

ETHICS

The business of Omelas

IN the short story entitled “*The Ones who Walked Away from Omelas*” the famous American author, Ursula K. Le Guin, in 1973, forces us to critically think about a fundamental question: can a happy society be built on exploitation? The story is about a city called Omelas. It is a city of astonishing happiness: its people are free, its festivals joyous, its harvest abundant.

But there is one condition to all this happiness; it exists only because in a locked room somewhere beneath the city, a single child is kept in filth and suffering and forgotten and unfed. In other words, the happiness of the citizens of Omelas depends on the suffering of the child locked in a room somewhere beneath the city. It is a kind of moral trade-off and it is a well-kept secret.

Eventually, every citizen of Omelas learns about the child. Most, after a period of horror and disgust, make their peace with it and accept the bargain because the arithmetic of one child’s suffering against a whole city’s happiness seems to them bearable. But a few cannot make that peace. They say nothing, ask for no explanation and simply walk away out of the gates of the city towards something the story never describes.

I have been thinking about that story lately, not as literature but as economics. Because somewhere behind the glass towers of global business – behind our conveniences, the food on our tables, the clothes we wear, the homes that are cleaned, the fields that are harvested –, there may be a room we do not ask about. The exploitation of someone we will never meet and whose suffering we are not required to witness.

The child of Omelas has multiplied. It has become millions of adults, and



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children too, and it is no longer hidden beneath one city.

We may, all of us, be citizens of a very large Omelas. We know, in the way Omelas’ citizens knew, vaguely, at the edge of comfort, never quite in the headline, that some of what fills our shopping carts and our itineraries may have been made by someone else’s captivity.

The International Labour Organization estimates that some 27.6 million people were in situations of modern slavery, including forced labour and forced marriage, on any given day in 2021 – and a significant share of them left home in search of something better, only to be trapped along the way. A migration system that is opaque about recruitment fees, silent about the right to change employer, indifferent to passport confiscation or slow to investigate complaints is a system that manufactures trafficking victims out of migrant workers.

But the real question is what do we choose to do once we learn about the child locked in the room? And, like most of Omelas, most of us stay. We stay because leaving is not really an option; because one person’s abstinence changes nothing; because the job, however exploitative, is still someone’s only alternative to no job at all; because businesses have grown remarkably skilled at keeping the locked room several subcontracts away from the label.

But there is a difference between the citizens of the story and us. They could only ever leave the city. We can go back for the child. This is the work sitting in front of each of us who has, at some point, chosen not to ask a question because we suspected we would not like the answer.

We are never told what the ones who walked away from Omelas found in the darkness beyond its gates. Perhaps they found nothing. Perhaps that was never the point. Perhaps the point was only ever this: that once you know the child is there, staying and doing nothing is itself a choice, dressed up as inevitability.

So, the honest question for business, and for the rest of us, is not whether we knew. Increasingly, we do. It is who, now that we know, will have the courage not to walk away from the city – but to walk back toward the locked door, and open it.

[Inspired from the speech made on the commemoration of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, held at the University of Technology, Mauritius, 29 July 2026]

GAZA’S CHILDREN

How many more must die before the world says enough?

A child should know the sound of laughter, not explosions. A child should carry a schoolbag, not the unbearable weight of losing a parent. A child should fall asleep wondering what tomorrow will bring, not wondering whether tomorrow will come.

Yet, for thousands of children in Gaza, childhood has been replaced by survival. The findings of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel confront the international community with an alarming reality. According to the Commission, approximately 30 per cent of those killed in the Gaza conflict have been children. It has also made grave findings concerning alleged violations of international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. These are among the most serious violations recognised under international law. But behind

the legal language lies something painfully simple.

Thousands of children have reportedly been killed, while many others have been injured, orphaned, separated from their families or repeatedly displaced. Schools have been disrupted or destroyed, healthcare severely affected and families deprived of the basic conditions necessary for children to live safely and develop with dignity. They did not start this conflict. They do not negotiate cease-fires. They do not determine military strategy. They do not draw borders or make political decisions.

International humanitarian law requires parties to distinguish between civilians and combatants. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution exist to limit civilian suffering. Children, because of their vulnerability, are entitled to special respect and protection. The Convention on the Rights of the Child further recognises every child’s in-

herent right to life, survival and development. It requires States to respect international humanitarian law applicable to children affected by armed conflict and to take all feasible measures to ensure their protection and care.

These principles were created because humanity learned, through some of history’s darkest chapters, that even warfare must have limits. The suffering in Gaza therefore cannot simply become another headline that disappears when the news cycle moves elsewhere.

For children, the consequences of armed conflict extend far beyond geopolitical considerations. They are experienced through the destruction of homes, the loss or separation of family members, repeated displacement, food insecurity and the constant absence of safety and stability. Conflicts also severely restrict access to essential healthcare, interrupt education and deprive children of the protective environment necessary for their physical, psychological and social development. And for children who survive, the war may continue long after the weapons themselves become silent.

Repeated exposure to death, destruction, displace-

ment and insecurity can leave profound psychological scars. Trauma does not necessarily disappear when buildings are reconstructed. A generation deprived of safety, education and stability may carry the consequences throughout adulthood.

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers now confronting the international community is indifference.

When suffering continues for months and years, horrifying statistics can gradually become familiar. Numbers replace names. Images become another part of the daily news.

At the same time, the universality of human rights requires consistency. Israeli children who have experienced attacks, bereavement, displacement, fear or hostage-taking are equally entitled to protection. The suffering of Palestinian children does not diminish the suffering of Israeli children, nor does recognising the rights of Israeli children diminish the urgency of protecting Palestinian children. The protection of children must never depend upon religion, ethnicity, geography or politics.

This is precisely why accountability matters. Credible allegations of serious violations of interna-



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tional humanitarian law and international human rights law must be investigated independently, impartially and transparently. Where responsibility is established, accountability must follow.

Humanitarian assistance must reach civilians in need. Food, clean water, medicines, healthcare and shelter are not political privileges; they are necessities for human survival. Hospitals, humanitarian personnel and civilian infrastructure must receive the protection afforded by international law.

The international community must continue demanding humanitarian protection, accountability and ultimately, a durable peace founded upon justice and respect for human dignity.

Peace must be understood as extending beyond the mere cessation of hostilities. It requires the establishment of conditions in which children can live in safety and without fear, families can access education and essential services with confidence, and healthcare institutions are able to fulfil their humanitarian functions effectively and without obstruction. It also requires an environment in which children are afforded the protection, stability and opportunities necessary for their development and future.

While history will inevitably document the military operations, diplomatic negotiations and political decisions that have shaped this conflict, it must equally record their profound human consequences, particularly for children and other civilians whose fundamental rights, security and dignity have been gravely affected. The children of Gaza must never become merely statistics in another chapter of human conflict. Their protection is not charity but a legal obligation, a moral imperative. And ultimately, it is a test of our common humanity.



LE «KREOL MORISIEN» AU PARLEMENT

Un pas de plus vers la décolonisation

LA République de Maurice est reconnue pour sa diversité culturelle, ethnique et religieuse. Cette pluralité, héritée de l’histoire coloniale et des migrations successives, a forgé une société riche, mais parfois fragmentée. Dans ce contexte, le *Kreol Morisien*, langue née sur le sol mauricien, s’impose comme un vecteur d’unité et de cohésion nationale. Longtemps relégué au rang de langue informelle, il est aujourd’hui progressivement valorisé et institutionnalisé.

Depuis de nombreuses années, la question de l’utilisation du *Kreol Morisien* à l’Assemblée nationale se pose légitimement. Un pas vient d’être franchi lors de cette législature avec la mise sur pied d’un *Select Committee* de 11 parlementaires afin d’étudier la question et de faire des recommandations en vue de l’officialisation du *Kreol Morisien* comme langue parlementaire. Cela constitue ainsi un pas de plus vers une décolonisation effective.

Cette dernière ne se limite pas à l’accession à l’indépendance politique. Elle implique également une émancipation culturelle et linguistique, afin que les peuples anciennement colonisés puissent se réapproprier leur identité. À Maurice, si l’Indépendance a été proclamée en 1968, le poids des langues coloniales – anglais et français – demeure dominant dans l’administration, l’éducation et les médias. Dans ce contexte, le *Kreol Morisien*, langue née sur le sol mauricien et parlée par la majorité de la population, apparaît comme un instrument essentiel pour une décolonisation véritable.

On peut alors se demander : en quoi le *Kreol Morisien* constitue-t-il un outil et un pilier de la décolonisation effective à Maurice ? Nous montrerons d’abord que cette langue est un symbole de résistance et de réappropriation identitaire, puis, qu’elle est un vecteur de démocratisation et d’inclusion sociale, avant d’évoquer les défis et perspectives liés à son rôle dans la décolonisation culturelle.

► Symbole de résistance et de réappropriation identitaire

Le *Kreol Morisien* est issu du contact entre esclaves, engagés et colons. Il incarne la mémoire des opprimés et leur créativité face à la domination. En valorisant le *Kreol*, les Mauriciens affirment une identité propre, distincte de l’héritage imposé par les colonisateurs *morisien*. Le *Kreol Morisien* est un marqueur d’authenticité et de souveraineté culturelle, permettant aux Mauriciens de se reconnaître dans une langue qui leur appartient.

Parlée par plus de 90 % de la population, cette langue est un outil de communication universel qui transcende les divages ethniques et religieux. Son introduction dans les écoles permet aux enfants d’apprendre dans leur langue maternelle, réduisant les inégalités face aux langues coloniales. L’usage du *Kreol* dans les institutions et les médias favorise une meilleure compréhension des débats publics et renforce la démocratie.

► Un vecteur d’acquisition de savoir et d’émancipation

Le *Kreol Morisien*, langue maternelle de la majorité des Mauriciens, longtemps marginalisé, est aujourd’hui progressivement valorisé. Il devient un outil d’apprentissage et un symbole d’émancipation culturelle et sociale.



par **Jean Marie F RICHARD**
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Plus de 90 % des Mauriciens parlent le *Kreol* au quotidien. L’utiliser dans l’éducation permet aux enfants d’apprendre dans une langue qu’ils maîtrisent naturellement. L’enseignement en *Kreol* diminue le fossé entre ceux qui maîtrisent les langues coloniales (anglais, français) et ceux qui en sont éloignés. Le *Kreol* est porteur de savoirs traditionnels, de contes, de proverbes et de pratiques populaires, qui enrichissent la mémoire collective.

Le *Kreol Morisien* est bien plus qu’une langue vernaculaire : il est un outil de résistance, un vecteur d’unité et un pilier de la décolonisation culturelle. En permettant aux Mauriciens de s’exprimer dans une langue qui leur est propre, il libère la société des carcans linguistiques hérités de la colonisation. Toutefois, pour que cette décolonisation soit pleinement effective, il reste nécessaire de renforcer sa place dans l’éducation, l’administration et la production culturelle. Ainsi, le *Kreol Morisien* incarne la voie vers une indépendance totale, non seulement politique, mais aussi identitaire et culturelle.

Le Parlement est l’institution suprême de la démocratie, lieu où la parole du peuple est censée s’exprimer librement et pleinement. Pourtant, à Maurice, le *Kreol Morisien*, langue maternelle de la majorité, reste largement absent des débats parlementaires, dominés par l’anglais et le français. Cette exclusion linguistique révèle une contradiction profonde : alors que la démocratie suppose l’inclusion et la représentativité, la langue du peuple est marginalisée dans l’espace politique.

L’exclusion du *Kreol Morisien* des sphères institutionnelles, notamment du Parlement – temple de l’expression démocratique – révèle une contradiction profonde : une nation indépendante qui continue de fonctionner avec les codes linguistiques hérités de la colonisation. Cette situation traduit une schizophrénie systémique postcoloniale, où la langue du peuple est marginalisée alors qu’elle devrait être au cœur de la citoyenneté. Pour dépasser cette incohérence, il est impératif de reconnaître le *Kreol Morisien* non seulement comme langue de communication, mais aussi comme vecteur de savoir, d’émancipation et de participation démocratique. Ce choix renforcerait l’unité nationale et permettrait une démocratie réellement représentative.

La récente mise en place d’un *Select Committee* de l’Assemblée nationale constitue un grand bond en avant pour notre démocratie et son émancipation.

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