic and natural-philosophical history of tradition in which “the corals and the products they create in the struggle for life belong in the realm of art.”¹⁸⁰ Had not Leon Battista Alberti, mentioned earlier in the present volume in a different context, already drawn attention to the simple way that complex natural forms can be reinterpreted from the human perspective into semantically high-powered works of art?¹⁸¹

That the coral is understood by the author from Port-Louis as a competing concept to the poststructuralist theory of the rhizome is obvious; at the same time, however, it becomes clear that both the coral and the rhizome, in an extremely similar manner, represent the non-centered, the self-networking, and the non-hierarchical, whereby the coral, in its oscillation between its life-dispensing (and erotic) fleshiness—the *Chair Corail*—and its sculpting dimension as a

¹⁷⁷ Khal Torabully: “Quand les Indes rencontrent les imaginaires du monde,” Ms., p. 10 f.

¹⁷⁸ Horst Bredekamp: *Darwins Korallen. Die frühen Evolutionsdiagramme und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte*. Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach 2006, p. 1. My thanks to Gesine Müller for pointing out this publication.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 70.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ C.f. *ibid.* p. 11.

stone monument presents a dynamic connection between geology and biology, between animal and plant, between death and life, between society and community, the poetic valence of which can be played out in Torabully's lyric poetry. The symbiotic world of the coral connects to a coexistence that from the perspective of the tropics gives rise to a life-world that settles and develops above and below the surface of the ocean. As a poetic trope, the coral embodies the movement-world of the tropics and, thanks to its migrations, is the transtropical life form *par excellence*.

It is fascinating to see how dynamically and with what movement-historical mobility the Mauritian author lays out his concept of the coral, something that one might be, especially with a view to the Great Barrier Reef, more likely to associate in a general sense with rigidity and resilience. But Khal Torabully listens to the sweeping sound of its story, its many-storied layers, its living sedimentation. And he references its natural yet palimpsest-like art. It is only from this profoundly vital story of the smallest life forms that the resilience of the giant coral reefs grows.

The connection between coral and migration repeatedly emphasized by Khal Torabully is tied in the image-world of this poet and theorist with a coolitude that enters into the oceanic and the migratory. As the Mauritian culture-theorist stated in an address to UNESCO:

It is impossible to understand the essence of coolitude without charting the coolies' voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude.¹⁸²

The *landscape of theory* implicitly addressed here undoubtedly enriches the relationality (developed transareally in the present volume over four phases of accelerated globalization) of the self-contained I(s)land-world and the archipelagic and transarchipelagic Island World, insofar as the movement-forms and forms of living of the coolies, who were released into the unknown, together with the epistemological and poetological metaphor of the coral, introduce a living and reinvigorating dynamic into this transtropical landscape of theory, and not only on the level of an intensifying metaphorology. Khal Torabully's conceptual world is shaped in a deeply transareal manner.

And this can be substantiated in terms of the history of the concept. In a volume he completed in 2002 with the British historian Marina Carter, the term

¹⁸² Khal Torabully: "The Coolies' Odyssey." In: *The UNESCO Courier* (Paris) (October 1996), p. 13.