



Making history come alive

Seeking truth and justice: An interview with Vijaya Teelock

Vijaya Teelock interviewed by David Denborough



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Abstract

In this interview, Mauritian historian Vijaya Teelock discusses breaking historical silences, democratising history, intangible heritage, memorialising and the complexities of seeking justice and reparation for historical wrongs. The interview took place in Vijaya's home in Mauritius with David Denborough, Cheryl White and Diana Shanto present.

Key words: *Mauritius; indentured labour; slave trade; memorialising; oral history; truth and justice commission; democratising history*

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DD: Narrative therapy and community work is a non-psychological approach to people's suffering. It's determined to ensure that problems are not located within individuals (internalised) and instead are located back in history and culture (externalised). It's a way of working that I believe has more in common with the field of history than psychiatry, and our field has so much to learn from historians such as yourself! We have great respect for your work in three different areas: how you contributed to breaking a historical silence in relation to slavery in Mauritius, your involvement in the Truth and Justice Commission here, and how you have sought to memorialise both slavery and histories of indentured labour. Is it okay to ask you about each of these themes?

Vijaya: Yes, of course.

DD: In Australia there have been multiple historical silences, one of the most profound relating to the histories of the Frontier Wars – colonial violence and the resistance of First Nations peoples. Here in Mauritius, in your early work, you were confronting a historical silence in relation to slavery and what happened to the descendants of enslaved people on this island. I believe there was a profound silence in the heart of a community of memory and you were determined to do something about this.

Vijaya: Yes. I graduated in history in 1979 and came back to Mauritius and got a job as a high school history teacher. I remember the job interview in which they asked me, "What books are you going to use to teach history? Because we don't have any school textbooks". I said I would go and do research in the archives, and so that's what I did.

DD: That's very interesting to me. So your initial engagement with the archives as a historian was in order to make the history available to Mauritian young people and children.

Vijaya: Yes, to 12- to 18-year-olds. And this was exciting. In schools, students initially consider history to be dry and separate from their lives. So I tried to make history come alive, to show them that history is all around them:

the houses we live in, the chair they're sitting on, the food we are eating, the jeans they were wearing – there is a history to all of these. And then we went about popularising the history of Mauritius, getting it to be known to the younger generation, not as something past, but as something very present.

At this point, the national television asked us to help them with a series of programs on local history. This involved going to different districts and letting the local population know about historical sites in each area. As we were systematically going through the districts, there was one chronological period that no one seemed to know anything about. When we asked: Where are the descendants of those who were enslaved? Where did they go afterwards? And when I looked in the history books and even into the archives, I couldn't find the answers to these questions. This was a huge gap in the narrative of Mauritius. We all celebrate the abolition of slavery, but what happened to those who had been enslaved? And how is this linked to Mauritius today?

We know the answers to those questions now, but at that time, there was a huge historical gap. There was one particular meeting that was very significant to me. During the making of the television series, I went to the village of Le Morne and met with a very elderly man. We were sitting together in a straw hut, with just a little light in his room. When I said to him, "I would like to talk to you about things that happened in the past, slavery and so on", he said, "No, no, no, I can't talk to you about it. My employers will not like it".

That was really the beginning for me. Slavery had ended so many years ago, so why would people be scared to speak about it? Everywhere I went, it was the same story. No-one would speak. So I realised there was something very wrong. When I talked to my colleagues – my fellow scholars, fellow lecturers at the university – they seemed scared of offending Franco-Mauritian friends. They said, "No, we don't talk about it. We don't want to offend people, and no-one would publish your work anyway".

Since I'm not really the relinquishing type, that was when I decided I must focus on this. It was in response to that silence that I started looking at the history of slavery through a master's degree at Columbia University then a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at University of London.

DD: I'd like to hear more about the actual historical research, but first, can you say something about Le Morne Mountain, which is now a World Heritage Site commemorating maroonage. I believe there was a struggle involved in this.

Vijaya: Yes, another key turning point for me was when developers wished to build a cable car on top of Le Morne Mountain, which is a place where those who escaped slavery, the Maroons, sought refuge. I saw a little note in the newspaper about the cable car proposal which invited people to come and give their views on this project. Only three people turned up to object to this idea: one of the most elderly Rastafarian people in Mauritius, an environmental activist and myself. After this meeting we started a campaign to fight against this cable car project. And again, we heard the same sort of fatalistic stories: You can't stop development. You can't go up against the big capitalists. You can't go against this. You will never win. So that made us even more determined. As a historian, I became involved in defending this historical site.

DD: So your initial determination to teach a meaningful history to school students led to discovering this historical silence, and then also to forming relationships and partnerships to defend historical sites. Can you say a bit about the journey from there being a deafening cultural silence around the descendants of those who were enslaved to now Le Morne being such a significant place of acknowledging history and memory? I'm thinking back to that elderly man who you met under that small light in Le Morne village all those years ago when it wasn't even possible to speak about these histories.

Vijaya: Yeah! People are not scared anymore to talk. So that's great. When you go to Le Morne today, people are proud that is a

World Heritage Site and they are all involved in this history. They're proud to take part in protecting it. We also discovered an abandoned cemetery, and we found when we did DNA testing that those buried there were all descendants of people from either African or Malagasy descent, so inevitably this was a cemetery of people who had been enslaved. Importantly, the whole village participated in these archaeological excavations.

For me, history making doesn't just involve one historian going to the archives and looking for information. It's also about getting people involved. For a lot of my students, the first assignment I used to give them was to go search for their family history. Go interview your grandmother, grandfather. And then they used to come back and say, "gosh, our grandmother knows so much!" [laughs] Family history for me is just as important as political history, or military history, or national history and so on. It's all those family histories put together that make up Mauritius.

Through these projects the study of history also became interdisciplinary. In researching the history of slavery, you don't have any written documents emanating from those who were enslaved, so it becomes important to look at other sources of evidence. Archaeology became very important, and this is what enabled the Maroon Cave archaeological project exploring where the Maroons had escaped and where they had lived. Some artefacts were found.

The importance of honouring oral tradition through oral history projects also became clear. Normally, historians are stuck in the archives, but it is very important to actually go to the places, interview those who are directly connected to these histories. Our history making became interdisciplinary combining archival work, archaeology, oral tradition and field work.

DD: It seems to me that some of your projects are also community work and social action: enabling communities to make their own history and influence the views of others. There is a great contrast between the image of your first conversation with that elderly man in

Le Morne who was too afraid to talk, and the image of the entire village being involved in engaging with history, becoming proud of the place as a symbol of resistance.

Vijaya: There are still places of silence though. For instance, there is no official recognition that discrimination and racism exists in Mauritius. I think the Mauritian government and civil servants strongly promote the idea that everyone is given equal opportunities in education and housing, and they don't want to recognise that racism – anti-African racism – does exist. Even the police, if you give a statement saying you have been discriminated against, they will not accept it as ethnic or racial discrimination. So too in academia. We have a whole sociology department that will write and talk about race and discrimination all over the world, but they won't talk about it in Mauritius! This includes some of my colleagues. When I asked them, "Why are you not including Mauritian case studies?", they said it was too complicated, it's too complex. It's crazy.

DD: I imagine this must contribute to people feeling crazy too.

Vijaya: Yes. The situation for women of African descent in Mauritius is particularly complex. During Covid, I started a small research group for women, and Creole women described the difficulty of talking about experiences of discrimination they had faced at school or in the office. Even when they try to talk about these experiences within their own families, they are laughed at and stereotyped. We know anti-African racism and discrimination exists, but how do we face it?

DD: Perhaps this is an appropriate moment to turn to your work with the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission. In Australia, First Nations people are calling for truth telling and commissions will be one part of this. The learnings from your experience could be significant. What an extraordinary endeavour the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission clearly was!

Vijaya: [Laughs] It exhausted all of us.

DD: What an extraordinary achievement of complexity. I believe it was unique in numerous ways. Within the report it states:

Mauritius is the first country in Africa and the world to have a Truth and Justice Commission investigating the history of slavery and its consequences and to accept the principle that reparations are required. (Truth and Justice Commission, 2011, p. 22)

It was also the only commission to look at events over such a long period (from 1638 to 2011) and explore the ongoing effects of those histories. It involved truth telling not only in relation to slavery, but also indentured labour and land justice. And when I read through the report, you considered the effects of these histories on diverse realms including family patterns and gender relations and considerations of child protection and safety. Your recommendations also involved trying to facilitate travel for descendants to ancestral homes, access to genealogy, reparations through education, memorialisation and much more. It was an extraordinary undertaking in a really short period of time.

Vijaya: We hired 50 experienced researchers, provided research assistants, access to whatever documents they needed and said, "Go and come back in two years with your report". And then we put everything together. The government gave us all the funds we needed and police powers to enter any building to obtain information and documents. It was, I believe, the first time historians have had police powers to enter any building and access any document.

Ironically, the only institution that really tried to block us was the Mahatma Gandhi Institute as they hold the Indian immigration archives, and they didn't want us to access these files because of the issue of caste. Many Mauritians of Indian descent hide their caste, and they wanted those records to remain hidden. Eventually we were able to gain access.

DD: Just one of many complexities that you had to deal with! Can I just take a step back. You mentioned how you had begun your historical explorations as a high school teacher trying to think about how to teach an honest or a rich telling of Mauritian history. And then, you had become the deputy chair of the Mauritian Truth and Justice Commission. You mentioned that your team experienced a sense of a “moral duty” to this work. When I read the terms of reference for the commission, you had a small task. It was to seek “reconciliation, social justice and national unity through re-establishing historical truth”.

Vijaya: [Laughs]

DD: In response to this *profound* challenge, it appears to me you did have some extraordinary achievements. The commission resulted in the establishment of a land division of the Supreme Court, the establishment of a land bank, the Museum of Slavery that you are working on now, a national inventory of heritage and an audit of housing units, alongside very practical developments such as breakfasts and lunches for school children who might be facing hunger on a daily basis. Some significant changes.

Vijaya: Some change, yes. But I think 290 recommendations were made, and very few of these have actually been fully implemented. I think civil servants were given the task of implementing the recommendations and I am not sure whether they were the right people to be tasked with this. Many did not even read the report.

DD: I'd like to ask you about some of the complex topics for the commission, starting with reparations. There is a section in the report titled “From compensation to slave owners to reparations for slavery” (2011, p. 381). It always takes away my breath when I look at the figures of the amounts of money paid to slave owners at the time of abolition, particularly when these figures are placed next to the current financial status of many of the descendants of those who were enslaved. I believe the call and struggle for reparations was a big part of why the commission was established.

Vijaya: Yes. Mr Sylvio Michel and his brothers had campaigned for many years for reparations in relation to slavery in the form of cash compensation for every ex-slave family. His work was highly influential in making Mauritius the first African country to formally discuss compensation and in establishing the commission with the hope of redressing injustices caused to the descendants of slaves and indentured labourers. The commission discussed Mr Michel's proposal for cash compensation and researched it, and what became very complex was the question of who is a descendant. There have been so many intermarriages and migrations on a small island that you have people of African, European and Indian descent within the same family, so how are you going to decide who will get compensation? I know Mr Michel was not happy at all at the end when the commission said it would recommend reparations rather than financial compensation to families.

DD: In Australia, considerations of reparations may one day be considered as part of treaty negotiations. I was interested in the direction of reparation proposals made by the commission which included:

Funding for reparations is sought by the Mauritian government from the historical slave trading nations, namely, the United Kingdom and France, for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities and settlements where slave descendants are in the majority.

Reparations be provided to poor individual families in terms of social reparations such as housing and education so that this community and its descendants are better able to create a more stable social and economic existence going into the future.

That a system and policy of affirmative action be implemented in Mauritius to address the social and economic imbalances created and fostered under Slavery, Indenture and Colonialism. (2011, p. 402)

You also included proposals in relation to making discrimination illegal at any level of society and the creation of an anti-discrimination unit.

Vijaya: Yes, and there was also a lot of attention paid to land justice and making it possible for families who believed they had been dispossessed of their land to seek justice. Now, 10 years later, when we look at the land issue, so many families are still waiting for justice. Their cases remain in the courts and every time a new obstacle is placed in front of them, as if it's hoped the claimants will die before they ever see their land. As claims for land justice have stagnated in the courts, I believe the debate for financial reparations to descendants of slaves will be revisited, should be revisited.

DD: Can I also ask you about the issue of caste?

Vijaya: It was very surprising to all of us that trying to study lower-caste discrimination within Indian populations was actually harder than studying anti-African discrimination. We had plenty of case studies, and it was possible for people to come forward and give us examples in schools, hospitals. But in relation to caste, people said, "Do not record us. Do not take our names. We will tell you everything, but we don't want this to be on record". This really shocked our researchers who would come to us and ask, "Why are they so scared?" There is clearly still a lot going on underground in Mauritius in relation to caste distinctions. I don't think this has changed. We are in need of campaigns that will enable people of lower-caste backgrounds to shift shame and reclaim a pride in their histories as has occurred for those descended from people who were enslaved.

DD: In addition to making recommendations and calls for justice, the commission involved "democratizing history", as Joyce Fortune (2011, p. 272) described it. Can you say a bit more about democratising history?

Vijaya: I never wanted to be an academic. I ended up in a university, but I always wanted to be a journalist. I respect questioning and have a determination to make sure that people

can understand their own history and can take part in writing their own history. There's a limit to what academic historians can do in the archives. If you make interpretations of history from the archive or from far away from the communities most affected by those histories – if you don't go and meet the people, or the descendants of the people, whom you're writing about – then very often those interpretations of history will not be correct. So it's critical to go and visit the place or talk to people and get other views. It's also critical to get people to write and reflect on their own family histories. Joyce Fortune, one of my first students, wanted to go around interviewing elderly persons about African or Malagasy traditions within their own families. It was through such oral history projects that a momentum started for what is called popular history, but this hadn't existed in Mauritius before. This democratising of history is very significant.

DD: I'd like to ask you now about memorialising, as this is one aspect of popular or democratic history. The first place we visited in Mauritius was Aapravasi Ghat, a superbly curated memorial, museum and research centre in relation to the indentured labour trade. We loved this memorial! There were many things about it that were significant to us. To start with, it not only richly honoured the individual and collective stories and exhausting labour of those whose lives and bodies made up this trade, but it also told the international story. I didn't know that the blackbirding of South Sea Islanders to Australia was so directly linked to Mauritius! I had no idea that this was the first place, after the abolition of slavery, that the British created an indentured labour trade of hundreds of thousands of people, primarily Indians, to support the industries that had previously been created and sustained by enslaved labour. While I was standing in the memorial, there was a group of Australians looking at the exhibit. They were clearly very moved by the experiences of the Indian indentured labourers. And so I asked them if they knew the Australian and South Sea Islander part of the story. They had no idea. It is actually not that well known in Australia. I, on the other hand, didn't know the international story and how

the international indentured labour trade has shaped peoples and cultures and economies in so many different parts of the world. And, of course, these histories are still affecting the lives of descendants of the labourers and the descendants of those who profited from their labour. I really appreciated how the international story was told.

But what I want to ask you about is the room that focuses on intangible heritage. I also hadn't known that Mauritius was the second state to ratify the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage, and that this led your country to make an inventory of intangible heritage. I loved hearing this. I wonder what an inventory of the intangible heritage of South Sea Islanders in Australia would make visible. Can you tell me about the thinking and process that led to the creation of that small room in Aapravasi Ghat, with the videos, songs, stories and riddles that represent the intangible heritage of those from different parts of India who made new lives in Mauritius through the labour trade?

Vijaya: As part of writing history, I think it's very important to look at oral traditions and oral histories and to collect these and re-present them. At Aapravasi Ghat, we started a project to collect oral histories, and that's shaped what is in the museum. I think we collected 400 to 500 interviews and this is continuing. As a historian, you learn through conversations and interviews so much that cannot be learnt through the archives. Archives can provide information about health, education, wages, but you'll find very little about what people think, how people think, about their traditions, and how they practice and re-make their cultures. This can be compensated for by studying oral tradition and history. Oral or digital archives are like another category of archive.

DD: Intangible heritage is a fascinating concept, isn't it? It's linked to narrative practice too. When people are enduring hardship, we try to explore some of the skills or practices people are using to endure this hardship. We seek stories about this and then we trace the histories of these skills of survival or endurance. These histories are personal and

often familial, but they are also often linked to collective histories and traditions. Often, the daily skills that someone might be using to endure hardship are linked to forms of intangible heritage. I'm really interested in this.

Vijaya: We learnt a great deal about our country through the national inventory of intangible heritage. This included learning about so many different crafts and fishing traditions that the researchers didn't know existed, and we also realised that there is a huge difference between the different parts of Mauritius: whether they live in the north or south, people's conception of life is completely different. We learnt that the more isolated villages of the south have kept traditions that have been forgotten in the rest of Mauritius. Even though it's a small island, there is a lot of variety. We talk of microclimates, but there are also microcultures that exist and exquisite variations of language in which Marathi, Bhojpuri and Creole are mixed together or Tamil, Bhojpuri, Creole together, so much so that a person from India would come and would not understand a word. These are unique aspects of Mauritian life that are worth preserving.

DD: We'll try to return to Aapravasi Ghat again before we leave! Now though, I'd like to ask about the very different ways that the history of slavery and resistance to slavery are being memorialised here. The monument at Le Morne is a very different place of memory. I have heard it described as "a holy mountain", "a fortress protecting freedom and dignity", "a temple in which rituals of healing take place", "a sanctuary", and "a shrine in recognition of crimes against humanity". Sitting in the shadows of the dramatic and beautiful Le Morne Mountain, this memorial consists of very few words, and instead rock carvings and symbols and representations of resistance and reclamation. Is there anything you'd like to say about this different sort of memorialising?

Vijaya: It's very significant that Le Morne has been recognised, and that an institution now exists to manage the World Heritage Site, but there are also complexities. The village of Le Morne consists of people of many different heritages. They're people of Indian and African ancestry.

Most of those of African ancestry would also have an Indian grandfather and so on. When the dossier was put together to try to establish World Heritage status, a particular ethnic approach, shaped by the South African experience, I believe, was adopted, which I had many doubts about. The experience positioned the mountain and memorial as being for Creoles (people of African heritage) only and prioritised the involvement of Creole people rather than continuing the momentum of a local collective village approach. Prior to this process, all those at Le Morne village were joined in their commitment to the mountain and to its heritage. But the process of creating the dossier split the village in half. I was unhappy about this and didn't agree with it at all. The split still exists today. I think we must engage with histories and honestly memorialise them in ways that honour complexity and local ways and relationships. I think Mauritius and Mauritian history asks this of us.

DD: Speaking of complexities, I believe you are now working on a different Site of Conscience, creating the Intercontinental Slavery Museum in the oldest building of the island, the former military hospital. Cheryl [White] and I had a powerful experience in Ghana some years ago when we visited Cape Coast Castle with Makungu Akinyela and Vanessa Jackson. This was a prison, a site of enslavement of Africans before they were sent across the Atlantic Ocean. The Ghanaian historian at that site, James Amemasor, took exquisite care in the ways in which he accompanied us. He had curated a memorial that was profoundly honouring of the suffering and injustice of the histories of that place, and at the same time involved cultural and spiritual practices to welcome and acknowledge people from the African diaspora. We learnt a great deal from this and also how he named the complicity of Ghanaians in these histories (see Amemasor, 2002). As you curate this new memorial, are you preparing to welcome Africans from the diaspora who are descendants of those who were enslaved?

Vijaya: Yes, I keep asking myself what this museum will mean for descendants of slaves here in Mauritius, and what will it mean for people in

the diaspora. In Madagascar, in Rodrigues and so on, slavery is not even talked about. In Madagascar especially, people are looking for this museum to spark interest and conscience in their own countries. There are huge expectations, and I'm afraid they're not going to be met in the immediate future.

Right now, they've got French experts coming to give suggestions for exhibits, but the Mauritian element appears to be missing. The Afro-Mauritian element is not there. I hope that African and Malagasy curators will be consulted and involved in the design, but this is not happening at the moment, which is disappointing.

I completely agree that we need to create a particular emotional space within the museum, and I have been advocating for water being central to this. Originally, the museum building, which used to be a hospital, had a direct entrance to the sea, where slaves or soldiers or sailors would be brought in directly. But now there's a huge building between the museum building and the sea and you can't see the water.

This new museum is adjacent to Aapravasi Ghat. Both are in the area that has historically been the safest bay in Mauritius. This is actually where everybody's ancestors would have come through. It's now part of a World Heritage Site for indentured labour, but for years we've been saying we need to open the space by the bay so it's open to honour all ancestors. So this is something to be discussed, but we are now at a time when the mode of honouring histories is by separating groups, separating histories, separating memories. This is the official policy. Trying to mix histories is not acceptable!

To me, the logical thing would be to create a common water feature or sculpture by the bay – a water memorial that would bring all Mauritians together. And then this would also link the new Intercontinental Slavery Site of Conscience and Aapravasi Ghat.

I believe that museums need to bring the past into the present too. Some of my students wrote a book on their experience

as young Creole girls in a very Catholic, very Franco-Mauritian convent, and how they were encouraged by their teachers and their parents to straighten their hair, to not have curly hair, to use skin lightening creams. They described how in their own families, when there are children of different shades, it was always the child with the lightest skin who was introduced to visitors. These practices are still going on today, which is so crazy. I have one student who's doing her master's on body politics: how women with African hair are looked at and considered in Mauritius, and why the same women often reject their African heritage, straighten their hair, use whitening creams and reject their Africanness. All of this needs to go in the museum. The legacies of slavery and anti-African racism are not just something of the past. We're still living the past with us today.

DD: In trying to represent histories in this new museum, there must be so many complexities you are grappling with. Would you like to speak of any of these?

Vijaya: Even language is complex. A lot of Creole Mauritians now don't use the term "slave" to describe a person but instead refer to "Africans who were enslaved", so how do we consider this in the creation of a museum about slavery? And there are also complexities about whether only Indians should be involved in studying indentured labour and only Creoles involved in studying the history of slavery. I'm not a believer in this as you then end up with different institutions and separate versions of history. But for the time being, it seems we're doomed to each one having their history.

DD: As there were not Indigenous people of Mauritius (it was an uninhabited island), the challenges of re-presenting Mauritian history are quite different than in Australia. But there are some resonances. We also have different versions of history. In Australia, there continue to be struggles between these. Sometimes this is simplistically characterised as a "white blindfold view" of history (that depicts a glorious version of European colonialism) juxtaposed against a "black armband view" of history (that honours the real consequences of colonialism for First Nations peoples).

But these struggles are over more than just which stories are told. There are also diverse philosophies about history in Australia. First Nations philosophies and spiritualities relate to history quite differently than Western engagements with the past. I don't think we white Australians have much of an understanding about this yet.

Vijaya: Yes, considerations of honouring ancestry, bringing ancestors with us into the present: these philosophies bring different implications for making histories. Interestingly, there are actually many historic connections between Mauritius and Australia. Many Mauritian slaves were deported to Australia and somehow integrated with Aboriginal families and community (see work of Clare Anderson, e.g. 2000, 2016). And there are also stories of Australian Aboriginal women who came to Mauritius on board whaling ships.

DD: I'd love to learn more about those interconnections! Finally, I believe struggles in relation to history continue here – as they do elsewhere. Can you say a little about current challenges?

Vijaya: The battle is still going on and perhaps now is getting even worse because in the tourist sector they have been setting up museums and mansions for tourists, and in the process the entire history of slavery is being re-silenced. There was a time when there were a lot of books and events about slavery and its continuing legacies, but now a re-silencing of the past has started.

As I mentioned earlier, there are also many continuing struggles over land. We have many land claims being made by descendants of slaves, and others too because dispossession of land is not only related to slavery. Hundreds of claims are being made, but access to the archives is often blocked to these people. There is a constant battle for information and evidence that will support land claims and restitution.

There are also new conversations beginning as some of the young generation of Franco-Mauritians whose ancestors may have been slave owners want to acknowledge the

damage done by their ancestors. They really want to talk about this but how to do so is complex.

DD: I guess this comes back to what you said earlier in relation to the significance of family histories. I can relate to this as some of my ancestors played very influential roles in colonial dispossession and in Frontier Wars in Australia. Being invited by Aboriginal colleagues to find ways to speak and write *together* about these histories, and in ways that make action more possible in the present to address current injustices, is really significant to me. One Aboriginal colleague, Jane Lester, said to me that she couldn't trust me, that we wouldn't be able to keep working together, unless I found ways to honestly connect with, honour and talk about the actions of some of my ancestors (see Denborough, 2020, 2022). This includes talking about family histories related to the blackbirding (indentured labour) of South Sea Islanders, which I've now learnt is linked to Mauritius!

Vijaya: While we seem doomed to parallel histories here in Mauritius at present, I think also maybe it's a question of time. My kids have

all grown up in an independent Mauritius and they're living relatively okay lives compared to what my parents went through. My dad was born in a straw hut. My son was born in a nice clean hospital. Their orientations to the histories here are so different. Young people don't feel what my dad may have felt about living in colonial Mauritius. For them, they've never lived it, they've never endured it. So maybe in 30 years' time, or 50 years' time, there will be very different ways that Mauritians of different heritages will come together to speak of those histories, to write about them, to memorialise them.

DD: Well, when a secondary school history teacher stands in front of a class in 30 years' time in Mauritius, thanks to your work and those of your colleagues and friends, they will be able to not only find textbooks to share, but they will be able to take them to Le Morne memorial, to Aapravasi Ghat, to the Intercontinental Slavery Museum. Hopefully they will also be able to follow your lead in participatory history making in relation to their own family histories and the histories of this intriguing, complex, beautiful island. Thank you so much for speaking with us today.

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