



Coolitude

Khal Torabully's *Coupeuses D'Azur* (2014)
Week 2

"Coolitude Khal Torabully's *Coupeuses D'Azur* (2014) Week 2" by Anisha Badal-Caussy, [Mahatma Gandhi Institute](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

Learning outcomes

By the end of this session, students should be able to:

1. Define Coolitude with respects to the Indentured times.
2. Relate the theoretical concept coolitude with Khal Torabully's *Coupeuses D'Azur*.

Coolitude

- Coolitude is a revisiting of the pejorative term coolie in its meaning whereby coolitude is not viewed from the perspectives of the whites demeaning the work of indentured labourers but it is a rendition of the indentured labourers' complex identities.
- There is a spiritual significance in Torabully's notion of *Coupeuses D'Azur*. His "Coupeuses" that is female indentured labourers cutting the sugarcane may be interpreted as a metaphor for the dual aspect of the female labourers' identity.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- Coolitude epitomizes in many respects a double articulation in Torabully's work: his commitment to denouncing trauma and violence during the Indentureship period as well as the concern of the poet to find adequate words, styles and modes to engage with this suffering.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- A more complex picture of the notion of Indentured identity, shifting the emphasis from a fossilizing nostalgia for a fixed India to the ocean space mediates the numerous cultural (ex)changes coolie culture has undergone during Mauritian indenturedship times.
- Coolitude thus emerges as a poetics that attempts to recover and reassess the transoceanic crossing of coolies, establishing it as a central metaphor that is constitutive of a new perspective on Mauritian indentured identities characterized by multiple crossings: crossings between cultures, heritages, places, gender, historical assertions, and mythical references throughout *Coupeuses D'Azur*.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- Khal Torabully's discourse of Coolitude (1992) revalorizes the pejorative term coolie and builds on previous discussions of identity negotiations as pronounced by concepts like Négritude, Antillanite, Créolité- while distancing coolitude from them.
- Torabully advances the idea that a displaced Indentured identity is necessarily determined by India as a land of origin, as much as it is defined by relational and residual exchanges of the Coupeuses to India, however not limited by India.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- The Coolitude in *Coupeuses D'Azur* resettles the imagination of Torabully whereby the field becomes metaphorically a space for repositioning in time whereby the Coupeuses tries to figure out where she mentally as well as physically stands while cutting the sugarcane.
- Paradoxically, the field becomes the territory where histories of trauma of female Indentured labourers can now be viewed from reader perspective as hardship of the indentured.
- Within the field, the female labourers are trapped between their desire for initiating strength by being "Coupeuses" and their self-esteem as dignified workers.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- The female labourers are relegated to perpetual servitude whereby the superiority of what was once the enslaver is relocated in estate managers and the profile of the indentured labourers described in *Coupeuses D'Azur* are reminiscent of Indentureship.
- Reading coolitude in *Coupeuses D'Azur* is about revealing the burden of the job women have to carry in comparison to white-collar jobs of the estate managers/owners.
- However, this difference is not as fixed as we might imagine as there are complexities in the coping strategies of the female labourers in the text.

Coolitude in Torabully's work

- The plot structure in Torabully's work is in the format of poems and not prose, relating narratives about the *Coupeuses D'Azur*.
- It is important to note that despite the title *Coupeuses D'Azur* is in plural term, the text voices the conditions of female Indentured labourers in a single female I-persona.
- The poem structure of *Coupeuses D'Azur* leaves an impression of how the female labourers engage with their different identities by putting forward the opinions of different people.
- The verses in the different stanzas are echoes of their unfixed identities, endowing them with a paradox on their strength/weakness, pride/shame.
- The duality in the female labourers is mainly due to the comparisons made from the historical indentured female labourers.



Thank you for your attention.