

# Ari Gautier, *Négrodalitalité*

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Ari Gautier is a Francophone writer who was born in Madagascar of a Franco-Tamil father and a Malagasy mother. He spent his childhood mostly in his father's natal world of Pondicherry, India. Subsequently, he lived between Paris and Pondicherry, before moving permanently to Oslo. The author of two novels, *Carnet Secret de Lakshmi* (2015) and *Le thinnai* (2017), and a collection of short stories, *Nocturne Pondichéry* (2021), he resumed writing poetry during the pandemic year 2020. Four of these poems are presented here as the cycle *Négrodalitalité*: a title that exemplifies how Gautier stretches, bends, and creolises language in response to political and aesthetic exigencies.

Gautier's paternal lineage embeds him within millennia of caste-based oppression crystallised around the community that colonial authorities in India infamously defined as 'Pariah'. His maternal connections to Madagascar bring him Africanity as a mode of solidarity and resistance. This complex, 'Afrovidian' sensibility is condensed in the portmanteau 'Négrodalitalité': its first element reminds us that it was George Floyd's murder that catalysed the cycle, while the second conjoins the Black Lives Matter movement to the struggle for rights, recognition, and respect waged under the banner of Dalit self-assertion. Coursing through this word, and the cycle it names, is an experimental praxis of creolisation as the motor of resistance through joy. This turn is the result of his collaboration with Ananya Kabir since March 2020 on their co-founded cultural platform, *Le thinnai kreyol*, and its associated epistemological structure, 'the archipelago of fragments'.

*Négrodalitalité* is a creolised word that traffics in fragments. In making space for itself in French, it emits an insouciant joy. Gautier's poems are replete with several such neologisms: morphologically French, but comprehending multiple worlds of feeling, experience, memory, and embodied resistance. The body is the plane of suffering as well as joy. Transformation takes place through drums (*parai molam*, *thappatai*) historically associated with the stigmatised parai-

yan community, and is registered in sensuous and surprising linguistic innovation. From 'nécropoétic' to 'alegroparai', via the plangency of 'tragédie cottonale', Gautier charts a fresh, creolising path through the debris of a complex colonial inheritance.

In 1962, Pondicherry ceased to be French and was incorporated into the Republic of India. Its awkward suture into the politics and daily life of an Anglophone postcolony is managed by the Tamil language shared across the region it is part of, but heightened by the French citizenship retained by Franco-Tamils such as Gautier. The French empire that gave mobility and capital to his ancestors, and made possible the conditions of his very existence by offering his father the opportunity of military service that took him all over the world, including Madagascar, also gave rise to complicities, collaborations, and compromises - however inadvertent.

Gautier repays the debt of linguistic belonging and European mobility this history places on him, by challenging the French language and Frenchness. Where he senses an epistemic and ethical problem, he responds ontologically: by creating new words.

In the beginning, there is always the (new) word.