# COMMUNICATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY

## Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius

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***Habit of seeing opposites***. — The general imprecise way of observing sees everywhere in nature opposites (as, e.g., «warm and cold») where there are, not opposites, but differences in degree. This bad habit has led us into wanting to comprehend and analyse the inner world, too, the spiritual-moral world, in terms of such opposites. An unspeakable amount of painfulness, arrogance, harshness, estrangement, frigidity has entered into human feelings because we think we see opposites instead of transitions.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, § 67

«It takes at least two somethings to create a difference. (...)
There is a profound and unanswerable question about the nature of those 'at least two' things that between them generate a difference which becomes information by making a difference. Clearly each alone is — for the mind and perception — a non-entity, a non-being. Not different from being, and not different from non-being. An unknowable, a *Ding an sich*, a sound from one hand clapping.»

—Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, p. 78

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Oslo, October 1987
Thomas Hylland Eriksen

# PREFACE

The present work is a revised version of my dissertation for the Cand. Polit. degree at the University of Oslo, originally entitled *Ethnicity in Mauritius. Its meaning, organisation and relevance*. Every section of the text has been modified to a greater or lesser degree; hardly a single page of the original manuscript remains unchanged. Apart from these innumerable minor improvements, additions include a new section on religion and new appendices (2, 3 and 4). Further, I have clarified my theoretical concepts and applied them in a (hopefully) more consistent manner. Notably, I have made many of the previously implicit theoretical references explicit, particularly those originating from systems theory.

The main argument, nevertheless, remains largely unchanged. No dramatic change has taken place in Mauritian society during the seventeen months which have elapsed since I left Mauritius. General Elections were peacefully arranged in late August 1987, and the coalition government, led by Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth of the MSM party, was re-elected. This, along with statistics indicating sustained economic growth, indicates continuity in the relevant macro processes of Mauritian society. Yet it should be emphasised that the present work takes its point of departure from the situation in Mauritius in 1986.

Oslo, April 1988

**Map of Mauritius here**

# 1. PRELIMINARIES

This is an analysis of ethnicity in Mauritius. In addition to showing the workings of ethnicity in its aspects as organisation and identity in various contexts and on various levels in society, I also consider other relevant social identities and the conditions for their emergence, that is, identities relating to class, gender, age, local origin and, in particular, nationality.

The present work marks the first stage in a larger comparative project comprising the French-speaking islands of the Indian Ocean and certain territories in the Caribbean.

What follows is not intended as an exhaustive description of Mauritian ethnic phenomena, although I have attempted to select representative examples. To protect my Mauritian friends and acquaintances from the dubious honour of being identified as «cases», I have deemed it necessary to modify details, names of persons and places, etc. in many of the empirical examples. This should not reduce the ethnographic value of the material — which is hopefully presented in sufficient detail for other anthropologists, who do not share my theoretical views, to criticise my analyses.

## MAURITIUS

Mauritius, former British colony and before that French, has been an independent state since 1968. It is located in the south-western Indian Ocean, comprising the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues as well as a handful of small to tiny islands nearby, the latter often referred to as the «outer islands». When using the word Mauritius in the following, I mean the island unless otherwise stated. Mauritius is by far the largest island, covering 1850 of the total 2074 sq.kms. of the state, and of the roughly 1 million inhabitants of the state, 96% live there (Mauritius 1984).

*History*

Mauritius was briefly settled and abandoned by Portuguese and Dutch colonisers in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Before they left, the Dutch had an unsuccessful attempt at plantation farming of sugar cane, which they had brought from Java, and they named the island Mauritius after the Dutch prince Maurits van Nassau. When they eventually left the island, small groups of fugitive slaves, *esclaves marrons* as they were later called, remained in the forested hills of the south-west and south-east; their hypothetical descendants, if they could be identified, could possibly pass as an aboriginal Mauritian population.

French settlement began in 1710, but it is generally acknowledged that the colony, now Isle de France, was settled in a rather more serious way under the governorship of Mahé de Labourdonnais (1735-1745). Large numbers of slaves were then brought in from various parts of Africa, Madagascar and southern India, and freemen trickled in at increasing rate — artisans, traders, noblemen and adventurers from France, the Indian subcontinent and Bourbon<1>. The capital Port-Louis was founded by Labourdonnais, under whose leadership plantation farming was also introduced (Toussaint 1972). Unlike Caribbean plantation societies, however, Mauritius was never a net supplier of goods during the French period (Arno/Orian 1986). Its

function in the French Empire was chiefly that of a port strategically located between Africa and Madagascar on one hand, and India and the Far East on the other.

During the Napoleonic Wars Britain seized Isle de France in a sea battle off the south-western coast of the island (December 1810), and rebaptized it Mauritius (the French version of the name became, and still is, Ile Maurice). No attempt was made to discourage the several thousands Frenchmen and «Creoles»<2> settled there, nor any other category of people for that matter. In fact, the capitulation, signed in 1810, guaranteed that the inhabitants be allowed to keep their customs, traditions and religion. Both the English and French languages were — and still are — used in politics and administration. When Charles Darwin visited the island in 1836, he expressed dismay at its slight degree of Anglicisation (Hollingworth 1965), as did the Anglican missionary Beaton, arriving some twenty years later (Beaton 1859). Indeed, similar reactions are not uncommon today, after 158 years of British supremacy and 19 years of independence with a constitution written in English.

Slavery was abandoned in 1835, and due to the refusal of former slaves to work on the plantations (for reasons still debated by Mauritian and foreign historians, cf. Allen 1983, Quenette 1985, Arno/Orian 1986), large numbers of indentured labourers destined for the sugar fields were brought in from several parts of India. A few decades later, Chinese immigration, up to then modest, increased and was fairly substantial up to the mid-twentieth century.

Mauritius became independent in 1968 after negotiations with the British, followed by General Elections and ethnically-based, social unrest in the towns, particularly in Port-Louis. 44% of the electorate (!) voted against independence.

Independent Mauritius was not left much of a chance by foreign analysts. The young nation-state had to face three serious problems: (i) The rapid population growth, (ii) the economic monoculture based on sugar exports, and (iii) ethnic antagonism and unstability. By 1988, most concede that the Mauritians have admirably coped with all three problems, and — although none of the problems mentioned are

definitely solved —, the social and economic outlook is much brighter than predicted by anybody twenty years ago. Despite frequent political reconfigurations — among and within political parties — since independence, and the emergence of an entirely new generation of politicians during the late 70's and early 80's, the parliamentary institutions are very stable, and political participation is high by any standards.

The main foreign issue of independent Mauritius has been the Diego Garcia conflict. Diego Garcia is a part of the Chagos Archipelago, situated roughly half-way between Mauritius and the Indian mainland. During colonial times, the archipelago was a dependency of Mauritius; however, one of the conditions of the British-Mauritian agreement over independence was that the islands be ceded to Britain. Britain then leased the islands to the United States. Today, Diego Garcia is the site of an American naval base of considerable strategic importance.

Diego Garcia was populated by some 1,200 Mauritian expatriates, some of whom were born there. The *Ilois*, as they are known, were repatriated in the early 70's. Compensation was paid and accepted, yet the Ilois («Islanders») have experienced serious difficulties in adapting to Mauritian society. They are widely regarded as a social problem, and most of them belong to the very poorest segments of the population (Walker 1986). In addition, it has been established that the cessation of Diego Garcia to Britain was probably illegal. Further, there is by now common agreement that the definition of the Ilois as «temporary workers», which justified their «repatriation», was false; there were actually permanent villages on the small island. The case has been brought to international courts, and Mauritius has received much sympathy, notably from Third World countries, but as yet, there has been no tangible progress in the case.

*Division of labour*

Today, Mauritius has a population density of more than 500/sq.km.; this places it among the world's top five (excluding «mini-states»). 52% of the total land area is under sugar cane cultivation, some 7%

grown with tea; there is little arable land not under current exploitation. Tourism is rapidly growing, as is the textile industry. Until recently, the population growth was very high (3.5% in the mid-sixties), but a successful family planning programme, along with a high rate of emigration throughout the first decade after independence, has reduced the growth rate to an average of 1.44% in the 1972-83 period (Mauritius 1983).

The division of labour is traditionally strongly ethnically correlated. Local folk representations are as follows: Hindus are associated with agriculture (as labourers or smallplanters) and increasingly with the public service; Creoles<3> are fishermen, dockers or belong to various other categories of manual, skilled or semi-skilled work; the mulattoes or *gens de couleur* are lawyers, journalists, teachers and suchlike; Sino-Mauritians are involved in business; Muslims are either rich merchants (urban) or labourers; Tamils are to be found everywhere; Whites are «sugar barons» or high executives.

No recent statistical figures are available in order that these folk assumptions might be tested. However, they are, clearly, reasonably accurate as rough estimations, not least because of their power as self-fulfilling prophecies. Only one myth must at this point be falsified: It is not true that a large proportion of the Creoles earn their living as fishermen, as is commonly assumed. Indeed, at the time of the 1952 Census (Mauritius 1953), there were more Creoles working in the sugar fields (a kind of work for which Creoles have a proverbial abhorrence) than there were full-time fishermen in the entire island. The fact that many Creoles spend their afternoons and weekends fishing gives an easy explanation of the origin of the mistaken assumption.

Ethnics<4> are to a great extent spatially separated on a neighbourhood basis, but this does not really hold true on the district level. True, none of Mauritius' nine districts presents a national average in terms of ethnic proportions, but there isn't a district where one of the ethnics is missing altogether either. As a rule, there is a Hindu majority in rural areas and non-Hindu majorities in the towns; this is reflected e.g. in election results. But in the Hindu villages there is always a non-Hindu

minority and usually a resident Sino-Mauritian shopkeeper's family; and in any urban neighbourhood, whether predominantly settled by Sino-Mauritian, Creoles or Muslims, there are always families belonging to other ethnics. Besides, distances are short and the infrastructure good: there is, in other words, necessarily a lot of casual inter-ethnic contact.

*Languages*

The complexities of the Mauritian language situation have been discussed in a large number of scholarly and not-so-scholarly analyses (an impressive review of literature appears in the opening chapters of Stein 1983). According to official figures, Mauritius is strongly reminiscent of the Tower of Babel; however, the actual situation is much tidier. (On pp. 89-98 and pp. 185-196, this discrepancy is accounted for in some detail.) Briefly, then: apparently, some 15 languages are spoken — this is probably true, but their distribution — spatially, numerically and situationally — is very uneven. The official language, English, is virtually absent from the linguistic repertoire of the large majority of the population. It is used in official documents, in academic writings and to a very limited extent in mass media; English is also an important language in school, but it is generally poorly learnt. French is by far the most important European language in Mauritius. Most Mauritians speak it, many very well, and it is nearly invariably the first language in which one acquires literacy. Well over half of the national radio and television broadcasts are in French; North American films are dubbed in French; bookshops have extensive selections of French novels (and English ones in French translation); and four of the six daily newspapers currently (late 1986) appearing in Mauritius, as well as most of the weeklies, are edited almost exclusively in French. (The two remaining dailies are modest sheets in Mandarin, English and French.) However, English is a language many wish to master, and its prestige is reflected in the English names of

several of the French language publications (Mauritius Times, The Sun, Sunday Star, etc.).
Although it is probably correct that most Mauritians could if they had to, few people actually *speak* French in daily social intercourse. The language conventionally spoken by the large majority of Mauritians is Kreol<5>, a French Creole, whose roots (then a pidgin; cf. e.g. the discussion in Hancock 1979) descend to the slave-master and slave-slave contexts in the first half of the 18th century<6>; which later (18th-19th century) became mother tongue for the non-white Catholics and lingua franca in the island as such; and which today is mother tongue for a growing majority of the Mauritian population.
Other languages currently spoken are Bhojpuri (a dialect of Hindi) and Hakka (a Chinese dialect, Mandarin script). Tamil, Telegu, Arabic, Marathi, Latin, Urdu, Hindi and English — ritual and sometimes literary languages, are probably no longer languages people speak with their children. Indeed, in some cases, they never actually were.

*Ethnics*

Mauritian society is, if anything, a plural one. The absence of a clear majority, aboriginal or not, calls for compromise or coercion; both options have been chosen in various situations in the colonial past. Today, Mauritius is a functioning parliamentary democracy whose inhabitants to a remarkable extent are aware of the many daily predicaments inevitably entailed, and compromise is the order of the day. The policy of the highest common denominator (cf. chapter 2) alternates with policies of avoidance throughout an enormous range of social contexts.
In 1988, no less than 22 public holidays are scheduled (some of them optional).
Although the ethnics of 1988 may be culturally less distinctive than those of 1888, Mauritians generally perceive themselves as strongly and profoundly different from what they perceive as members of other ethnic groups. This is a feature so pervasive and multifaceted in daily

intercourse that it cannot be accounted for as a purely political phenomenon, whether «conscious» or not.

It is not possible to say offhand «how many ethnics» there are in Mauritius. According to the former official ethnic classification, still popular although formally abandoned in 1982, there are four — Hindus (52%), Muslims (16%), Sino-Mauritians (3%) and General Population (29%)<7>. At certain points in the history of Mauritius, the four officially recognised communities<8> have been political entities, but not invariably so. Earlier classifications, such as the one used in the Census of 1901, were racially based, whereas this one, using neither race, religion nor geographical origin as its starting point, describes potential political alignments (and as such, the classification — its basic logic dating back to the 1944 Census — was obsolete in 1968, and is even more so now). The taxonomy was retained by the first government of independent Mauritius, ostensibly in order to ensure that each community be fairly represented in public bodies. It was abandoned by the 1982-3 government because it allegedly served to reproduce a sense of communal (ethnic) belonging no longer seen as desirable. The 1944 classification remains, nevertheless, part of shared cultural representations.

The criterion for membership in the puzzling fourth ethnic community is/was that the person in question, «does not appear, from his way of life, to belong of one or other of these three <other> communities» (Constitution of Mauritius, Schedule I, Paragraph 4). In fact, the category «General Population» consists of a small group of white Franco-Mauritians (perhaps as little as 2% of the total population now, after massive emigration around independence), a much larger category of Creoles; that is, Catholics of African or mixed African-European, African-Indian and/or African-Chinese descent, as well as a residual category comprising some Christian Tamils<9> as well as people whose ancestors might have come from as many as eight different geographical regions, and who at least nominally are Christians. Neither the «General Population» nor its non-white component can meaningfully be said to constitute a socio-cultural entity. Apart from what is held to be the most fundamental principle of internal division,

the «amount of milk in the coffee»,i.e. skin colour, the Coloured-Creole category is continuously being divided socially, and the actors tend to perceive these processes as confirming crucial cultural values (cf. discussion on pp. 109-124; also Arno/Orian 1986).

The Franco-Mauritians form socially distinctive groups. Those of real or fictitious aristocratic descent have until recently been strongly endogamous; among the «commoners», further, anybody who marries a non-white person (usually a Coloured) loses social links despite obvious cultural continuity in the marriage.

The three remaining «communities» also fail to present obvious cases of tight ethnic organisation. Before the second world war, the massive majority of the Mauritian population (about 67%) were simply classified as Indo-Mauritians; then, successively, the Muslims (16%) and Tamils (7%) broke away politically; and Hindus from the low castes (*Shudras*) are not necessarily members of the same ethnic as members of the twice-born castes. The Muslims are divided into Sunnis, Shi'ites and Ahmadis as well as having their own endogamous «high castes». The Tamils are divided along caste lines, while the Sino-Mauritian community has reunited after having been split first into Hakka and Cantonese speakers, and later into pro-revolutionaries and supporters of Kuomintang. As a general rule, moreover, differences between townsmen and villagers potentially divide all ethnics except the Sino-Mauritians and Franco-Mauritians. Ferments of ethnic fissure founded on perceptions of rural-urban differences, incidentally, have the strongest direct consequences in the case of the Tamils.

One cannot, then, speak of ethnic groups as «objective entities», nor of ethnic membership as a categorical and unambiguous quality of individuals. Group membership is highly conditional, and the actual compass of a particular ethnically-based collectivity depends on the context. Continuous redefinitions of ethnics and of the relevance of ethnicity take place responding to changes in situation and context; changes that may occur on local as well as global levels of society.

The problems of pluriculturalism are most readily visible in formal contexts, such as those to do with law. The Code Napoleon was retained under British administration, but subsequent laws were British

and frequently at odds not only with particular French laws, but with the entire Napoleonic way of thinking about law. Today, Mauritians also face juridical predicaments to which there is no solution but compromise, democratic procedures taken for granted — it would for instance have been impossible for the Muslim community to introduce Islamic law, should they have wished it; formal decisions about family planning are received less than enthusiastically in strongly Catholic neighbourhoods but cannot be overruled locally; there can never be a national religion, and perhaps English is a good compromise as a national language because nobody speaks it.

*Change*

A striking feature of contemporary Mauritian society is its current pace of social change. At independence the island was fully dependent on sugar for foreign exchange; since then, the economy has diversified remarkably, and at the moment (early 1988) it does not seem an exaggeration to speak of an economic take-off. An industrial «zone» (Export Processing Zone; EPZ or *zone franche*) modelled on similar projects in East Asia was founded in 1971 and has since grown at an uneven pace. However, the number of employees in EPZ enterprises doubled from late 1983 to late 1985 (Yeung and Yin 1986) and grew another 40% during 1986 (*ibid*.). Today, more Mauritians work in the EPZ than in the sugar industry. In addition, tourism is rapidly becoming a major earner of hard currency. Solutions to the problem of unemployment are now sought at home rather than in emigration. Briefly, social change is *visible* in contemporary Mauritius; people notice their lives change, and hitherto unknown types of strategies emerge — not all of them ethnic in character (cf. chapters 4-5).
There is no rural exodus; indeed, the population of Port-Louis is growing more slowly than in many rural areas (Mauritius 1984-6).

Industry is not restricted to a physical, spatial «zone», and many of the new factories are established in large villages, two or three of which have by now the size and complexity of small towns. About 43% of the Mauritian population are defined as urban, but less than 5% live more than a two hours' bus ride from the nearest town.

*International links*

Despite geographical proximity to Africa, Mauritius cannot be considered an African country. Although some 30% of its population is of largely African and/or Malagasy extraction, the actual socio-cultural configurations throughout the island are very different from those in most African areas (Eriksen 1986). Mauritius, lacking an aboriginal population, is being built from scratch since 1715 and has in most respects much more in common with West Indian islands than with virtually any African society of comparable scale. Mauritius is a member of the OAU (Organisation for African Unity) and was until recently (spring 1986) member of the Zone of Preferential Exchanges in Southern and Eastern Africa. But many maps of Africa exclude Mauritius, and in standard works of African history, Mauritius is more often than not absent from the index (see e.g. Davidson 1978).

The most important trade partners are the EEC (notably UK and France), South Africa, Australia and Taiwan, whereas cultural bonds are healthier with respect to virtually any other region in the Old World than with Africa. A current trend in Mauritian politics encourages improved contact with Africa however, and in April 1986, an agreement of cultural exchange with Senegal was signed.

Mauritius has an increasing number of air links with the Western world, and is served by frequent cargo ships.

Not sensing belonging to a continent, Mauritians of non-African origin tend to turn to their real or postulated ancestral homelands for a self-identification of loftier scope than the options locally available. Further, the western Indian Ocean is a regional unit of increasing

relevance, both strategically on a global level (Bowman 1984), and in terms of local cooperation.

## AIMS AND PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

*Competing concepts of ethnicity*

The word ethnicity, as employed in social anthropology, is becoming increasingly difficult as it is being used in interpretations of a growing range of social contexts; some displaying strong family resemblances, some very different. As a theoretical term, «ethnicity» remains seducingly vague.

Following dramatic social change in many of the geographical heartlands of social anthropological research, ethnicity has somehow become a word of comprehensive connotations, indispensable to those trying to come to terms with these processes of change. As a leading theorist notes, «...the term can be of great *heuristic* significance for the current phase in the development of the anthropology of complex society» (Cohen 1974a: xxi, my emphasis). While agreeing substantially with this, I hold that a major conceptual problem consists in the discrepant uses of the word; the tailoring, as it were, of the word ethnicity to a particular theoretical problematic relating to a specific empirical context. Here I shall have to argue against the school of researchers that rashly and repeatedly state that «within the contemporary situation ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon» (e.g. Cohen 1974b:4). Indeed, in Mauritius, one of the largest ethnics has a perfectly dreadful political record, partly because of certain enduring particularities in their own social expression of ethnic distinctiveness. This not only implies that ethnicity has many aspects of which politics is but one; here, it is argued that ethnicity is best conceptualised as something altogether *different* from the «ethnic

political organisation», the latter being a possible *result* of a certain ethnic configuration but never a necessary condition for its existence.

It is common to contrast Abner Cohen's (1969,1974a,1974b, 1981) concept of ethnicity with that of Barth (1969). In Cohen's work on the Hausa of Ibadan and later on the Creoles of Freetown, ethnicity is located to urbanising African societies and analysed as a vehicle of political organisation charged with symbols and social obligations from pre-urban culture. Most of the contributors to *Urban Ethnicity* (Cohen 1974a) discuss urban African politics. Barth (1969) and his collaborators, on the contrary, represent a wider approach; empirical material here ranges from northern Scandinavia to central Laos, incorporating a number of otherwise very diverse societies in a supposedly common conceptual framework. Cohen (1974a: xii) criticises Barth's conception of «ethnicity ... as an essentially innate predisposition» and claims, further, that the «central theme <of this approach> is descriptive and its argument is essentially circular» (ibid.). It seems, then, that while Cohen's representation of ethnicity is one of pressure groups forming and evolving in response to changing structural conditions, Barth's position may be described as that of individual ethnic *identity* being logically and empirically prior to its expression in an organisational form.

Two points seem to me obvious in comparing the two concepts of ethnicity: (i) That they have very much in common; (ii) that their differences are purely *ad hoc*, caused by the particular requirements of the material to be analysed.

In both Cohen's and Barth's cases, interpretation of the maintenance of the corporate or semi-corporate group is a central concern; in both cases, the context is one of scarcity — Cohen concentrates on scarcity of political influence, while Barth is concerned with constraints in the physical environment. In both cases, moreover, the concepts are tailored to fit the contexts: In small-scale societies such as those analysed by Barth and his colleagues, ethnic membership is arguably ascribed, by self and by others, as being intrinsic to the entire social person. In the African town or city, on the other hand, individual «statuses» can be released from the acting subject and recombined in

new clusters — in some areas, they may be free from clustering altogether — in other words, Cohen analyses fields dominated by single-stranded *Gesellschaft* relations, while Barth analyses fields where multiplex *Gemeinschaft* links are profoundly rooted in economic and political life, where the range of choice open to the individual is more restricted in this respect. However, granted that most of the contributors to the two collections of essays discuss competitive relationships between collectivities, the two perspectives do not seem irreconcilable in this respect. In my own analyses of competitive aspects of Mauritian ethnicity, insights from both the British and the Scandinavian groups of researchers have been most valuable.

Implicitly criticising Cohen, Barth and others, Worsley (1984) writes:

> «Many interactionist studies of ethnicity at the level of the community are vitiated by a liberal metaphysic developed in open societies, where a degree of choice exists for the individual to consciously decide whether to assimilate or not, and where social mobility is permitted and significant. (...) Life, it would seem, is a market, or cafeteria.» (Worsley 1984:246)

Ethnic identity or membership is, as Worsley correctly stresses, rarely a status that can be chosen. Yet it can be exploited, «invested» as it were, to varying degrees and in different ways. Now, in social anthropology one inevitably studies «customs» as well as «cases», the «customs» forming the relevant context of the «cases». In many of the classical Copperbelt studies, for instance, the main issue was «indigenous responses to social change». Unless we invoke some general law about social change it must be studied empirically, and insofar as «society» does not act, we must focus on acting individuals, repre-senting themselves and/or corporate groups, choosing their actions within a relevant frame of reference. Sometimes, this is a very narrow frame of conditions for action, allowing for little «freedom» in a liberal sense. The point is, however, that a person who no longer exerts choice, by definition *ceases to be an actor* (cf. e.g. Giddens 1982: 39).

Another problem in the anthropological analysis of complex societies, is posed thus by Worsley (*ibid*.):

> «Formal sociology's insistence that consciousness of Self necessarily implies distancing oneself from the Other, however true, does not explain why *only certain groups or categories* become reference-groups in certain kinds of societies.» (My emphasis.)

I hope to be able to reply at least partially satisfactorily to this question, although the purely economic analysis is lacking from my study. The advantage of anthropological analysis in this respect lies in its concern with the production of meaning in ongoing social intercourse. So if our understanding of the underlying causal factors remains sketchy, at least we intend to clarify the issue of why people, faced with a particular situation, choose certain criteria of self-definition and social identification, rather than any of the other criteria available.
In this study, then, I attempt to reconcile an essentially «interactionist» procedure with an institutional focus such as that represented by Worsley. I wish to take account of the fact that crucial conditions for action originate outside the fields in which action takes place. These conditions for action cannot be seen merely as «ecological constraints» or «macro features» *in abstractio*, but as a certain societal formation which can — and must — be modified through the agency of individuals. I do not promise to conceptualise this societal formation in a satisfactory way, but at least its existence is recognised as an important systemic level intrinsically linked to individual action.

*Multiple identities*

Whereas Barth and his associates concentrate on understanding maintenance of ethnic boundaries against a backdrop of environmental constraints; and the contributors to *Urban Ethnicity* generally see

ethnicity as a modality of urban political organisation, several of the articles in Despres (ed., 1975) deal with the relationship between ethnicity and social class in societies which are plural in a largely Furnivallian sense; integrated in the market-place, ruled by a hegemonic ethnic, leaving ample room for ethnic differences in the private sphere. Categorical concepts of ethnicity are, here, seen as insufficient theoretical bridgeheads for a comprehensive understanding of the societies in question. Despres notes that ethnicity is one modality of social stratification and class another: the two are never identical and must be considered separately (1975:195). Earlier, Eidheim (1969, 1971) has described the inter-relations between the two (although he scarcely uses the word «social class») in his micro-sociological analyses of the predicaments of Norwegian Lapps (who belong to a low-status ethnic group), attempting to escape from their ascribed Lappish identity. Anyway, Despres's distinction between ethnicity as an ascribed identity tag and class as an achieved one cannot be retained because neither is ever exclusively one or the other, provided we do not adopt the perspective of 19th century classical economics. The two simply refer to positions in different but interrelated hierarchies. Social class refers to allocative power, power over material resources; while ethnicity in its stratification aspect must be conceptualised as a string of representations of cultural identities, placed on an ambiguous «normative ladder» which is *in principle* being maintained independently of the current class configuration. A Mauritian Creole, a good fisherman and enduring drinker, may enjoy a high position in the local intra-ethnic hierarchy, but his Hindu neighbours despise him and he ranks below any educated fellow Creole in the national hierarchy of social rank<10>, although the latter is perhaps at the very bottom of the former's normative ladder.

Several normative systems are thus being reproduced in the «multi-ethnic society». Sometimes, as in the example mentioned, this takes place in what is visibly a single social context — which is then, in other words, interpreted differently by the participants. These discrepant interpretations apparently do not always follow from social stratification or ethnic organisation, but stem from divergent *ethnic*

*identities*. Throughout the present study, I contrast ethnic identity with organisation, and argue that the former is in every sense prior to the latter; it can be maintained for generations without any organisational «vessel» whatsoever.

But even if we stick to a conceptualisation of «ethnicity» as a principle of stratification, like Despres suggests, we will discover that identical actions and symbols dramatically change (subjective) meaning and (objective) consequences for the actor as the context changes. To escape the infinite complexity this seems to entail, it may be helpful to distinguish analytically between different abstract *social fields* or ideal-typical arenas for interaction (cf. Grønhaug 1974, 1979; *infra*: chapter 2) and, within a given field, between (i) types of social relations and (ii) intersubjective representations and visible actions.

Some essentially non-ethnic social identities become manifest and acquire actual relevance at certain stages in particular processes. The development of this insight cannot be limited to a consideration of budding nationalism in young states, nor does it divert us from the study of ethnic processes: Weighing such criteria of belonging and/or group membership as gender, locality, class and nation against those relating to ethnicity, enables us to deliminate the truly ethnic aspect of a process. If a fuller understanding of social identity and process as such can be developed following such an analytic procedure, light will be shed on ethnicity too.

To make my position clear, I should perhaps state that I do not believe in one representation of ethnicity as being more true, as it were, than others. My interest in this study of Mauritian ethnicity lies primarily in the actual practical *usages* of the actors' concepts of ethnicity; how notions with a strong family resemblance can be invoked in different, sometimes very different socio-cultural contexts and levels of society. As implied in the last paragraph, I shall inevitably have to concede that there are problematics which may tempt us to analyse them in terms of ethnicity, but which are perhaps better accounted for when viewed in a different *optique*.

*A problem of definition?*

I still haven't solved the problem of definition, if there is one. In my view, Despres's distinction between class=achievement and ethnicity=ascription, although empirically false, leads us to a reasonable heuristic understanding of ethnicity. It is a fact that *folk models* tend to agree with Despres. In liberal capitalist societies, at least, ethnicity is commonly perceived as the inert, virtually unchangeable birthmark of the social person, while class membership or rank in general is widely understood as the aspect of self which is «your own responsibility». Actions and attributes perceived as «ethnic» in character are accounted for deterministically, while «non-ethnic» «social facts» are related to luck, freedom and choice. This holds true both with regards to intra- and inter-ethnic systems, and also whether or not the actor is an individual or a (representative of a) collectivity. But the validity of the assumption is limited to the *discursive* aspect of social intercourse, and it may also be purely *ad hoc*. Be this as it may; the presence of deterministic folk taxonomies, automatically invoked in many situations, is a profound characteristic of inter-ethnic links and, unlike Cohen's corporate groups, it is an absolutely necessary condition for the reproduction of social and cultural distinctiveness in a society with much inter-ethnic intercourse. Probably, similar taxonomies preclude intermarriage among social classes or «subcultures» in urban Europe; the distinction between subculture and ethnic is one of degree in this respect. But subculture membership is less encompassing and can be discarded more easily than ethnic membership — the latter, implying having been born into a particular «subculture», presents itself to the actor and his acquaintances as more inert — in a word, *determined* by forces external to the acting subject. Further, we may reasonably add criteria relating to age and sex composition, degree of endogamy, durability over time, compass of internal rules, and collective origins to distinguish between the two — in which case we would rapidly discover that Cohen's ingenious invention of the «ethnic group» London City men (Cohen, 1974b: 98-102) does little to clarify

the issue. In most cases, it is not practically difficult to distinguish between an ethnic and something else, although there is perhaps nothing more substantial than a family resemblance to unite the world's «ethnics» under a common heading. Faith in the intersubjectivity of common sense is a more important prerequisite for the validity of these judgements than many anthropologists are willing to admit.

## NOTES

1. This is the former name of the current French *département d'outre-mer* Ile de la Réunion, an island slightly larger than Mauritius and its closest neighbour, situated about 250 kms. to the south-west.

2. The word «Creole» has a large number of different meanings. Here it is used in the late 18th century French sense; namely, a white person born in a colony.

3. «Creole» here represents a Mauritian wholly or partially descended from Africans/Malagasy. The terms «Mulatto», White Creole and *gen de couleur* are used throughout the text to distinguish a *sociological*, not primarily racial, sub-category of Creoles (cf. pp. 70-80).

4. The word is directly adapted from the French «ethnie»; used here and below as a replacement for «ethnic group», «ethnic» does not have any strong connotations in the sense «ethnically based organisational unit», and therefore it suits my purpose better.

5. This spelling, introduced by Baker (1972), distinguishes the language from the ethnic. The ortography exemplified in this word, developed by Baker and by the cultural one-man movement Dev Virahsawmy (who since 1966 has insisted on calling the language *Morisiê*, i.e. Mauritian), is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). French ortography is still often used in written Kreol, and many Mauritians, trained to read French, complain that the Baker ortography is difficult to read. However, if Kreol is ever to achieve status as something more than a poor man's French, it could do better than adopt the idiosyncracies of French spelling. When citing a Kreol word or

phrase, I therefore use the most commonly used variety of Baker's ortography. (See Appendix 1 for sample texts.)

6. For a while, it was held, by linguists and others alike, that French-derived Creoles consisted of «French words and African grammar». However, Goodman (1964: 138-9), the first to carry out a truly comparative study of French-derived Creoles, admits being uncertain of the relative roles played by varieties of French and African languages in the formation of fairly similar French Creoles. Today, the hypothesis of the «African substratum» has largely been left. (Cf. Hancock 1979 for an extract of the academic discourse; cf. Corne/Baker 1983 for a more updated discussion with particular reference to the Mauritian and Seychellois Creole («Isle de France Creole»). Cf. also Appendix 1.)

7. Note the apparently arbitrary choice of criteria for membership.

8. Adopting Indian usage, Mauritians describe their main ethnics as communities (in Kreol, *kominote*). Undesirable ethnic chauvinism is labelled «communalism».

9. In some cases, these families have been converts since the mid-nineteenth century; in others the conversion took place last week. Sometimes they are not referred to as Tamils at all nor perceive themselves as South Indians, even if there has been little or no intermarriage with others. They are then lumped with the Creoles as a «Creole sub-group» of doubtful origin.

10. This hierarchy and its representations, that is the highest, most abstract level of normative ranking, is being defined, reproduced and sanctioned on a large scale, in national politics, mass media and ultimately in the economic system.

# 2. FIELDS, LEVELS AND SOCIAL PERSONS

Concepts of (vertical) levels of scale in society and (horizontal) social fields have already been alluded to in chapter 1; in this chapter I specify how they are to be applied to the analysis of action. The exposition proceeds from the general to the specific: from a presentation of concepts to a demonstration of their uses<1>.

Forms of formal and informal organisation in Mauritian society vary crucially with respect to compass and importance in society at large, although this difference may not seem important to the participants. To the pensioner in the fishing village of C., it apparently makes little difference whether he receives his Rs. 200 monthly from the State or from his son, although the two possibilities imply integration on very different systemic levels (nation-state versus household). In discussing ethnic and «non-ethnic» identities and forms of organisation, proceeding to discussions of nationalism and social change, I accordingly try to locate the phenomena in two respects: first, we have the actual arenas (fields) where action continuously unfolds; secondly, there is the Mauritian nation-state, itself an «actor» in both local and international politics, but reproduced by ongoing individual agency. A tentative exposition of the interconnections between the nation-state and the fields of action is perhaps the ultimate aim of this study, even if «structure» is only visible in the analyses as (changing) conditions of action.

Two recent perspectives on social reality have proven uniquely useful for such an appreciation of the compass of individual action and its inherent relationship to «greater society». The approaches are different and complementary: one stresses the significance of the changing *context* of social micro-process, whereas the other present a matrix for an understanding of the relationship between individual interaction and abstract institutions.

*Fields and scale*

The first perspective is the kind of sociological analysis departing from concepts of scale and social fields, as discussed in Barth (1979) and Grønhaug (1974). Social fields are conceptualised by Grønhaug in this phrasing:

> «People pursue tasks, and when they act and counter-act vis-a-vis each other, the acts have intended, but eminently a multitude of un-intended consequences, chain-reactions, and repercussions. When series of such implications between events make up delineable implication-systems we can label them '*social fields*'.» (Grønhaug, *ibid*., II:16)

Social fields are, in other words, the abstraction of the anthropologist and do not necessarily form part of the actors' representations.
Ultimately it is true that only individuals are capable of action, but some are more powerful than others because they act on a larger scale: the actions of sugar factory proprietors and national politicians have greater ramifications than those of the average canecutter, even if the latter theoretically may have larger personal action-sets than the «persons in power». Ethnic identity and organisation are produced and reproduced in several social fields, some of which are globally more important than others insofar as actions on these systemic levels influence a larger number of people and/or are more authoritative than others. This I demonstrate below, comparing the «structure of three social persons» active on different levels of scale. I then proceed to suggest a typology of social fields to be applied to the analysis. The aim is (a) to locate agency in social space, and (b) to distinguish between relevant actions of varying content and consequences. Nearly every case of action discussed can be localised to one such field<2>, while enduring processes involving many individuals, and/or processes initiated on a high level of scale, are likely to take place in two or several fields, simultaneously or successively.
The relations activated in any field can be divided into two vaguely defined types; multiplex and uniplex. The difference refers to the

qualitative content of the relationship; whether or not it involves more than one aspect of the social person. The dichotomy is only intended as a regulative idea and has no claim to accuracy.

It should preliminarily be noted that the distinction between «small» and «large» scale is not the same as «macro-micro» distinctions (cf. Barth 1979b:255-6). While macro analysis, departing from a conception of systemic levels, refers to societal properties dependent on a large number of actions for their very existence, analysis departing from a concept of scale presupposes the existence of these properties as conditions for action, and restricts itself to analyses of agency itself in different contexts. Scale is, Barth writes (*ibid*.: 253), «a characteristic of the *context of social interaction*» (my emphasis). Barth further outlines the procedure of sociological discovery logically leading from notions of scale and fields (*ibid:* 256-7):

> «Having observed an action, you seek to discover the field of options to which such an action belongs, and the contexts in which these options are relevant. (...) The course of investigation is thus from the event to class, from the singular to population or aggregate.»

The procedure suggested is purely inductive and therefore an impossible challenge (cf. Appendix 4), yet it is extremely attractive because it leads the attention of the researcher away from his models, towards an appreciation of social reality itself.

The present study aims to provide an understanding of interrelations between macro and micro levels of society, and Barth's uncompromising methodological individualism must therefore be supplemented by a second perspective focussing on — and drawing its concepts from — the structural properties of society:

*Structural levels*

The kind of socio-cultural complexity peculiar to Mauritius, compared with any ethnically less heterogeneous society at the same level of urbanisation, is the kind of complexity that entails 22 national holidays annually. In other words, the complexity is at its most evident on the «macro level» of society (Mauritius seen from a bird's perspective, as it were). The structure of the individual does not usually reflect this because there are standardised, culturally sanctioned ways of relating to members of other ethnics — and the relevant stereotypes are few in every individual case, although they are many put together. In the discussion of ethnic taxonomies and stereotypes below (pp. 53-72), it is made apparent how taxonomies are always most detailed closest to the individual in question, and how the classification of other Mauritians is carried out according to an increasingly simplistic model as social distance grows. In other words, if there are as many as 15 (or 20 or 25, for that matter) categories of Mauritians acting as ethnics in one or several recurring contexts, it is rare that more than four or five are relevant in the actual status setup of any one individual. Even politicians do not seem concerned with internal divisions within ethnics other than their own (although this might arguably have been politically sensible). The workings of ethnicity in Mauritius are such that internal sub-divisions within the ethnic are rarely interfered with — or exploited — by outsiders. (One notable exception is the MMM party's strategic exploitation of caste, cf. pp. 60-62).

In their successive participation in different social fields, individuals activate various aspects of their social status repertoire or cultural identity. Each individual possesses, according to his status setup, real or potential membership in several collectivities of varying compass — they can all be represented wholly or partly in one or several of the social fields in which he participates, and invoke different aspects of the social person. In the following chapters, I investigate the forms of integration in groups; the reproduction of collectivities as relevant units of action from the perspectives of (i) the participants' «interests» (utility/meaning), (ii) fields of participation (social fields), and (iii) normative/representational systems (fields of shared meaning, i.e.

taxonomies, norms etc.). In analysing the reproduction of collectivities, I focus on the *justifications of models of the relevant context*.

My conceptualisation of the relationship between action and social structure is inspired by Anthony Giddens' general theory of structuration (1979, 1984), but is informed by concepts initially external to it (concepts of systemic levels, scale, social fields etc., as outlined above and applied in the following chapters).

The theory of structuration stresses the «duality of structure», i.e., social structure as being continuously constituted by directional, independent agency — yet existing on a different systemic level as necessary conditions for this agency. In other words: Interaction is the «stuff that society is made of», but action is always going on in a meaning-context which it didn't itself create in the first place. When we start acting in the world, the world is already there. This meaning-context (or simply institutional level of society) provides the necessary conditions for action, and is in turn reproduced and modified by the ongoing processes of agency. In a different tradition of social thought, the same phenomenon can be described as the reproduction of already existing «incentives and restraints» (Barth's wording) as the aggregated outcome of (partly or wholly) unintended consequences of intentional interaction over a long period of time. The road to hell is paved with good intentions: since the accumulated consequences of action are unknown, they may be different from the actors' individual intentions<3>. The whole is, at least in this respect, different from the sum of its parts.

Social structure consists of (a) the relevant, overt or covert, conscious or unconscious factors external to the individual, influencing his action; (b) the accumulated outcome of actions insofar as they are properties of a social system, i.e. have bearings on a either immediately or after a certain lapse of time. It is granted that actions frequently have unintended consequences at any given systemic level (from the dyad to geopolitics) and that structure well may be recursive (=have feedback effects) in a fashion not predicted by anybody. But, although most lay actors perceive structure as a constant, a thing as it were, we must insist

that «it» is but a process, necessarily produced and reproduced continuously by actors who may nevertheless not be fully aware of the actual (immediately and later retrospectively viewed) content of their actions, neither at the time of acting nor later (cf. Schütz 1972:159-163). The anthropologist should, on the other hand, be able to identify ramifications of actions even if they remain unknown to the actors themselves.

There are, ultimately, no responses but individual ones to changes on the societal level, and there can be no societal or «structural» level without individuals to produce and reproduce it. The inclusion of institutional levels of society in the course of analysis is nevertheless necessary in order to account for changes in actors' representations and actions. Change, on the level of individual action, enters first as potentiality or «definite possibility»<4> for choice, following reconfigurations in one of several «macro levels», e.g. changes in the political leadership of the village, in the national legislation, or in the world market.

*Structure and culture*

Four structural (macro) features of Mauritian society appear to necessitate constant inter-ethnic compromise: (a) The absence of a single majority ethnic, dominating several or most spheres in public life, (b) the presence of democratic institutions and various pressure groups, (c) the small size and high population density, (d) the presence of a unitary capitalist system of production and monetary system of exchange.

Restraint and single-stranded relationships are the rule, conceptually and practically, in inter-ethnic contact, although exceptions are many and important. During the 1960's, when independence was debated and voted over, virtually every ethnic in the island was involved in occasional violence. Those who took part disregarded or overruled the policy of the highest common denominator and opted for open confrontation: places of worship were violated, shops looted,

individuals randomly killed. On the other hand, the highest common denominator may be redefined in any inter-ethnic situation, and this happens frequently in independent Mauritius, where social and cultural differences between individuals diminish, sometimes transforming one or several ethnics, sometimes creating intermediate categories of people half-way between ethnics and perhaps half-way *beyond the very logic of ethnic conflict*. Friendship and intermarriage are obvious examples of such a redefinition of relevant social reality, while the effect is less dramatic but no less significant in cases where an employer hires manpower from ethnics other than his own; or in the (limited, though real) choice of dress, place of residence, written language or club.

While there is a certain although very ambiguous «flow of personnel» (cf. Barth, 1969:9,21) between ethnic groups, I prefer to emphasise the flow of *information* — through communication in its widest sense — in accounting for ethnic processes. Although it is sometimes possible to switch ethnic identity, as among others Haaland (1969) has shown, processes of individual «boundary-jumping» are not typical of processes of inter-ethnic relations as such. If ethnic boundaries are maintained, most individuals remain within them — but to the extent that communication is taking place across the boundaries, the boundaries themselves change (i) meaning, (ii) «location in socio-cultural space», and (iii) practical relevance. In our Mauritian context, the inter-ethnic and meta-ethnic discourses may be seen, tentatively, as corollaries of social change promoting non-ethnic strategy, identity, and organisation. And here Barth's (*ibid.*) suggestive metaphor «osmosis» may well serve a purpose, but relatively to flow of information and systemic relations, not with respect to flow of personnel and «ethnic entities».

The diversity of levels and contexts in Mauritian ethnicity implies the possibility of «changing membership» in only one or a few respects, or to have an «anomalous» personal hierarchy of group allegiances, as is the case with Tamils who acknowledge their Tamil identity but simultaneously identify with the (non-Indian) General Population on a higher level of social abstraction (cf. taxonomic figure and discussions

on pp. 53-72). Particular individual set-ups of identities are identifiable through a dissolution of the actor into his various activities; this implies, in other words, a view of the actor as being identical with his meaning-contexts in this analytical respect. In other words; in Mauritian ethnicity as presumably in other capitalist systems of a certain scale, we are not dealing with «whole social persons» with a particular status setup, but with actors adapting to and creating diverse contexts.

In a more basic sense, it is on the level of communication or ongoing social intercourse that the form and content of ethnicity is made apparent to self and others; it is there that identity is «negotiated» and reconfirmed; and any change, be it as potential or fact, must always be adequately codified for it to be perceived in any particular way. Although conditions for individual action exist largely independent of the individual actor, it is the actor who acts, and in order to do so he must have communicated. —This is not to say that the information he possesses causes him to act in a particular way, but it presents him with particular representations of «incentives and restraints», pre-existent in the world, to be acted upon. Basic structural features of society, on the other hand; whether they are codified by the anthropologist as mode of production, ecosystem, division of labour or political system, limit the flow of information in certain ways. Individuals attempt to reproduce or to modify «structure», and interpretations of structural properties cannot be dispensed with even when accounting for individual action. Non-sociological background variables, which must also be kept in mind, include the spatial distribution of ethnics and the material infrastructure.

This is not to say that a proper understanding of the individual rationale for action is not absolutely necessary for an adequate interpretation of Mauritian ethnicity. Processes extrinsic to individual action sets<5> and their changing cultural content are — and must remain — background variables incapable of performing causal processes on the level of the actor.

A few theoretical issues have now hopefully been clarified, and I have indicated the general direction of the study. In the remainder of this chapter, I present samples of ethnography, and a typology of social fields tailored for the anthropological study of Mauritian ethnicity and social change.

## PERSONS, FIELDS, STATUSES

*Three examples*

(i) Claude (Creole, Port-Louis, 35, married, 2 children, docker)

(a) Work: Daily routine. In his status as a docker, Claude daily encounters a horizontally organised collectivity largely composed by members of his own ethnic (6 Creoles, 1 Tamil). (Status: Workmate/colleague.) His occupation is stereotypically and statistically linked to his ethnic. Vertically, he reports to a Hindu foreman and further up in the hierarchy, to the Franco-Mauritian administrator. (Status: Employee/subordinate.)

(b) Work: Trade unionism. At union meetings he regularly encounters 6 people, 4 of whom are Creoles, one Tamil and one Muslim.
The union of which Claude is a member is linked with the MMM party, representing Creoles and others. (Status: Union member.) The union leader, a Tamilo-Creole, is a personal acquaintance of Claude; they live in the same neighbourhood.

(c) Leisure. He spends much of his leisure time with four male friends in his locality; three Creoles and a Hindu. One of them is a workmate, and they are all about the same age. Claude has known two of the

Creoles and the Hindu since he moved into the neighbourhood ten years ago; the third one, who moved in a few years later, is a former schoolmate of his cousin from the village of Triolet. (Status: Friend.)
Other members of his club, whom he meets at least once a week, include five young Creoles, a Sino-Mauritian, two Tamils and one Hindu. Some of them play football with the local sports club, where Claude was a member as a young man. (Status: Remote friend.)
The shopkeeper and his family are Sino-Mauritian; Claude encounters them about twice a week and exchanges a few words. (Status: Customer.) He also has many casual acquaintances in the neighbourhood, virtually all of them Creoles; some of whom he occasionally goes to parties with. Favours (money or a helping hand) are sometimes granted neighbours, although it is customary first to turn to one's kin. (Statuses: Neighbour, friend.)
Claude occasionally (although rarely nowadays) takes out a girl to a film in town, her acceptance of the invitation connoting (within the Creole ethic only) that she must accept his sexual advances afterwards. (Status: Lover.) Because of cultural variations, no girl from outside the Creole working class would be available.
Claude has no television set, but is free to watch TV at a friend's, although he rarely does.

(d) Family life. His wife and children are Creoles. His wife has never worked. (Statuses: Father, husband, head of household.)

(e) Kin relations. In his extended family, his links are particularly good with his cousin Jean, who lives in a Hindu-dominated village in the east of Mauritius; he sees Jean about twice a month. His father died three years ago; Claude sees his mother, who lives with his elder brother nearby, twice a week. Several of his five remaining siblings, who live in other parts of the island, are not encountered casually; only at rites of passage, that is in practice, about three times a year. (Statuses: Brother, cousin, son.)

(f) Other sets. Claude goes to Mass with his family about once a month (his wife and daughter go every Sunday). At church, he briefly encounters many fellow Creoles whom he knows, but little information is exchanged. The priest is an expatriate Frenchman, and Claude hardly knows him personally although they exchange the occasional phrase when they meet. (Status: Member of the congregation.)
About two Saturdays a month, he goes to the horse races downtown with one or several members of his peer group. He bets regularly at a Tamil owned stall, the proprietor of which was a remote acquaintance of his late father. (Status: Customer.)

(ii) Veerasamy (Tamil, Rose-Hill, 40, married, 4 children, bus driver)

(a) Work: Daily routine. Veerasamy works with a Tamil conductor. (Status: Workmate/colleague.) Among the mechanics etc. at the garage, about 60% are Tamils, while the remainder are Muslims and Creoles. Veerasamy encounters many of them daily and exchanges brief greetings and perhaps a cigarette. (Status: Colleague.) Veerasamy takes his lunch breaks with fellow bus drivers and conductors, most of whom are Tamils or Tamilo-Creoles. (Status: Colleague/friend.) Although not Tamil owned, the company is being run on a daily basis by a Tamil and an office staff of five persons; two Tamils and three Muslims. Veerasamy reports at the office twice a day. (Status: Employee/subordinate.)

(b) Work: Trade unionism. He is not a member of the union, which comprises employees of other companies than his own as well and thus is ethnically mixed.

(c) Leisure. Veerasamy is a regular customer at a bar in Rose-Hill, where he encounters men from virtually every community. (Status: Remote friend.) None of his colleagues frequent the bar; many of them are religious men. His closest friends at the bar belong to the Franco-Mauritian — Creole continuum; virtually every evening he meets,

chats with and exchanges drinks with a *petit blanc*, a Coloured and two Creoles. However, he does not visit them nor invite them home, and their friendship depends on reconfirmation in these encounters. (Status: Friend.)
The proprietor of the bar is a cheerful Sino-Mauritian, always ready for small-talk. Veerasamy and his friends discuss him behind his back however, and they agree that his smirking manner is but a technique of maximising his profits («You know what the Chinese are like: they worship money like you and I worship God!»). (Status: Customer.)
Veerasamy has a television set, and watches the news and possibly a non-Hindustani feature film whenever he is home.

(d) Family life. His wife and children are Tamils, and his wife belongs to the same caste as himself (roughly in the middle of the hierarchy). (Statuses: Father, husband, head of household.)

(e) Kin relations. Veerasamy's parents are both dead; all his siblings live within a radius of three kilometres. Two of his three brothers and one of his two sisters are Christian. They still maintain contact, but relations have become somewhat strained since the conversions. (Status: Brother.)
On Sundays, Veerasamy occasionally helps his elder brother cleaning his chickenhouse, and is invited for dinner in return. (Status: Younger brother.)

(f) Other sets. Veerasamy does not frequent the temple regularly, and participates in ritual only when obliged to, as in rites of passage in the family. He does not belong to a club any more. The family lives in a housing estate where most of the occupants are Creoles, and he is on good terms with his neighbours. (Status: Neighbour.) He visits a Creole prostitute twice a month. (Status: Customer.)

Both of the men's action sets include individuals from several of the other ethnics. However, in Claude's case, there is a clear tendency that

it is easier to form close links with members of own ethnic than with outsiders. To begin with, Claude's ascribed statuses relating to kin and origins define him as a Creole. The Hindu in Claude's close group of friends overtly undercommunicates his Hindu identity, meaning he does not participate actively in political discussions, and does not talk about his family life.

Veerasamy presents a less obvious case. An urban Tamil, he perceives himself as a «real» Mauritian as opposed to the «Indian Immigrants», many Tamils having arrived as freemen already during the 18th century. Politically, Tamils in Rose-Hill are allied with the Creoles; culturally, they tend to classify themselves under the heading «real Mauritians» along with Francos, Coloureds and Blacks rather than under the heading «Indo-Mauritians». It is therefore easy for Veerasamy to agree with his drinking comrades' casual criticism of the government, and in the status of friends, he does not perceive them as Others. However, at the bar, Veerasamy introduces himself as Samy, a more Christian-sounding name than his real one. Thus, in a certain sense, he changes cultural identity when changing status. At work he is known as Veerasamy, and he is freer to speak his mind on certain subjects with his colleagues, who are co-religionists as well, than with his friends at the bar. Following the dictum of the highest common denominator, his playing out his various identities/statuses depends, as it were, crucially on the numerator (i.e., his interpretation of the context). During a lunch break, Veerasamy once asked for his colleagues' views on conversions to Christianity. (Most of them were violently opposed.) At the bar, the shared meaning necessary for such a dialogue to take place, was absent. Conversely, Veerasamy is able to discuss women with his fellow drinkers in a manner not possible during lunch breaks. In this sense, truth is local and relevance relative when we deal with complex action sets like Veerasamy's, common in urban Mauritius.

It should further be noted that unlike Claude's friendship-based set, Veerasamy's is not directly linked with the locality.

Most of the sets described have potential ethnic aspects which remain latent most of the time. Their becoming manifest as conflict is usually spurred by events on a greater scale. The most spectacular large-scale process of regular ethnic entrenchment is arguably the general election campaign, but relative ethnic discreteness is also being reproduced in daily, trivial situations of inter-ethnic contact. Two such contexts constitute the cases I now consider.

Veerasamy's relationship with some of the men at the bar became difficult for a while during a court case against a Tamil accused of nepotism. It was claimed, by a remote friend of Veerasamy (a Creole), that nepotism was typical of Tamils; «in that respect, they're just like Hindus»; the Creole, further, proceeded to strengthen his argument by referring to Veerasamy's working place, well known for being dominated by Tamils. Veerasamy retorted that it was not his personal fault; that he needed a place to work like everybody else, and that it was not true that non-Tamils were denied employment where he worked —he enumerated a couple of cases where non-Tamils had been employed where there were also Tamil applicants. He gained little support, and for a few weeks, he avoided some of the Creoles, including his close friends, although he did not cease to frequent the bar. Then eventually, the Creoles in question reached the conclusion that «Samy is OK even if he is a Tamil», and things returned to normal, but both parties had been reminded of their differences.
The example is typical of casual inter-ethnic relations. Conflict usually arises when someone tries to generalise about the other ethnic, thus breaking the dictum of the highest common denominator. Non-violent quarrel and eventual mutual avoidance is the usual outcome. The conditional clause invoked by Veerasamy's friends when they understood they had wronged him, is probably a universal phenomenon wherever there are minorities. «Some of my best friends are Jews, but —-»; conversely «He's all right although he is a bloody queer», etc. Inter-ethnic unease and latent antagonisms are definitely not results of direct inter-ethnic contact; rather, they exist as abstract models being reproduced within the ethnic, but as often as not being falsified in

actual inter-ethnic situations. To account for non-stereotypical Others<6> as exceptional cases is, obviously, necessary in order that the abstract model be maintained. To interpret unpleasant events as the cunning scheming of Others is a different method. My second case deals with this.

A process structurally similar to the case above, took place when a Hindu was appointed foreman at the wharf where Claude was employed. The docks have traditionally been the domain of the Creoles; the employment of the Hindu was unusual and rumoured to have been monitored by a minister. After grudgingly having obeyed the Hindu's orders for a week, Claude eventually refused to carry out a particularly messy task. Invectives were employed on both sides, and Claude's fellow workers took his side, claiming that the floor ought to be cleaned by means of a machine, as was indeed the rule. The foreman replied that none of the machines were at the moment free, and the task had to be carried out quickly. Claude, sensing his activity in the union (which was associated with Creole communalism) made him the foreman's scapegoat, told the latter to buzz off, and left in a fury. The foreman complained to his superiors and demanded that Claude be dismissed. The union took up Claude's case, and eventually mutual apologies were reluctantly exchanged, both men studiously avoiding each other later.

The two cases are in some respects similar; both arise from daily interaction and depart from ethnic antagonism — and in both cases, a higher level of society is instrumental in creating the actual situation: in the second case cited, the integration of Creoles and Hindus into the same economic system is the crucial structural condition; in the first case, job scarcity is the most important variable. The most important differences are, (i) that in the first case the parties were reconciled, not in the second; (ii) that the first situation (and its context) was voluntary on the part of the participants, the second forced. This seems less than arbitrary; thus P. Mayer's dictum «Unions transcend tribes» (Mayer 1961) cannot be applied directly to the Mauritian labour market. When several ethnics participate in a uniform economic system and there is

competition over jobs, antagonisms might just as well be accentuated as mitigated; particularly when nepotism is one of the most common forms of communalism. Unions transcend tribes only insofar as there is no general, inter subjective perception of a systematic correlation between occupation and ethnic membership.

At Veerasamy's regular bar, there is no scarcity of important goods; thus, the joking relationship is usually more pertinent than the quarrel. At the wharf, on the contrary, people make their living knowing they may well be replaced by an Other should the management wish it, and people are constantly slightly paranoid about other ethnics «taking over the island». To Claude, the appointment of a Hindu foreman was symptomatic of this process (whether imagined or real); thus, the situation took on a gravity not to be expected in casual intercourse.

But the interpretation of any situation depends on the actors' representations and therefore, I won't consider the working place as a more crucial context in the formation of ethnic identity and groups, than say, the bar. They both provide arenas for encounters and inter-ethnic flow of information, and in this respect they rank equally.

A typical, more general aspect of the cultural content of the men's action sets is the situational changes in attitudes towards other ethnics<7>. At work, Veerasamy happily chats away with the conductor about the silly ways of the Creoles, and he does, when pressed, admit holding the view that Creoles are somewhat inferior to Tamils. This, he explains, is not contradictory to having Creole friends insofar as they are exceptional. Similarly, Claude, the Hindu-hater, maintains cordial relations with a Hindu neighbour. Obviously, their accounting for this assumed contradiction in terms of «exceptions» will not do analytically. Rather, it is more than likely that stereotypes, whether ethnic or not, apply to people one doesn't entertain multi-stranded, vaguely defined relations with: to the faceless mass, as it were, of potentially threatening aliens<8>.

The stereotypes, although experientially false in many actual situations, give meaning and direction to taxonomies and, more generally, make sense of the apparently chaotic diversity of «races» and forms of culture in Mauritius. The only way they can be discarded, is by means

of replacement with a more persuasive classification of mankind — which is, indeed, hard to come by in Mauritius. Nevertheless, divisions other than the ethnic ones are current in Mauritius although their compass is usually more restricted; one such is social class (cf. also chapter 4).

In 1971 and 1979, Claude's union joined up with several unions chiefly recruiting non-Creoles, in large-scale strikes led by anti-communalists urging workers to unite against the exploiters regardless of colour. From this class perspective, Claude and his foreman would possibly have common interests, as would Veerasamy and some, but not all, of his mates at the bar — *against* capitalists belonging to their own ethnic. The fluctuations in Mauritian class consciousness do not seem to be caused by changes in the actual economic infrastructure of society, but from reinterpretations of the infrastructure. Social reality is ambiguous, and different (native) interpretations are available. Any interpretation must, for it to be intersubjectively valid, depart from a particular perception of *practice*, but it does not emerge unmediated from practice itself.

(iii) Runglall (45, Vacoas. Member of Parliament, Lecturer at the University of Mauritius. Bihari Hindu, Vaishya.)

(a) Work. Runglall works full-time as a lecturer in sugar technology. This entails a large set of regular links of varying intensity and content with individuals from all communities. His secretary is a Hindu (female). His immediate colleagues are Hindu (2), Franco-Mauritian (1), foreign white (1), Sino-Mauritian (2), Coloured (1) and Muslim (2). In the tea room, he is liable to meet them and anybody else from a group of fifteen further employees. Some are personal friends. (Status: Colleague.) His students belong to every community and caste, a fair proportion of them foreign blacks (from Africa). (Status: Teacher.)

(b) Politics. He belongs to the ruling MSM party representing the Hindus. The political milieu is small, and he knows virtually every

MLA (member of the legislative assembly), where all ethnics except the Franco-Mauritians are represented. In committee work, he develops closer links with some. Through the agency of the Chief Whip (the leader of the parliamentary group) his links with fellow MSM MLAs are continuously reproduced; this also regularly takes place at party meetings, during coffee breaks in Parliament etc. Only two persons participate in both his political and professional networks, but among his political colleagues, too, does he have contacts whom he defines as personal friends — also in the Opposition. (Statuses: Colleague, fellow Hindu, fellow politician.)
Pressure groups include religious bodies, unions and *ad hoc* petition campaigns. Three of Runglall's closest political associates are unlike himself members of the largest Hindu organisation.

(c) Leisure. Runglall's chief Sunday activity consists in gardening at home. He and his wife frequently give parties where from 5 to 40 people are invited, most of them from his professional and political sets; most Hindus, but never exclusively Hindus. They are also often invited to similar parties. Although overtly «just for fun», parties play an important role in maintaining and creating political connections. (Status: Host/guest.)

(d) Family life. Runglall's wife is a Creole, and their three children are ostensibly raised to embody the spirit of «Mauritian-ness», i.e. free from ethnic prejudice (and membership). (Statuses: Husband, father, head of household.)

(e) Kin network. Runglall sees his parents, with whom he speaks Bhojpuri, «much too rarely». There was a stir in his family when he decided to marry a Creole, but basically his parents, who run a small tobacco shop, are proud of their son. He has «virtually lost touch» with his two brothers, corresponds irregularly with his elder sister, married in England, and visits his younger sister «whenever he has the time»; in practice, they meet only at rites of passage. Not depending on his wider kin network, it is activated only when a cousin or nephew needs his

favours. (Statuses: Son, brother, cousin, uncle.) (f) Other sets. Runglall frequently speaks at public meetings, and he is occasionally interviewed in the mass media; thus he communicates unidirecionally to a large number of people. They collectively respond at election time. (Status: National politician.) He corresponds with colleagues abroad, and contributes to international journals. (Status: Colleague/ professional.)
Runglall lives in a upper-middle class residential area dominated by Franco-Mauritians and Hindus; he has little contact with his neighbours.

Runglall's action sets are qualitatively — and significantly — different from those of the two other men in that many of his links operate on a *higher level of scale* than any of the others'. When teaching at the university or giving interviews in a newspaper, he addresses a large number of actors simultaneously; when voting in Parliament, he makes decisions affecting many other people's lives, through defining modes of discourse and structural conditions for action. In a word, Runglall has a much better opportunity to influence Claude and Veerasamy than they have to influence him. Accordingly, Runglall's actions on a high level of scale are conditioned by social pressures operating on the same level: The *All-Mauritius Hindu Congress,* an important interest group, professes to represent his electorate, but the Christian pressure group *Ligue Ouvrier d'Action Chrétienne* cannot do so.
Now, Runglall has for the last decade or so been among the most outspoken anti-communalists in Mauritian politics. Nevertheless, he admits probably having been elected on an ethnic basis, and his party, although ostensibly an universalist socialist party, recruits its politicians and voters nearly exclusively from the Hindu community. This, too, he admits in private. Since politics is widely perceived as an ethnic zero-sum game by the electorate and by the pressure groups representing it in tangible issues, a politician is forced to consider this perception when defining his strategies, even if he disagrees with the model. In Runglall's case, this entails a contradiction between his domestic practice and his pragmatic politics, if they be considered as

part of the same system. But as I briefly noted above, discussing Veerasamy's different statuses, relevance is context-dependent. In choosing his spouse and raising his children, Runglall invokes norms and values relating to a certain representation of humanity *tout court*, the level of discourse being private and the meaning-content of links very vague and encompassing. When participating in the professional community, the central norm pertains to scientific progress, and they relate to a representation of the state of the art. In politics, then, the level of discourse is public. Runglall's context of reference is his party and his electorate. The Franco-Mauritians can safely be assumed not to form part of his electorate. So, when, in 1983, it was suggested that the export tax on sugar from plantations be raised, he voted in favour of the proposition although he might, in a different context, have considered it unjust. Similarly, Runglall's party has recently been instrumental in improving the lot of the smallplanters, most of them Hindus; a small minority of whom are very wealthy. As Cohen (1981) and other observers have noted regularly since Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*, particularist intentions must be masked as universalist ones in public discourse. Thus, both the decisions referred were justified with reference to the common good. Outside the Hindu community, nevertheless, it is commonly agreed that the first decision was an act of revenge against the Franco-Mauritians, and the second one an implicit promotion of Hindu economic interests. And it is empirically true that little has been done by the state apparatus to improve the economic conditions of Creole fishermen. Insofar as they form an interest group, it is via the agency of Catholic organisations, which are not perceived as relevant pressure groups by a Hindu politician, but which might likely be perceived as such by the Hindu private man.

Runglall's status as husband to his wife changed meaning during the election campaign of 1983. His party was eager to get votes from Creoles, and Runglall's position as spouse of a Creole thus became an asset in the campaign. In campaigning among Creoles, Runglall the politician exploited this status in a fashion Runglall the husband could not have accepted.

Few of the three men's statuses derive directly from their ethnic membership. But ethnicity as a relevant and highly ambiguous variable frequently enters into their ongoing interpretation of their statuses, and therefore influences their actions in a way it would not have, had an essentially non-ethnic model of greater society been reproduced in a wide range of situations of inter-ethnic contacts.

*Fields in Mauritian systems of action*

The social fields enumerated and briefly discussed below are my abstractions from observed interaction. They have no empirical existence except as abstractions. The actors involved may or may not share the anthropologist's representations of these fields. Such abstractions are useful in ordering empirical material — chiefly of a situational nature — along dimensions of scale, range of consequences, and division of power.

**1. Small scale**

(i) The household. The most basic social unit in all communities, whether rural or urban. Nuclear, extended or joint. Usually mono-ethnic.

(ii) The locality. Never entirely mono-ethnic, whether rural or urban. Comprises a large number of social networks of varying content, intensity and degree of formalisation. Peer groups are often mono-ethnic. «Non-ethnic» youth clubs are often in fact nearly or wholly mono-ethnic, as are, naturally, Hindu *baitkas* and Muslim *madrassahs* (youth clubs). Local religious organisations are more or less mono-ethnic, but local parents' groups (educationally oriented pressure

groups) are not. Village councils usually reflect the ethnic composition of the area, but ethnicity is not overtly exploited in local politics.
Extensive kin networks are sometimes localised to a village or a ward, but are more frequently scattered over a wide geographic area. Nevertheless, these and similar personal networks outside the locality are included in field (ii) because their scope and the consequences of their maintenance defines them as voluntarily reproduced multiplex networks on a small scale.

(iii) The working place<9>. Often pluri-ethnic, particularly in recent occupational types within industry and tourism. Local union branches may be one or another. Hierarchies exhibit strong correlations with ethnic membership.

**2. Large scale**

(iv) The national economic system, comprising as a field the social networks on top of the entire multi-ethnic hierarchical system of working places, real or potential, and those actors repeatedly interacting with members, such as high trade union representatives. Unions are often ethnic-specific, and policies of employment and promotion are often linked with ethnic membership. (These practices contribute to reproducing the global division of labour (a macro feature), highly correlated with ethnicity.) Organisations such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce overtly represent sectional interests.
This is where a disproportionate amount of allocative power is exerted.

(v) The national political system. Encompasses several multi-ethnic subsystems, but the actors participating tend to follow ethnic logics. The political parties — at the moment two major blocs — are largely ethnically constituted. National religious organisations, acting as pressure groups, represent clusters of norms wider in scope than the actual religion implies. Whether or not a group is included in the

political system at any time depends on its recognition by the other recognised actors.

Authorising power is concentrated here<10>.

(vi) Nation-wide communicational systems. The public educational system strives to satisfy every pressure group, as does the MBC (Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation). The two largest daily newspapers profess to be «national» ones; the remaining four more or less overtly address themselves to particular ethnic segments of the population. Weeklies and periodicals may be classified according to the same categories. There are about 40 cinemas in Mauritius; as a rule, Hindustani films from Bombay dominate in the countryside and North American, European and Hong Kong-made films, all dubbed in French, dominate in the towns, reflecting not only the geographical distribution of the ethnics, but also to some extent local variations in the culture of Indo-Mauritians.

The difference in scale between the two groups of fields (i-iii and iv-vi) is much less in Mauritius than in most other nation-states, although we shall maintain that there is a difference in kind and that the two must never be applied on the same level of analysis. In the first cluster, the individual is perceived as the central acting unit; in the second, the acting individuals represent collectivities in practice even if this is unacknowledged. Further, any decomposition of the fields into participants' statuses will *by definition*_display a predominance of multiplex relationships in fields i-ii and uniplex ones in fields iv-vi. If Runglall wants to create close, vaguely compelling bonds with fellow actors in field v — whether referring to aims defined in his status as «politician» or as «Hindu», «friend» or «human» — he has to descend to field ii to do so, while perhaps incorporating his status in field v in his strategic actions in field ii. This was apparent during the election campaign briefly mentioned above. Runglall would then visit Creole villages in order to win votes, i.e. in his politician status. But he was received as a casual actor in field ii, in local space of vague mutual obligations. Acting the role of friend (bringing little gifts, buying

drinks), he sought to fulfill the aims of the politician (securing votes). This is not to say that Runglall is a cynical manipulator; rather that not only do statuses change when the actor moves between fields, but so does the content of any particular status, which one brings along, consciously or not, to the next field. Similarly, Veerasamy the husband is a different person in fields i,ii and iii. At home, he responds to family obligations, with friends to the exigencies of manhood, at work to norms defining him as a Tamil. Runglall is not unique in bringing along his statuses as politician and husband of a Creole to the friendship context. The vaguer, less circumscribed a social relationship becomes, the more difficult it is to shelter it from influence from one's other social relationships.

Political bodies, boards of directors and other formally defined networks are founded with a specific purpose in mind; should the purpose disappear, so would these particular «manifestations of fields» as such, even if some of the actors included therein should maintain links for different reasons. When Runglall invites colleagues and fellow politicians to his home and thus switches contexts (and fields), but involving the same individuals, he attempts to justify and to reproduce bonds of non-contractual obligation, as opposed to certain contractual obligations, which are formally present in professional contexts and necessary for them to continue to be defined as professional by the actors themselves.

Although fields i-ii may be transformed in structure and meaning-content, depending on the performance of certain tasks defined in the setup of statuses or changes in status setups, they will not disappear as instances of (abstract) fields because of failure to perform a single type of task.

This pertains to system complexity and to diversity of individual statuses involved in the reproduction of the field. If a large and diverse status inventory is activated by each individual in the reproduction of a field, it is less likely to disappear than otherwise. *Gemeinschaft* is prior to *Gesellschaft*, as Tönnies would say — or, in plain English: A son need not be prime minister, but few prime ministers fail to be sons.

## NOTES

1. This form of presentation is dangerous because it may encourage a strong dependence on particular concepts. It is tempting because it may encourage a tidy exposition and argument. It has been chosen here because the concepts are epistemological rather than theoretical.

2. Some of the empirical material discussed in chs. 3-5 cannot, however, be located to any these six ideal-typical social fields. These cases, invariably *public events on a large scale*, are socially unique (they lack the repetitive quality and fixed status setup characteristic of the production and reproduction of a social field) and do therefore not constitute «fields» in the sense I use the word.

3. Cf. Elster 1983a, 1983b.

4. The concept is Hegelian and must be contrasted to «*in*definite possibilities»; that is, possibilities which are not perceived as relevant.

5. The concept of the «action-set» is taken from Adrian Mayer (1966) and is defined as «the finite set of linkages initiated by an ego», as opposed to the entire «'unbounded' network of relationships between pairs of people, making up a field of activity» (p. 102).

6. The capital «O» in «Others» is used in a way owing little to Sartre. It refers, throughout the text, to actors belonging to another ethnic than the subject.

7. Many of the studies of urban African ethnicity from the 1950's and 1960's make the same point. In a review article, Mitchell (1966) notes: «In following the same individual through several situations in an urban society, the observer is able to notice several inconsistencies in behaviour: the individual may behave as a tribesman in one situation but not in another. (...) This inconsistency is possible because all the values and beliefs in terms of which individuals interact in daily activities are not operative at the same time.» (Mitchell 1966:58-9)

8. Christie's (1972) survey of former Nazi camp warders in northern Norway is one of numerous studies confirming this view. Christie finds that many of the Norwegian warders tended to treat the Yugoslav inmates very cruelly until the latter began to talk to them (asking for cigarettes in Norwegian, for instance), thus proving their humanity through the creation of intersubjective contexts.

9. This is a painful abstraction to make. Several of the other fields include «working-places» and links between colleagues. But, granted that most individuals do not participate in the fields I have defined as «large-scale», the working-place is a distinctive arena for interaction in that it denotes a context different from the home and the locality (cf. the conflicting allegiances of Veerasamy discussed above). It is chiefly an arena for encounters between structural equals acting on a small scale, whose tasks are explicitly and formally defined through the labour contract, as are their interrelations.

10. Yet the nodal persons in the political system are far from omnipotent, even if we disregard the power exerted by actors monitoring the economy:
It is often said (in fields i-iii) that *communalism*, undesirable ethnic chauvinism, is an invention of the politicians (acting in field v, communicating through field vi). True, ethnic conflict is empirically being accentuated through participation in systems led by politicians, but it cannot be created *tout court* by politicians: rather, they are in a position to exploit sentiments which necessarily are reproduced, potentially or manifestly, in fields (i), (ii) and (iii). Naturally, the single actions performed in fields (iv), (v) and (vi) have consequences for a greater number of persons than single actions in the three former fields, but the actual interdependence of the fields is, in this respect, equally compelling for each.

# 3. THE COMMUNICATION OF DISTINCTIVENESS

«Ce pays cultive la canne à sucre et les préjugés. (...) Dans cet enfer tropical, personne ne rencontre personne — hors des castes, des franc-maçonneries du sang, tout est TABOU. Voici une Ligue des Nations où la guerre des préjugés est éndemique et atroce, surtout pour ce qui est du préjugé de couleur.»

Malcolm de Chazal, *Petrusmok*: vii (1951)

*Highest common denominators*

De Chazal, poet, novelist and essayist, left for France as a young man. His works, some of them semi-classics, were written in Paris, and despite the bitterness he felt towards his insular home, they are cherished by cultured Mauritians. However, nobody wishing to participate in Mauritian society can make statements like the one cited. It is true, as de Chazal states, that many topics are «taboo» beyond the «freemasonries of blood». My task is to show in what sense and why this is so, and to suggest how the social and cultural boundaries de Chazal so despised are now possibly breaking down.

But as yet, I shall consider de Chazal's description as being relatively accurate, as most of my empirical material also suggests.

Few days after my arrival in Mauritius, an intellectual explained to me that «the way we maintain ethnic peace is through avoidance. We avoid discussing every controversial subject outside our inner circle.» This policy I label the policy of the highest common denominator. The «inner circle» alluded to may, according to context, be the family, the union members, the party, the religious congregation, the neighbours or indeed any formal or informal group one might think of; and thus, the highest common denominator is dependent, as it were, on the global content of the equation.

Very often and in crucial situations, nevertheless, the group in question is constituted on an ethnic basis. A fellow expatriate, who had lived in the island over a decade, told me, resignedly, that «we walk on eggs all the time». The policies where common denominators are sought actively, are necessarily linked to policies of avoidance in an inter-ethnic system of communication — which is, then, at least binary in this respect. Mauritius's first prime minister, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (cf. pp. 174-179), repeatedly reminded the Mauritian people(s) that religion and (ethnic) politics ought not to be discussed in inter-ethnic situations. (Had he been in politics after 1982, Ramgoolam would probably have added language to religion, as language has recently replaced religion as the most important ethnic marker in public discourse.)

*The local codification of ethnicity*

Ethnicity is locally associated with origins, language, religion, physical appearance (phenotype) and lifestyle or *habitus*. None of Mauritius's ethnics meet all these conditions on the level of action; in fact, it can easily be argued that cultural differences are decreasing, although social ones may not be. The criteria of ethnicity are in practice not purely cognitive ones; on the contrary they are charged with symbolic ambiguity; i.e., their meaning is not fixed, but is established

situationally/relatively to a particular context. Theefore, both the *meaning* and the *social importance* of ethnicity are also variable and susceptible to change.

At the moment, seven ethnics are conventionally held to exist in matters relevant for individual careering, and this is widely assumed to be reflected in patterns of employment, in politics, education and mass media.

Hindus form majorities in most rural constituencies, while the other ethnics together form political majorities in the towns. Over half of the total Sino-Mauritian population live in Port-Louis, but the «General Population» is the largest ethnic in all of the five municipal areas.

Official and semi-official ethnic classifications like Table 1 below are reified conceptually by actors and thus form part of their shared representations. Indeed, Mauritian Muslims have told me that «until 1962, we were not an ethnic group», referring to the first census where they were granted a separate category.

Table 1 on page 52 is unofficial, and was commissioned by the political parties before the 1983 election: it is constructed from constituency-specific figures.

Mauritians identifying themselves as belonging to one of the largest «communities» are usually very anxious to convince foreigners that «communalism» is a thing of the past, that it disappeared by the time of independence etc. Those claiming membership in small ethnics, on the other hand, stress the omnipresence of communal quarrels between the others.

Remarkable though Mauritius may be in its relative ethnic tranquillity —against every odds, as it were, there is always latent tension, which becomes manifest in particular situations, not all of them «public». For instance, intermarriage is a growing source of anxiety for Mauritian parents (cf. pp. 148-154).

Nevertheless, the public arenas are naturally most important in the reproduction of ethnicity. Only when an issue is perceived, and defined, as having wide relevance for the «common good» do ethnics emerge as groups. Further, had Mauritius not been integrated politically on the level of the national state, economically in a very

uniform capitalist system, ethnic conflict could theoretically have been avoided altogether. The situation, as defined and interpreted by the participants, entails potential ethnic conflict and ardent application of the policy of the highest common denominator. More often than not, actors define their own strategies as zero-sum games; this means that whatever the other ethnic/individual gains, one's own group/oneself loses.

Hindus<1> 223,520 (41.87%)
Tamils/Telegus<2> 50,334 ( 9.43%)
Muslims 89,988 (16.86%)
General population<3>152,023 (28.47%)
Sino-Mauritians 17,156 ( 3.31%)

Total 533,021
(roughly 52% of the total population)

**Table 1. Unofficial ethnic composition of the Mauritian electorate<4>, 1983. (Source: Rivière 1984)**

## TAXONOMIES, STEREOTYPES AND THEIR APPLICATION

*(i) Taxonomies*

Every Mauritian possesses, consciously or not, a particular cognitive model of the ethnic setup in the island. These socially reproduced mental constructs, linked with moral stereotypes of the other groups, have important bearings on action, and are in turn reinforced or modified by the accumulated outcome of actions, i.e. social form or structure. After examining the taxonomies as ethnic-specific features of culture, I turn to a discussion of their application in social situations,

before considering ethnic stereotypes, their connections with taxonomies, and their actual importance as guidelines for action.

Figure 1 (page 54) is a relatively exhaustive ethnic classification scheme, implicitly taking account of the various social fields on one hand, and relevant levels of social/cultural integration on the other (from the endogamous group to the level of the nation-state). Smaller classificatory units exist with regards to particular meaning-contexts (e.g. Tamilo-Christians and Gujerati-speakers). Tamils, notably in towns, no longer regard themselves as Indians, and should perhaps have been granted a separate category. When the fourfold ethnic division was still in use, Indo-Christians were sometimes regarded as Hindus, sometimes as members of the General Population. A former division, no longer applicable, obtained between Sino-Mauritian speakers of Cantonese and Hakka. The former are very few, and no longer form a distinctive entity in any relevant respect. Further, it is noteworthy that Hindus and Muslims were lumped together as Indo-Mauritians in official censuses until 1962. Internal divisions within the category of people of Indian origin, always present as a potentiality, became manifest in the late 1940's (cf. Simmons 1982:108-9), coinciding successively with the extension of political rights in Mauritius and the Indian civil war. The Tamils formed their own political party (now defunct) in the early 1960's, and it is believed that a majority of them voted against independence.
The word «White» (*blan*) is commonly used about Franco-Mauritians; the sub-category «Aristocratic» is arguably an endangered species. *Kreol Sinwa* (Chinese Creole) refers to the offspring of mixed marriages between Sino-Mauritian and Creole, fairly common in some parts of Port-Louis, *Kreol Madras* means «Tamil Creole» (Christian Tamil, sometimes racially mixed) and *Malgas* or *Mazambik* refers to the Creoles of most obvious African descent.

Table 1 here

Mauritians do not usually carry Figure 1 in their heads. They settle for the interesting part, meaning that classification becomes successively more detailed the closer it approaches the Ego in question. Thus, a typical urban Tamil taxonomy could look like this (my abstraction)

MAURITIANS

Indian Muslim White Sino-Mauritian Creole Coloured Tamil
Telegu Other Urban Rural
H L H L Christian Hindu Ch. H.
H L H L H L H L

**Fig. 2. Tamil taxonomy**

A typical «Aristocratic» Franco-Mauritian taxonomy, on the other hand, might look like this:

MAURITIANS

Franco-Mauritian Sino-Mauritian Black
Aristocrat Common Indian Muslim Creole Coloured

**Fig. 3. Aristocratic Franco taxonomy**

*The practical foundations of taxonomies*

Taxonomic divisions are crucially relevant, and are practically reproduced, in marriage. (Cf. also discussion, and cases, of intermarriage on pp. 148-154.)

First, the choice of spouses always involves considerations of taxonomic distance. Ideally, ethnic categories are here activated on the very lowest level of abstraction. Hindus are ideally supposed to be ethnically endogamous on the level of caste within each subgroup, Coloureds should not marry Blacks, etc. In practice, the ethnics are to varying degrees endogamous. The Creoles, notably, have no strong collective technique for organising their notions of ethnic endogamy; neither a strong kin-based organisation nor clear rules of inheritance.

A fundamental difference between the populations of Indian origin and the rest consists in the fact that within the former, it is customary that the parents arrange marriage when potential spouses are still children. Among Sino-Mauritians, Franco-Mauritians and Creoles, both ethos and practice allow for a good measure of personal choice, although power mechanisms are activated if a child chooses an alliance which could be morally or economically disastrous.

Be this as it may, whenever intermarriage occurs, it is nearly invariably disapproved by the family. One exception is when an ethnic becomes so small that it cannot reproduce itself endogamously without literally degenerating. This has happened to the Telegu (after many years of *de facto* intermarriage with Tamils and Aryans and thus diminishing numbers), to the Cantonese (who are about to be totally assimilated into the Hakka-speaking majority of Sino-Mauritians) and to the Aristocratic Francos (after years of widespread intermarriage with «Bourgeois» Francos and emigration to France and South Africa). A Telegu, himself exogamously married (to a Tamil), explains: «Nowadays all the Telegus in Mauritius are cousins. We are poor people and cannot go to India to find wives. So what does one do?»

When man and woman decide to marry, or when their respective parents agree that they should, the most important single status is still that of ethnic membership. In some cases, then, the ethnic status is

overruled by another. This could be financial or political position, or purely personal qualities. Parents usually emphasise kin alliances, whereas the young codify possible heterodox choices in referring to romantic love. I have heard many stories, some of them confirmed, about young lovers who belonged to different castes or communities, and therefore committed double suicide as it was impossible for them to marry. As a rule, nevertheless, ethnics (excepting Creoles) are endogamous on the lowest taxonomic level. And the closer a spouse is in the taxonomic system, the less is an exogamous marriage considered a grave deviation. Marriages between Ilois from Diego Garcia and Mauritian Creoles are very common (cf. Walker 1986) and considered more natural than marriages between say, Creoles and Sino-Mauritians (which are also relatively common in some areas), not to mention Creole-Muslim or Creole-Hindu marital alliances (which are very rare). As to the Hindus, it is much easier for them to get away with marrying other Hindus from different castes or even different subgroups, than any other group. And so on.

Second, the localisation of the new household is highly dependent on ethnic membership. Granted that it is to be neolocal (which is the most common variety), it should ideally be spatially close to the husband's parents' home.(This notion is weaker among Creoles than among others, but exists there too.) If this option is not available, the household should at least be located in an area where one's own ethnic is already numerous. Usually this presents no problem, since one's social action sets are largely ethnically endogamous, and favours are generally granted within the ethnic. In addition, the economic situation of a couple is strongly correlated with their ethnic membership. Thus, simplistically, one might say that Creoles are tenants in public housing estates (*cités ouvriers*), while Franco-Mauritians live in Curepipe and on the south-western coast, and Hindus in concrete houses near the sugar estates, etc. The point is not, of course, that taxonomies themselves reproduce a particular pattern of settlement, but that the practical application of taxonomies and kinship categories encourages reproduction of such a pattern, and along with other factors to be considered (notably division of labour and economic wealth), it tends

to inhibit the emergence of a less ethnically-correlated pattern of settlement.
Many neighbourhoods in Mauritius are class-based rather than ethnic-based, and these are becoming increasingly mixed as the ethnic division of economic and political power gradually changes.

(b) Fields iii-iv: Careering

«*Sak zako bizin protez so montayn*,» said a prominent Hindu politician in 1983 («Each monkey has to protect his mountain») and thus broke an unwritten rule in Mauritian public life: —Although you practice communalism, never promote it in public!

In the allocation of jobs and education, a taxonomic level lower than those included in the figure on p. 39 has practical priority: that of kinship<5>. All other things being equal, one hires one's kin. Should one happen to be in the Ministry of Education and has to make a shortlist of candidates for a particular school, kin are favoured before other members of one's ethnic<6>. These practices are conventionally expected — by one's electorate and by the other politicians. In practical politics, the competition over scarce goods is codified as a zero-sum game between ethnics, one which frequently has to be solved as sequences of «give-and-take» between politicians. An extensive court case during my stay, involving several national politicians and two large parastatal bodies, made controversial public news of such practices.
«Descending» to field iii, the situation is no different in the choice of patrons, choice of jobs and of friends at the working-place. I have already given several examples to this effect, and more are to come. Suffice it here to say that perceptions of taxonomic distance are largely congruent in fields i, ii, iii and iv. This means that the actor's perceptions of ethnic closeness/distance are normally identical whether he considers marriage, buying a house, looking for a job or employing a subordinate.

(c) Field v: The national political system

The MMM party, ostensibly working against ethnic divisions since its emergence just after Independence, has fairly consistently referred to ethnic taxonomies in their designation of political candidates on the highest level, i.e., decisions taken by the party's Politburo before General Elections in 1976 and 1982. A few examples illustrate the point (cf. pp. 180 ff.) for a different approach to the phenomenon of the MMM).

(1) Paul Bérenger, the founder of the party, was posed as the party's prime minister candidate for the first time in 1983, and then as a last option in an urgent situation. Although he may not have admitted it at the time of previous election campaigns, he frankly confessed to me when I met him in March, 1986, that the reason was purely strategic. In the early days, there was a shortage of Hindus in the party; when Aneerood Jugnauth, a London-trained lawyer joined, he rapidly acquired the status as the MMM prime minister candidate. Despite Jugnauth's short career within the party, there was little internal opposition against this decision. Jugnauth was not only a Hindu; like Ramgoolam, he also belongs to the most numerous caste, the Vaishya (known as *Veysh* in Mauritius). This is probably no coincidence, as there were already low-caste Hindus of long-standing membership, who had also been active during the heroic period of the party (1971-2), but who were discarded as potential leaders of the country. In other words, the lowest taxonomic level available was perceived as relevant. From 1976 to 1982, Jugnauth served as leader of the Opposition, and since 1982 he has been prime minister. When the ruling alliance split in 1983, MMM ideologists rapidly created an image of Jugnauth as a pawn in Bérenger's hands; a manipulated mascot with no independent will (cf. MMM 1985).

(2) Having narrowly lost the 1976 election, the MMM Politburo, now interpreting the situation in communalist terms (i.e. admitting the pragmatic validity of a model of society as divided along ethnic lines), realised the need for a wider alliance before the 1982 election. They eventually decided to band up with a small populist Hindu party with a sound rural base, PSM (*Parti Socialiste Mauricien*). A formerly influential MMM faction, the Maoist *Lalit*, left the party in disgust. The alliance, uniting taxonomic extremes, won the election.

(3) In the early days (before 1976), the MMM would frequently pose Hindu candidates in predominantly Creole constituencies, Muslims in Hindu neighbourhoods etc. Looking at the current setup of Parliament, it becomes evident that this policy has been left: All the 12 MLAs from the four constituencies of Port-Louis belong to the MMM. Two Creoles and one Hindu were elected from constituency 1 (ethnic composition: Gen.Pop. 44%, Hindu 20%), one Sino-Mauritian, one Hindu and one Muslim from no. 2 (Hindu 19%, Sino 12%, Muslim 45%), three Muslims from no. 3 (Muslim 75%), and one Creole and two Hindus from no. 4 (Gen.Pop. 38%, Hindu 32%). The candidates chosen by the Politburo did not necessarily have any other asset linking them to the constituency than their ethnic membership.

In general, it should be noted that perceptions of taxonomic closeness/distance are not identical in politics and in the other fields. «Politics makes strange bedfellows», and the functioning two-party system is being maintained as long as the blocs are roughly the same size. Muslims, Creoles, urban Tamils and Sino-Mauritians are united in a strategic alliance against the Hindus and Coloureds; any alignment departing from notions of taxonomic distance would have looked fundamentally different.

*Stereotypes as shared representations and as sources of conflict*

Now turning to the moral stereotypes linked with taxonomies, they are to some extent interlocking, giving each ethnic a destiny as it were, in being different from the others. Creoles and Hindus, in particular, contrast their respective lifestyles and outlooks. The stereotypes held by a particular individual, linked with its taxonomy, constitute a coherent symbolic system. These systems are being reified and reproduced in fields i-iii, chiefly intra-ethnically, and remain fairly constant. As part of the actor's early socialisation, taxonomies and stereotypes exist prior to action. They are necessary for the individual to act in a relevant way, even if they are not taken at their face value by the actor.

**STEREOTYPES HELD BY OTHERS**

CreolesLazy, merry, careless
HindusStingy, dishonest, hardworking
MuslimsReligious fanatics, non-minglers
Sino-Mauritians Greedy, industrious
Franco-Mauritians Snobbish, decadent
ColouredsClever, conceited, too ambitious

**STEREOTYPES OF SELF**

CreolesFunloving, compassionate, friendly
HindusSensible, care for family
MuslimsMembers of a proud, expanding culture
Sino-Mauritian Clever, industrious
Franco-Mauritian«True Mauritian», dignified
Coloureds«True Mauritian», intelligent

**Table 2. Ethnic stereotypes**

The lists above are simplified in that they do not take account of ethnic-specific variations in stereotypes of others, nor in contextual differences relating to fields. For instance, Creoles in general have a more positive view of the Franco-Mauritians than do the Muslims; Hindus and Muslims are sometimes socially close in rural areas but never in town, etc. Nevertheless, although many Mauritians may disagree with the truth-value of these stereotypes, they are common knowledge, *shared meaning*, and must as such be reckoned with even by actors who do not agree with them. They do not prescribe action directly.

Any of the six major symbolic systems emerging indexically from these standard perceptions, along with a particular version of the ethnic

taxonomy, also incorporates knowledge of the Others' stereotypes of self. This means, among other things, that the five systems are not only similar, but that they, added together, constitute a seamless descriptive symbolic order on a higher level. The contradictions between the subsystems, then, originate not in differences in actual representations (although such minor differences are reproduced systematically) but in the cultural *values* attached to them in pragmatic interpretation of real-life situations. To a Creole, a *séga* party is an expression of positive values; to a Hindu or Sino-Mauritian it reflects the Creole's lack of foresight. When a Franco-Mauritian of «Aristocratic» tendency lifts his little finger along with his cup of tea, it sets him apart as more gracious, more of a gentleman than the dirty blacks — conversely, it also sets him apart as an empty snob. The interpretation depends on the perspective; the perspective, incorporating judgements of value, is partly an aspect of cultural identity, but is also partly modified by social context. This is how our Tamil bus driver can dislike *and* respect Creoles: he dislikes them when his conductor tells him about his dirty neighbours, but respects them when they buy him a shot of liquor.

Although there is no general agreement about the nature of the interrelations between the elements and their moral value, it seems perfectly legitimate to talk of a *shared symbolic system* in this context, provided we distinguish representations from norms (in Geertz' (1973) terminology, distinguishing models-of from models-for). The representative models («denotations») are perceived as being *really there*; only when linked with values («connotations») do interpretations differ. The Sino-Mauritian's thrift becomes stinginess in the eyes of the Creole because their respective *normative systems* differ. They are mutually aware of the other's interpretation: there is apparently perfect intersubjectivity although disagreement. In real-life situations, such value judgements, naturally, invariably form part of the interpretation and cannot be separated from the representation outside analysis. My point in distinguishing representations from values or norms here is simply to argue that a system of representations, «models-of», can be compatible with several systems of norms, of «models-for». An ethnic

taxonomy, thus, has no means of reproduction unless tied to a particular set of norms. And surely, for a particular normative version of a shared system of representations to be officially established as the universal one, its proponents will have to be those controlling social fields iv-vi; that is, the Mauritian state apparatus (legal and political institutions), the means of production (economic institutions), and/or the private mass media (where modes of discourse are being established and reproduced). No ethnic is collectively in such an omnipotent position in modern Mauritius although there are obvious asymmetries of power. But on the micro-level, any particular model may be regarded as *the* correct one in a given situation. Trouble, in the form of negotiation, violence or network fissure — and silence are the two alternatives when there is such disagreement. The fundamental ambiguity of the shared system of representations suggests that conflict is frequently inevitable.
Generally then, mutual stereotypes and partly overlapping taxonomies constitute *fields of shared meaning*. Insofar as they normatively connote functional complementarity or indifference to the actors they remain unproblematic, otherwise they don't.

The following cases<7>, respectively located to fields iii and ii, should illustrate the point.

A Franco-Mauritian family in Curepipe, the husband employed by a shipping company, the wife not working outside the home, employs two servants; a Muslim gardener, Mahmood, and a Creole domestic maid, Jacqueline (their relevant statuses: employees; type of relation: uniplex). In this there is already an inherent power hierarchy; the family's two employees, however, are of approximately equal rank (mutual status: colleagues; uniplex relation). The sex differences of the two servants make their division of labour seem appropriate to themselves, as does cultural convention relating to ethnic-specific career strategies. Their mutually exclusive tasks imply that they see little of each other; there is a functional complementarity. Jacqueline takes the kitchen wastes out daily to the garden dump, into Mahmood's

domain; and he enters «her» house daily to wash up and sometimes to drink a cup of tea in the kitchen. They tacitly accept each other's presence, but are not on good terms. They both regard the mistress of the house as a legitimate giver of orders, and rather turn to her than to her husband if they have a complaint or a request.

Jacqueline had been dissatisfied for a while with Mahmood's habit of entering the house without wiping his feet; during the rainy season this implied a not negligible amount of extra work for herself, and eventually she complained to Madame. «These filthy Muslim men,» she said, «they've got no idea of how to behave themselves in the house. At home, I bet he keeps his wife like a slave and has her kiss his feet whenever he returns from work.» Madame asked Jacqueline why she couldn't tell Mahmood herself because, after all, it was a problem between them. But Jaqueline insisted that Madame tell him, because «you'd think he would listen to me? *Ayo*, never, Madame!»

So the mistress of the house reported the complaint to Mahmood, and requested him to take off his boots before entering the house. And so he did thereafter, for a while. Eventually, however, he returned to his old habit. He explained this to me in these terms: «It is not good for a man to do what a woman tells him, it makes him weak.» I reminded him that he usually did what Madame told him, and he continued: «That's different. It's not that woman, it's *that* one»; suggestively pointing towards the kitchen.

During the same period, Mahmood began to file complaints against Jacqueline as well. «You should keep an eye on her,» he told Madame, «I know that kind — very sweet and nice and all that, but how they steal! Besides, she's as careless as one'd expect from her kind. I've seen some of the things she throws out — good food, if you ask me.» When asked for evidence, he promised he would show her soon.

Apart from a further deterioration in the relationship between Mahmood and Jacqueline, nothing tangible happened after this demarcation.

In both instances, the protagonists applied ethnic stereotypes, presuming their Franco-Mauritian employer shared them, to strengthen

their evidence. In the case of the dirty feet, the representational interpretation of the situation was naturally identical on both sides: Mahmood *did* enter the kitchen with dirty feet, and this *did* imply extra work on the part of Jacqueline. But the normative aspect of the situation differed. According to the Creole woman, a man should be kind and considerate, and besides, the woman rules in the house. According to the Muslim man, a woman should be acquiescent and respond sympathetically to any of the man's whims. Mahmood knew that Jacqueline was invoking stereotypical descriptions of Muslims against him, and for a while he did adapt to the meaning-context she and their mistress had defined, before deciding that it was unacceptable for a man to behave in this way. He fully understood their version of the facts, but rejected it as a false interpretation. And his accusations against Jacqueline were probably fabricated; rather aimed to reinstall his ethnic and masculine pride than to guard his mistress's property. Had Mahmood been a less confident man, he would have complied to the two Catholic women's wishes, and thus contributed to the reproduction of a symbolic relationship between men and women which would have been totally unacceptable to him at home.

The second case exemplifies the relativity of criteria for truth and relevance on a somewhat larger scale.

Somewhere in the Muslim heartlands of a Mauritian town, there is a Sino-Mauritian owned cafe. Since the racial disturbances in the middle-to late sixties, the proprietor had not sold alcoholic drinks nor food with pork in it, for fear of being ostracised, boycotted or perhaps even lynched by his neighbours.
Then, in a period of reduced public ethnic conflict, the cafe was purchased by a young Sino-Mauritian. The previous owner, an old man who left to spend his last years with his son's family in Chinatown a few blocks to the west, warned the purchaser that he should respect local custom. The new owner, Gérald, agreed with this.
Soon, some of Gérald's friends from Chinatown started to frequent his cafe, not mingling socially with the Muslim old-timers although sitting

in the same room (about 40 sq. metres). From the first, Gérald's friends complained that he did not sell alcohol and Chinese specialities like sausages and smoked pork's ears. He replied that he didn't want to offend his Muslim customers and neighbours — and besides, his profits would probably drop if he did so. Gérald's friends, concentrating on the economic aspect, retorted that his profits would clearly increase if he did what they suggested. Then, they claimed, he could attract more Sino-Mauritian customers and perhaps even people from the Creole neighbourhood on the other side of Khadaffi Square. After a few months of lousy profits, Gérald applied for a licence to sell liquor. While awaiting the reply, he took in supplies of beer (for which no licence was required) and included pork dishes on the menu. He kept the crates of beer out of view, but of course, everybody quickly learned of his decision. His only employee apart from his wife, a young Muslim boy with cleaning duties, resigned shortly after. But his customers did not disappear, and for a while, business went well. His small group of friends faithfully came to drink beer and eat pork, and sometimes they succeeded in bringing other Sino-Mauritians with them. No Creoles came, however.

After four months, Gérald had not yet received an answer to his application for a liquor licence, and he went to see the Mayor of Port-Louis about it. He then learned that the Mayor had just received a petition urging the Municipal Council not to give Gérald his licence. The Mayor suggested that Gérald withdraw his application; the latter declined.

Then, eventually, his regular customers disappeared, all at once, clearly because of a collective decision on the religious community level. Gérald's Sino-Mauritian friends, sensing their responsibility, tried to mobilise their own, but with little success. A caricature of a Chinese with porcine features appeared on the external wall of the cafe. One day, a local imam entered the cafe and explained, diplomatically, that his congregation could not accept blatant and conspicious breach of Allah's law in their midst, and urged Gérald to conform to local rules of decency. Gérald replied by referring to (universal) Mauritian law; the

imam reminded him of the need to be tolerant in a multicultural society.

Gérald's friends were furious when they heard about this. «Why, is this not a free society? Only three blocks from here, you can drown yourself in hard liquor if you like — why not here? Muslims are bloody fanatics!» etc. The truth was, however, that Gérald and (especially) his pregnant wife, were by now very worried about what was to happen next. *They* had to live here, after all.

More graffitti appeared on the walls; anti-Chinese and Islamic slogans (in Kreol and French). Gérald's wife started to complain that she felt people staring at her when she went out. Apart from the imam, however, none of the locals talked to Gérald or his wife about this.

In the end, about a year after his takeover, Gérald announced that he would return to his predecessor's practice of no pork and no alcohol. His friends were, naturally, disappointed in him, but they understood. After all, the Sino-Mauritian key to success consisted in avoidance of open ethnic confrontation.

The graffitti was removed, and «things returned to normal». The Muslim customers returned, and Gérald's friends now only came every now and then, usually during their lunch break, to «see how things went».

Gérald's participation in the local community was always limited to economic transactions: his locality, where he had kin, friends and was member of organisations, was in a different part of town (although very close). An outsider in the Muslim quarter, he had to undercommunicate his discreteness. His status as a *commerçant* was acknowledged — that's how Sino-Mauritians are supposed to be, in the eyes of others —, but in attempting to negotiate the meaning-content of this status, he lost. He tried to argue with reference to universalist values (the law of Mauritius), but his opponents interpreted him as a communalist, and claimed the primacy of their communal values over his in this local context.

Both the cases discussed involve negotiation over cultural — and ethnically variable — values. In none of the cases did the participants

claim the universality of their own, ethnically specific values, only their validity in the actual context. Jacqueline and Mahmood did not care what the other did at home, while Gérald did not mean to imply that Muslims, too, ought to drink alcohol; nor did the Muslims insist on universalising their value, i.e. try to force himself and his family not to consume pork and alcohol. What actually led to the conflicts seems to have been the necessity to interpret the situation according to values external to the definition of the social relation. Abstractly, all involved could accept the presence of conflicting values in Mauritian society; their mutual links were defined according to an agreed version of the highest common denominator. In the event, then, the situations demanded a redefinition of their context and thus of their own meaning. Truth was in other words being defined as something *local*. Finally, stereotypes were invoked in accounting for the Other's presumably erroneous interpretation, and this reproduction of belief in own moral superiority indeed seems a necessary condition for cultural boundaries not to dissolve in a pluricultural society.

The examples deal with conflict over (cultural) ethnic-specific interpretations of a shared social reality and cannot be reduced to (social) competition over scarce resources. Below, I discuss the interrelations of the two aspects of ethnicity, departing from a few examples of ethnic-specific career strategies (individuals acting in field iii).

## ORGANISATION AND IDENTITY

*Ethnic-specific career strategies: Fields iii-iv*

Variations in size, position in greater society and internal socio-cultural resources suggest that the internal organisation of the ethnics follows different principles. Viewing the question from another angle, we may add that cultural differences and unequal distribution of property implies systematically divergent individual career strategies. I now demonstrate the links between (individual) careering and (collective) organisation, although largely remaining on the analytical level of action.

Despite rapid social change, occupational stereotypes still cling to Mauritian ethnics. Every profession is in principle open to everybody, but the reproduction of social and cultural differences along ethnic lines is strongly rooted in the division of labour. This holds true, then, on a practical level as well as on a representational one.

An integral part of the normative taxonomy discussed above is the occupational stereotype of the Other, to a great extent understood idealistically with reference to assumed inherited moral characteristics of the members of the ethnic in question. Conversely, occupational stereotypes of self are widely justified with reference to one's own ethnically determined moral characteristics. Knowledge about one's own ethnic's social and cultural resources in the competitive labour market is also applied to practices and thus plays an important role in the reproduction of the division of labour, although the process is naturally recursive, mediated through the duality of structure. A particular ethnic division of labour and property (macro level and field iv) entails predominance of successful career strategies (field iii) seeking to exploit it, and these strategies constitute its only means of reproduction.

Table 3 (p. 74) is «true» in the same respect as Table 2 and Figs. 1, 2 and 3; that is, it exists as (unsystematised) representations in the shared Mauritian culture.

The ideal stereotypes of occupations, confirmed in practice partly because of their existence (as self-fulfilling prophecies), are largely congruent with the actual distribution of power: Franco-Mauritian families control the most important means of production (the sugar

estates); Sino-Mauritians have a virtual monopoly in retail trade and were the founders of the EPZ; Hindus control the state apparatus (although most Hindus are poor labourers and smallplanters); some Muslim families are powerful in business; the Coloureds have, for various reasons a strong position in national communicational systems; and the Creoles are collectively virtually powerless in greater society.

The individual cases below illustrate the direct relationship between occupational strategies and ethnic membership.

| | REPRESENTATIONS OF OWN RESOURCES | REPRESENTATIONS OF OWN OCCUPATION |
|---|---|---|
| Franco-Mauritians: | Property, knowhow | Managerial |
| Sino-Mauritians: | Intelligence, thriftiness<br>Informal contacts | Top of wealth-generating activity |
| Hindus: | Kin solidarity | Agriculture (rural), politics, trade, civil service (urban) |
| Muslims: | Corporate organisation | Professional, trade |
| Coloureds: | Education | Professional, civil |
| Creoles: | Honesty, working ability | Manual, non-agricultural |

**Table 3. Ethnic perceptions of resources in the labour market**

(a) Billy, a Creole (49), grew up in the village of Bel Air in eastern Mauritius. He received some schooling there; by the time he left school at twelve he could read and speak French and perform simple mathematics. Billy's father was an artisan at a sugar factory, his mother

periodically working as a domestic maid in Franco-Mauritian households. There were nine children. Billy was expected to join his father, who might be able to help him with a job, at the factory. But he wanted to go to town, and when he was fifteen, arrangements were finally made that he might stay for a period with an uncle in eastern Port-Louis. There, he found a job as a Creole carpenter's apprentice through the agency of his uncle, also an artisan. He remained in this man's service for five years, throughout which period he continued to stay with his uncle and paid him a little money with irregular intervals. He also went to see his parents «as often as possible». The job was not well paid, and he frequently applied for others. In his own opinion, the reason he didn't have luck was his ethnic membership. «You know how people are — Chinese employ Chinese, and Hindus employ Hindus.» At the age of 21, a friend, a neighbour of his uncle's, managed to find him a job at the garage where he was working himself, and Billy was happy for a change, although this job was also badly paid. In 1963 he married a girl from the neighbourhood, and the ceremony and party were held, according to custom, in Bel Air. By now his father had been promoted, and claimed he could help Billy find a better paid job and housing at the sugar factory; Billy agreed to give it a try although his wife disliked the idea. By 1964, they settled in Bel Air; this job was reasonably well paid and further, after a couple of months they got a flat in the sugar company's housing estate. Billy has worked at the factory to date; he has never been offered another job, he claims, «and besides, things are tough for us Creoles these days».

(b) Jean-Pierre (Franco-Mauritian, 53). Medical doctor, Curepipe; private practice and weekly visits to 5 sugar estates.
Jean-Pierre grew up in a non-landowning family of higher public servants and professionals; his father was an attorney and his maternal uncle an officer in the British army (this was a matter of joke in the early days, but became serious during the war when most of Jean-Pierre's family members supported the Vichy government. The man in question, by then a captain, was abroad throughout the war.) Jean-Pierre went to Mauritius' best secondary school at Curepipe, and was

then sent to France for his higher studies. Naturally, his maternal language was French. Upon returning from France, he married a Frenchwoman who had accompanied him, and immediately had a house raised on the ample family plot in Curepipe. There was no shortage of money. Reluctant to work as a hospital doctor, he quickly established himself as a general practitioner. A Franco-Mauritian friend of the family let him an office in his block in central Curepipe. In the mid-seventies, Jean-Pierre took the additional job at the northwestern sugar estates; as a Franco-Mauritian, he was preferred to the other applicants, «and in any case, I know all these people <directors> through my family; there's M. Noël, M. de Robillard and —». In addition to his houses (his parents are dead), Jean-Pierre has a *campement* at the seaside, where the family spends the winters (June-August) and weekends.

Jean-Pierre has three children (29, 31 and 32 years old), and has funded all their education abroad; two in France and one in Quebec. His daughter is married in France; his elder son has a lower managerial position with a sugar company, and his younger son has a similar job in a cargo handling company. Both the companies are Franco owned.

(c) Robert (Sino-Mauritian, 27). The younger son of a general retailer in Port-Louis, he had no hope of taking over the family business. He took his School Certificate in 1978 with good marks, and applied for several scholarships in order to study commercial or related subjects abroad (in particular, he wanted to study computer science in Japan; the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had just founded this scholarship then). However, he received no scholarship, and decided to find a job instead of continuing his education at home. His patriclan was not a particularly big and powerful one; most of his uncles were in the retail business. He did not feel like working for his father. Eventually he got a clerical job at the Casino of Mauritius at Curepipe, owned by Sino-Mauritian non-relatives. Two years later he got a better paid job at a seaside casino, not Sino-Mauritian owned, and was quickly promoted

further. At the age of 24, Robert wanted to set up his own business. He still lived with his parents, and had saved some money. He found a cafe for sale in central Rose-Hill, borrowed more money from his father and yet more from two uncles (the former interest-free, not the latter). The remaining money was raised through a bank loan. In 1984, Robert took over the cafe including its living quarters, located in the high street of Rose-Hill and always Sino-Mauritian owned. The same spring he married, and his wife came to work with him as is the custom among Sino-Mauritians.

In all the three cases briefly considered, ethnic networks — often but not always simply kin networks — were activated in careering. This is hardly surprising, given the ethnic division of labour and the predominance of members of own ethnic in the personal action-sets of multiplex links.

The differences in the ethnic organisation of personal assets are obvious. In the two latter cases, the preliminary conditions for individual careering include property and education, whereas in the first case, the actor's only asset was his working ability and personal action sets. The Sino-Mauritian also could activate his patriclan network. Creole genealogies are nearly always shallow, largely horizontal, and inaccurate. The average Creole has a large number of «cousins», but rarely knows the descendants of his grandparents' siblings. Sino-Mauritian and Franco kin reckoning, on the contrary, is detailed and recorded in writing.
A typical Hindu career would involve assets like geographic origins (in India), caste membership, education, and political acquaintances.

In other words, careering is largely an intra-ethnic matter. Employers feel they can trust their own people and therefore tend to prefer them as employees; jobseekers, accordingly, turn to their own for help. Systemic properties are reproduced in this way, but they can hardly be said to «emerge» from aggregated action; properties of greater society are already present before strategies are laid, as structural conditions

for action (macro view, Giddens' expression) or incentives and restraints in the social environment (micro view, Barth's expression). Social structure does change, but enduring structural change is usually monitored in fields iv-vi, on a large scale, that is<8>; it always involves a (gradual or sudden) new configuration of allocative and/or authorising power, and a new shared definition of relevant social reality.

In the labour market, there is competition as well as complementarity. To some extent, the cultural variations (here: values and stereotypes), still imply systematically different strategies. In a coastal village of Hindu/Creole mixed population, there is a strong tendency that the Hindus work on the land, either as smallplanters or for an estate; while the majority of the Creoles are fishermen. This is perceived by the actors as a perfectly legitimate, if not natural form of occupational complementarity. When the division of labour involves great differences in wealth, on the other hand, there are murmurs about conspirations and injustice. There is universal agreement over the value of individual economic wealth, and in this respect, the labour market is a field of constant competition over this scarce resource. But as I have shown, ethnically specific strategies to create personal wealth differ in content and efficiency.

*Ethnics in occupational hierarchies, monitored in fields iv-vi*

The taxonomies and stereotypes discussed above are casually reproduced in fields i-iii in society. Power is also an aspect of social relations on this local level. But individual decisions affecting large numbers of people are by definition taken on the higher level of scale. Drawing on Giddens's (1984) twofold division of power into (i) authorising power (over persons) and (ii) allocative power (over material resources), I now describe ethnic power relations successively in the labour market and in the state apparatus. I then proceed to discuss control of resources of communication in the educational system and media of mass communication.

(a) Allocative power in the labour market (fields iii-iv)

(1) The sugar plantation. 19 of the 20 sugar plantations constituting the backbone of the Mauritian economy are owned by Franco-Mauritian families, who still, then, control the most important means of production. A typical pyramid of authorisation within the plantation would place Franco-Mauritians on top, Sino-Mauritians and Coloureds in the middle administrative positions, Creoles in the factory, and Hindus and Muslims in the fields.

(2) The factory. All ethnics, except perhaps the «Black» Creoles, have members possessing one or several of the some 500 factories in the EPZ. Many are, further, owned by foreigners, notably East Asians and South African expatriates.
If a factory is owned by a Hindu or a Muslim, it is likely that most of the employees belong to the same ethnic. If it belongs to a Franco-Mauritian or a Sino-Mauritian, however, only the managerial positions are held by members of the owner's ethnic, simply because these two minority ethnics have few or no members belonging to the working class. Coloured industrialists seem to have few ethnic preferences in matters of employment. The Coloureds constitute the ethnic (or sub-ethnic) where community sentiments are weakest (cf. discussion pp. 119-124).

(3) The tourist hotel. Often administered from abroad (France, South Africa). The employees are, it seems, generally hired on basis of formal qualifications.

(4) The fishing boat. Usually owned by a Hindu or Muslim *banyan* (middleman) along with the remaining equipment (nets, sails etc.). Nearly all fishermen are Creoles, who, then, in practice are the employees of the *banyan*; they are compelled to sell him the catch at his price.

(b) Authorising power in politics (field v)

The government has since independence been dominated by Aryan Hindus, although they have most of the time ruled with support from a small party representing segments of the «General Population». Outside the government itself, there is little sign of a massive Hindu takeover of central authoritative positions. In matters of employment, nevertheless, the common mechanisms of nepotism and «communalism» are frequently activated.

Two important examples illustrate the assumption.

(1) The legal system. The Chief Judge is a Muslim, while three of the six judges of the Supreme Court are Franco-Mauritians, one is Muslim, one Sino-Mauritian and one Hindu. Every major ethnic has its prominent lawyers. The system of laws is a curious mix of the *Code Napoléon* and British judiciary principles.

(2) The parastatals. I have at random selected six parastatals and computed the ethnic composition of their respective administrations (Table 4, p. 82).

Many a Mauritian would be surprised at the comparatively slight degree of over-representation on part of the Hindus. The most grossly over-represented category is actually the Franco-Mauritian, while both Muslims and Creoles are statistically underrepresented.

Merit, real or presumed, probably accounts for the high proportion of Franco-Mauritians in the parastatals. About half of those represented are involved in the sugar industry; this is a field where they, in myth and fact, possess the knowhow.

| *Boards of Parastatals* | *Hindu* | *Creole* | *Muslim* | *Sino-M* | *Franco* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SILWF (Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund) | | | | | | | | |
| -Members of committee | 14 | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | |
| -Senior staff | 6 | | | | | | | |
| Mauritius Housing Corp. | | | | | | | | |
| -Board of Directors | 6 | | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | |
| -Administration | 6 | | | | 2 | 3 | | |
| Mauritius Marine Authority | | | | | | | | |
| -Marine Board | 5 | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | |
| -Senior staff | 8 | 2 | | | 2 | 1 | 2 | |
| Tobacco Board | 4 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Rose Belle Sugar Estate Board of Directors | 5 | | | | | 4 | | |
| Sugar Insurance Fund Board | 5 | 1 | | | | 3 | | |
| Totals | 59 | 6 | | | 8 | 6 | 15 | |
| In % | 62% | 6.4% | | | 8.5% | 6.4% | 16% | |
| *Total % of population* | *52%* | | | | *28%* | *16%* | *3% 2* | |

**Table 4. Ethnic membership of high-ranking public servants**

Sometimes parastatals are considered as «belonging» to one ethnic or other; this is then unofficially decided on the level of the government. In the autumn of 1986, a prominent politician sued a minister of an ethnic other than his own over an employment case in a managerial position in a parastatal body. Here, one obviously well qualified applicant had been bypassed, presumably because of his ethnic membership. In court, several witnesses confirmed that high-ranking members of the government had divided, so to speak, certain parastatals between them on an ethnic basis.

(c) Education and mass media (fields v-vi)

(1) The educational system is directly linked to individual careering and thus to power in its widest sense. Control over parts of the educational system entails power to define which qualities of particular actors are to be seen as relevant in later careering, e.g. when candidates for a particular higher educational programme are selected. Restricting ourselves to the national educational system here, we may state categorically that this process is carried out through the shortening of lists of applicants on several levels of decision, beginning at the school and ending in the ministerial office. Tacit criteria of selection to certain national educational programmes (such as nursing school, the police academy etc.) include ethnic membership of applicants. The individuals acting on a high scale here are clearly in «nodal» system positions endowing them with much authoritative power, and the mechanisms of selection of actors are the same as those operative in (b).

Education is also a vehicle for exertion of power in a more general and more elusive way, through the establishment of curricula and, more generally still, through the definitions of what is to count as relevant knowledge. In order for educational institutions and mass communication media (discussed below) to function as vehicles of power, they must necessarily be connected, in fact or potentially, with

structures of allocation and/or authorisation in society; to which structures they do not strictly belong themselves.

The Director of the Mauritius Institute of Education, a linguist by profession, has described and analysed historical changes in scope and topical content of the Mauritian educational system (Ramdoyal 1977). Perhaps surprisingly, the British presence from 1810 did not lead to a strong Anglification of educational institutions, which remained largely French in content and character — many of them private and linked with Catholicism. Today's public secondary school curricula, nevertheless, are adapted from British ones, and lead to equivalents of «O» and «A» Levels.

It is also noteworthy that some Indian children were taught in their vernacular by an Anglican missionary already in the mid-19th century.

Today, primary education is nominally free and compulsory; in practice, it is neither. Kin must buy school uniforms, books and stationery for the pupils, and no sanctions are applied towards regular absentees. But the huge majority of Mauritian children do attend school, and some 27% proceed to secondary school (Mauritius 1984) with varying degrees of success. Some schools, both on the primary and secondary levels, are private (Catholic and Hindu supported schools, French lycees, an Islamic «College» etc.), but at least most of the primary ones are public.

Religious instruction is not an important subject, but language is. The attempt to find a reasonable compromise between ethnics is analysed within the general discussion of language as ethnicity on pp. 63-69 below.

Control over educational institutions, then, entails direct authorising power in the acceptance/rejection of applicants, but also implies power as *justified definitions of relevant reality*, i.e. power over symbols, sanctioned by the state apparatus in the case of public educational institutions, but by the ethnic or other relevant acting unit in private ones.

(2) Mass media. The national broadcasting corporation is government controlled. During one week in 1971, roughly half of the radio

broadcasts were in French, a quarter in Hindustani/Bhojpuri<9>, a seventh in English and the rest in various minority languages (Baker 1972:25). I have no exact material from 1986, but the proportion of Kreol, absent altogether in 1971, is today between 5 and 10%, while the proportions of French and Bhojpuri have decreased slightly. On television, Baker reports (*ibid*.), 51% of the broadcasts were in English, 41% in French, 6% in Hindustani and the remaining 2% in other languages during the month of March, 1969. During March, 1986, the figures were: 21% English, 62% French, 12% Hindustani, 3% Kreol and 2% in other languages. The stigma of Kreol, «the unofficial national language», as a substandard form of French, is in other words still strong although gradually decreasing. The replacement of English with French as the dominant language has its obvious practical reasons, while the increasing proportion of Hindustani (which is not a language spoken in Mauritius) was immediately caused by the introduction of two weekly Hindustani feature films.

The obvious interpretation of this policy is that French and English are retained as dominant languages in the state media as a symbolic justification of power on the part of the actors in decisive positions. French and English are here exhibited as the natural linguistic codes of universal communication, and thus implicitly linked to the presumably universalist intentions of the men in power capable of using them. French and English are the only languages used e.g. in parliament, and are being reproduced symbolically as necessary knowledge in successful careering.

Printed media are owned by individuals, by political parties or by religious organisations. With the Maoist weekly *Lagazet Lalit* in Kreol and the two Mandarin/French/English dailies as the only current exceptions (late 1986), they are massively published in French, but most of them print the occasional article in English or in an «ancestral language». The two leading dailies, owned by non-corporate aggregates of individuals, have an overt policy of detached disinterestedness, while the remaining press to a greater or lesser extent, overtly or tacitly, addresses itself to chosen segments of the population, whether singled out on an ethnic/religious basis or not.

The «power of the mass communication media» can be described as an ability to *define fields and modes of discourse*, and their immediate importance is probably enormous in the ambiguous Mauritian minefield. As I have already argued, a particular alignment of interests is not the immediate result of a set of practices; rather, it is being produced in interpretative mediations of practices; in the production of meaning. In this perspective, media, whether loyal or non-loyal to the relevant structures of power, play a part in generating the practices intended to maintain or change these structures; simultaneously they are themselved strongly influenced by the same structures (property and political power). This holds true whether on a national, ethnic or local scale.

* * *

The following case, illustrating some of the points made above, deals with a radical priest who was accused as a communist and defended as a communalist.

Père Diard was a French Catholic priest who had worked in Mauritius for several years. In March, 1986, his permit of work and residence expired, and it was not renewed by the authorities. This caused a great public scandal, lasting about two months — fading out in the press several weeks after Diard had left Mauritius.
The government's explanation was this: Monsieur Diard had been preaching among the workers of the EPZ, encouraging them to organise in unions. He had associated with the leftish Christian organisation LOAC (*Ligue Ouvrier d'Action Chrétienne*). This had been known for a while. Now, Diard had recently been instrumental in organising an illegal strike at several factories in Petite Rivière. This was a threat to the stability of the country and could not be accepted. «If I had gone to France and done what Diard did here, I'd have been evicted immediately,» said Prime Minister Jugnauth on television.
The diocese of Port-Louis quickly condemned the decision publicly, and thought it outrageous that Diard should be considered a communist

(understating that had he indeed been a communist activist, it would have been correct to evict him).
It never became quite clear what Diard had actually done; contradictory versions from different factory owners, workers and politicians appeared in newspapers and periodicals. It is clear, however, (a) that it had something to do with workers' rights, (b) that he claimed these rights on behalf of all workers, not only the Christian ones.

From the first, there was a strong tendency that Diard was defended by Christians *as an ethnic*. Reporters of the influential weekly *La Vie Catholique*, Coloured columnists in best-selling *Week-End*, and other prominent journalists discussed the case without directly implying that the case was one of ethnic conflict. Some cried out about «authoritarian measures» without specifying. On government controlled radio and TV, the case was regularly commented, but from a perspective favouring national unity and stability, not defining the conflict as an ethnic one.
In the village where I was staying at the time, a fishing village heavily populated by Creoles, people nearly unanimously held that Diard was evicted «because he was a Christian». Many Hindus thought so, too. Only in one household of my acquaintance, a Hindu teacher's family, was it argued that Diard's being a Christian could hardly be a satisfactory reason to evict him. «Probably he engaged in illegal activities,» the teacher said, «and the same thing would have happened to an Indian pundit doing the same thing.»

Linking the case to our social fields, we see that: Diard set about to work in field iii, his activities were then perceived as harmful in field iv, the government (field v) applied authorising power to neutralise the effects, and the case was referred and discussed in field vi, from where lay people received all their information about it, forming the premises for their discussions in fields i and (particularly) ii. Now, the unity of interests between fields iv and v is apparent. Notwithstanding the fact that many politicians have personal interests in the EPZ, they

collectively support the interests of the capitalist economy sanctioning their power and justifying their policies.

The re-definition of the issue, from one of communism to one of communalism as it were, clearly took place in fields i-ii, but this could probably not have come about without the agency of journalists in field vi, without whose participation many people would never have learnt of the case at all. Virtually none of the articles dealing with the Diard case directly accuses the government of communalism, however. Some (particularly in *La Vie Catholique*) accuse it for being anti-Christian, but at the same time linking Christianity with universal humanism, i.e., the form of socialism Diard was believed to represent. In most of the written material circulating at the time, the conclusion that Diard was primarily a radical seems, to the outsider, just as likely as the conclusion that he was a Christian. The fact that most Mauritian Catholics perceived Diard primarily as a Catholic rather than as a champion of social justice, exemplifies the pragmatic primacy of ethnic identity/membership; community overruling class in this case, and it is true that virtually any political issue is immediately interpreted (or re-interpreted) by ordinary people as dealing with ethnic conflict rather than with any other conflict in society. Yet there is no obvious link between such an interpretation of the situation *in this particular instance*, and people's perceptions of their own utilitarian interests.

*Language in ethnicity*

An examination of the language issue in Mauritius will bring us closer to an appreciation of the actual forms of organisation involved and their underlying values, and it also brings us towards a preliminary understanding of different types of actions relating to ethnicity.
The ways in which ethnic identity and organisation are linked to language are many and complex. As briefly noted already, the number of languages in use in Mauritius is very high whereas their respective uses differ greatly and crucially. Language is, above all, an obvious,

normatively charged marker of ethnicity, which is convincingly demonstrated in the discrepancy between what many people *claim* they do, and what they actually *do* when it comes to speech acts in the widest sense.

The Catholic priest Henri Souchon, titling his contribution to a conference on language and society<10> «The Myth of 15 Languages for a Population of One Million» (Souchon 1982) aptly characterises the ambiguity of the situation. In his brief paper Souchon elaborates on former typologies of languages, and finally divides Mauritian languages into four categories; I follow his basic scheme in Table 5 on next page.

Since Kreol is by far the most spoken language in Mauritius regardless of ethnic, language is not used as a marker of ethnic distinctiveness in daily situations. Dialectal variations within Kreol are linked with age and degree of urbanisation rather than with ethnic. Instead, collectivities representing individuals will emphasise the importance of their own ethnic's bonds with their ancestral languages, sometimes to the extent of falsifying given facts. This discourse takes place in fields v and vi and ramifies into the local fields.

The percentages in the table refer to figures from the latest population census (1983). As the census was carried out as a questionnaire survey, the figures accumulate individual statements as to what language they and their ancestors spoke, and these social facts are not entirely coterminous with the historical and empirical facts.

The concept «ancestral language» is an elusive one, and in practice it replaces the former census category «ethnic membership». Ethnics are now officially banished, and to a great extent, statements about ancestral languages are to be understood as statements about ethnic membership.

| *Language* | *Maternal* | *Ancestral* | *International* | *Ritual* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arabic | N 0.2% | N 7% | Y | Y |
| Bhojpuri | Y 20.4% | Y 19% | N | N |
| Cantonese | N | Y | N | N |
| English | N 0.2% | N 0.2% | Y | Y |
| French | Y 3.7% | Y 3.5% | Y | Y |
| Gujerati | N | Y 0.2% | N | N |
| Hakka | (Y) 0.6% | Y 2% | N (Y) | |
| Hindi | N 11.5% | N 23% | Y | Y |
| Hindustani | N | N Y | N | |
| Kreol | Y 54% | Y 29% | N (Y) | |
| Latin | N | N N | Y | |
| Mandarin | N | N Y | Y | |
| Marathi | (Y) 1.3% | Y 2.2% | N (Y) | |
| Sanskrit | N | N N | Y | |
| Tamil | (Y) 3.6% | Y 7% | N | Y |
| Telegu | (Y) 1.6% | Y 2.6% | N (Y) | |
| Urdu | N 2.5% | Y 5.8% | N | N<11> |

**Table 5. Languages in Mauritius.**

Sources: Mauritius 1984, vol. II, tables 19 and 20 (percentages), Souchon (1982), Baker (1972), Stein (1983), Ramdoyal (1977), own field material.

*Comments*

(1) In fact, Kreol is casually spoken by much more than 54% of the population. — Perhaps the term «mother tongue» is ill chosen, for indeed, many Indo-Mauritians speak Bhojpuri with their mother and

Kreol with everybody else. Be this as it may; the somewhat spurious linking of Kreol («Creole») with the Creole ethnic, and the much less spurious assumption that Kreol began as a slave language, is one factor discouraging non-Creoles to advertise the fact that Kreol is, in fact, their maternal tongue. Before the census, further, religious and ethnic organisations ordered their followers to fill in the census forms in a way enhancing ethnic interests. Instructions were given from religious or otherwise ethnicist bodies (from field v), through vertical religious and para-religious channels in order that information be available in field ii; outside mosques and temples, through *baitkas* and *madrassahs*, and in mass media (field vi).

(2) An example of an ethnic minority organisation anxious that the cultural identity it embodies continue to be recognised, is the National Telegu Federation, which represents some 2.7% of the total population, virtually all Kreolophones. Their newspaper advertisement reads as follows (*in French!*):

**NATIONAL TELEGU FEDERATION**

> All Telegus of Mauritius are asked, as regards the new population census,to write in the columns 11-12-13:
> *Telegu - Telegu - Telegu*.

Thank you. (From Hookoomsing 1986:124)

The columns in question are those dealing with, respectively, religion, ancestral language and language currently spoken.
Obviously, if all Telegus had in fact been casual speakers of Telegu, this advertisement would not have been necessary. Noting that only some 60% of the Mauritians of Telegu ancestry actually did fill in the last column as asked, we find it tempting to suggest that (a) some

interviewers did not take answers at face value<12>, and/or (b) some of the people in question followed values different from those of their organisation: they allowed an identity different from the ethnic one to overrule the latter. The second assumption is not valid. Ethnic identity can be maintained despite the recognised disappearance of linguistic difference. The fact is that virtually all the Telegus of Mauritius stated that their *ancestral* language was Telegu. This means that even those of Telegu origin who admitted being Kreolophones remained self-ascribed carriers of Telegu cultural identity. For when does an ancestral language cease to be an ancestral language? Three generations after it was last spoken within the family? Five generations? Ten? A hundred? — It does when members of an ethnic cease to regard themselves as such, i.e. when the ethnic ceases to exist. If those Mauritians whose forefathers were Telegus start to claim Kreol as their ancestral language, they will have acquired a Mauritian identity overruling the ethnic one. Why don't they?

The Telegu are a small minority within the larger Hindu ethnic, and most of them are rural; smallplanters and labourers. Politically, the Telegus are believed to vote with the governing MSM party. Ritually, they share many practices with the Tamils and have a related ancestral language, but there has been no spectacular revival of Telegu traditions. The leadership of the Dravidian League of Mauritius is strongly dominated by urban Tamils, and there can be no comparison between the level of participation in the respective festivals of Tamils and Telegus. The Tamils have a strong urban base and many wealthy members (notably merchants in Port-Louis), and several leading politicians. The Telegu have none of this (there is one Telegu MLA, but he must be considered something of an exception). So why, then, was it so important to the Telegu pundits that their lay brethren state that they spoke Telegu daily? The answer has a practical and a symbolic aspect; one relating to utility, one to meaning. First, the Telegu leaders would never have encouraged maintenance of their identity as discrepant unless they believed that this could endow them with greater power than they would have had, had they allowed their discreteness to disappear into greater Hinduness. This hypothesis is

plausible enough in a global context where the rights of ethnic minority groups are unofficially recognised in fields v and vi. A Mauritian interest group has an unspoken right to more power the larger the number of adherents it can credibly claim. Second, it is in the utilitarian interest of the Telegu leaders to maintain genealogies and recognition of kinship as intact as possible. As I have repeatedly shown, nepotism is a major form of communalism. Should their mutual recognition of closeness disappear, it wouldn't follow that the individual Telegus approached any other ethnic taxonomically, and they would as a result end up in a situation similar to that of the Creoles in the labour market: with no self-sustaining «safety net», no networks facilitating social mobility and securing employment.
If this explains why the Telegu Federation (functioning in field v) encouraged people to overcommunicate the cultural content of their ethnic identity, it cannot explain that over half of the Telegus of Mauritius, most of them rural workers and their families, falsely stated that their casual language was Telegu. Surely, from their own perspective, this could not improve their or their children's job opportunities? No, it is much more likely that they did it in order to communicate their cultural identity (i.e., the symbolic aspect of ethnicity) to others and to themselves: to the interviewer they did not want to admit not being capable of speaking their ancestral language; to themselves they felt ashamed about it. There is no reason to believe that they replied like they did for purely utilitarian reasons.

(3) In Emrith's *The Muslims in Mauritius* (1967), acknowledged by Muslim organisations as authoritative, no mention whatsoever is made of Arabic as an important language to Mauritian Muslims. In the 1972 Census, *nobody* referred to Arabic as their ancestral language: The entire Islamic community still overtly recognised the Indian subcontinent as their ancestral country, and Urdu was still the ancestral language. Today, the Muslims, erroneously believed to act very corporatively in political matters, are split in several factions on the language issue. 7% have redefined their own history and now claim their ancestors spoke Arabic, 5.8% stick to Urdu, and the remaining

4% are probably distributed over Kreol, Bhojpuri and Gujerati. (In fact, the large majority of the ancestors of Mauritian Muslims spoke Bhojpuri.) The turn towards Arabic is (a) an expression of a wish to participate in the pan-Islamic movement, (b) part of a strategy to create employment for Mauritian Muslims in OPEC countries, and (c) a qualitative «improvement» of one's own cultural identity. No social prestige is associated with links to Pakistan, whereas the Arab part of the world is of increasing geopolitical importance (since the early 1970's) <13>.

(4) Among the Sino-Mauritians, a surprisingly high number state Kreol as ancestral and currently spoken language alike. Indeed, Mandarin is possibly more widely read than Hindi, as there are two dailies in Mandarin and none in Hindi currently appearing in Mauritius. (Of course, every major religious group has its occasional journal, but none is edited exclusively in an ancestral language.) Why is this? Obviously, the Sino-Mauritian strategy is fundamentally different from that of the Hindus and Muslims. Numerically weak but economically strong, the «Jews of Mauritius» undercommunicate their ethnic identity in public, by claiming Kreol as a first language. In fact, this practice makes it virtually impossible to identify the Sino-Mauritian ethnic in the census. Altogether, some 21,000 Mauritians state a Chinese language as their ancestral one; this amounts to only some 65% of the Sino-Mauritians. The rest cannot be identified with reference to religion either as they are Catholics like the General Population. Clearly, the strategic option chosen by a growing number of Sino-Mauritians is Mauritian nationalism. As an economic elite, they have everything to lose in democratic communal competition. It is in their immediate interest that the recognition of the existence of ethnics be undercommunicated, the «Jews of Mauritius», the Sino-Mauritians further fear the very possible advent of anti-Chinese sentiment. In a social context where national identity is more important than ethnic, nobody need pay attention to the fact that many of the nation's important businessmen are of Chinese descent. Simultaneously, the Sino-Mauritians efficiently reproduce their organisation and cultural traits *internally*, with a material base in the Chinatown of Port-Louis. This is where the various organisations

with Chinese connotations (many of them bearing «neutral» names) are based; it is where clans meet, Sino-Mauritian newspapers are printed *and* distributed (I have *never* seen any of them outside this quarter), and where the signs of shops are in Chinese — many of the shops specialising in imported goods from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China. Roughly half of the Sino-Mauritians live in Port-Louis; the atmosphere of the Chinese quarter (where less than half of these live) has a strong Chinese flavour, whereas the Chinese cultural element is virtually absent elsewhere in public Mauritius. The strategy is, then, to remain as invisible as possible externally (to keep out of politics), and to reproduce ancestral culture and forms of organisation intensely internally. The parallels to diaspora Jews are striking (cf. e.g. Epstein 1978:64, quoting a New York rabbi: «For our own part, we are Israelites in the Synagogue, and Americans elsewhere.»).

(5) It should further be noted that the Creoles do not collectively at the moment emphasise their African ancestry: virtually nobody stated that their ancestral language was Malagasy, or Wolof, or even «African» (the latter being an option in the census forms). Their history as an ethnic begins with slavery. But the example of the Muslims shows that it need not be so, and changes in the Creole representation of their own history and thus their communal identity may be imminent. A very low proportion of the Creoles state that French is their ancestral language, although many are of mixed phenotype.
Hookoomsing (1986:126) finds a high correlation between ancestral language and religious inclination in the census figures. The Hindu ethnics display a nearly one-to-one relationship; Kreol is slightly overrepresented vis à vis Christianity; the case of Islam has been referred above; finally, there are apparently many more descendants of speakers of Chinese languages than there are Buddhists. In fact, most of the Sino-Mauritians are today officially Catholics.

In sum, differences in the ethnics' mode of internal organisation are reflected in the strategies adopted in the population census. The Hindus tend to overcommunicate the Indian-ness of their culture, and the

Hindu sub-ethnics stick to linguistic markers of distinctiveness<14>; the Muslims are drifting from a Pakistano-Mauritian to an Arabo-Mauritian identity; the Sino-Mauritians undercommunicate their distinctiveness, whereas the Creoles and Franco-Mauritians have no corporate strategies at all.

*Religion in political and cultural ethnicity*

—Sakenn pe prie dan so fason.
(Each prays in his own way.)

Mauritian proverb

Statistically, religious diversity in Mauritius is, if anything, even more confusing than linguistic diversity. In the 1983 Census, 87 different religions were recorded in a population of a million. As in the case of language, differences that make a difference are much less than 87 in this respect too. In significant organisational contexts, only three major religions are relevant: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Besides, religious symbols are invested in politics in pretty much the same fashion by adherents of these three — although the *meaning-content* of the religions naturally varies.

Before arriving in Mauritius, I asked myself a question later to be discarded as naïve and misleading: I wondered how it could be possible for an actor to maintain sincere belief in a particular religious doctrine, granted that the surroundings offered a multitude of alternatives, visibly proven cognitively viable to their adherents. Of course, this way of posing the problem was quite beside the point and typical of an European intellectual. Actors do not conventionally subject their representations to systematic and critical scrutiny, nor do they endorse meta-views such as the one insinuated<15>. Their representations are

located in the «body» as well as in the «mind»; a «culture» is as present in the mind of the fisherman as in the mind of the religious leader...and contradictions between representations and practices are significant aspects of social reality (cf. Holy/Stuchlik 1983). Being «Christian» does not imply that one regrets every act of adultery; it doesn't even necessarily mean that one relates to the Holy Trinity in any particular way. In Mauritius, the more important cultural differences have to do with *lifestyles* and *patterns of careering* — and these aspects of ethnicity are much more potent in creating conflict than mere religious belief. What makes a Hindu despicable to the Creole is not the fact that he attends ritual in the temple rather than the church, but the «fact» that the former is a miser with no understanding of the «real qualities of living».

## Religious pragmatism

As a rule, Mauritians relate pragmatically to religious belief and practice — whether one's own or someone else's — in non-competitive contexts. A string of examples will serve to illustrate this.

—Historically and presently, an aspect of Franco-Mauritian cultural distinctiveness consists in their patronising contempt for the Creoles. However, Francos and Creoles belong to the same religion (Christianity) — even the same denomination (Roman Catholicism). In order to accentuate their superiority, many Franco-Mauritians have increasingly turned towards strongly traditionalist forms of Christian practice (performing Mass in Latin, for instance); forms of ritual perceived as elitist by the Mauritian population and, notably, perceived as snobbish by the average Creole. Among the Creoles themselves, on the other hand, the last decade has seen the development of a local form of «liberation theology»: young Creole priests are important inspirators for the labour movement in the EPZ, and the organisation *Ligue Ouvrier d'Action Chrétienne*, which has been mentioned above,

is led by Creole priests, and perceived as belonging to the extreme left politically.
When political elections are approaching, however, the cultural unity of the different segments of the «General Population» is stressed by campaign leaders, and the symbolic focus of the unity is, besides the French language, Christianity.

— Tamils tend to stress the differences between their «Dravidian» brand of Hinduism and the «Aryan» practices. The structural conditions for this overcommunication of cultural difference can be located to the labour market (actors in field iv) and politics (actors in field v), where they compete as different ethnics. Marathis originating from the Bombay area, although their ritual equally differs from mainstream Bihari forms. The Marathis do not act as a separate ethnic group politically.
The split between traditional Sanatanism and reformist Arya Samajism has not led to separate political organisations, although the differences in *beliefs* are here much more radical than in the other cases.

— Large numbers of Tamils, and later Sino-Mauritians, have converted *en masse* to Christianity because this at the time seemed strategically profitable. (Until recently, only Christians have been entitled to certain positions in the civil service. A Hindu girl was refused a scholarship in 1948 because she was pagan...)

Flow of «cultural stuff» between religions

Granted that we now tentatively consider religion as a social «sphere» (and not as an aspect of any patterned action), we may turn to the points of conjecture between them; that is, the flow of information (embedded in practices) across the ethnic boundaries. This communication and modification of practices does not necessarily lead to the breakdown of boundaries, but it does — as earlier stated — change their meaning.

The extremities in inter-religious contacts are, apparently, physical violence and rational discourse. The former is exemplified in the riots of the late 60's, but below, I argue that the riots were not of a religious nature at all). The latter was demonstrated to me at a tea party where a Franco-Mauritian intellectual had invited a Muslim imam to compare their respective religions rationally; neither was convinced, and the event seemed strangely atypical of Mauritian inter-ethnic relations.
The common attitude to religious diversity can be summarised in the «oecumenical» proverb *Sakenn pe prie dan so fason*. «Syncretism» is fairly common, particularly in the towns — and it is tacitly accepted by «purists». The flow of information across religious boundaries may take many visible forms, among which are the following.

—In later years, increasing numbers of Creoles have participated actively in the annual, spectacular Tamil *Cavadee* festival.

—Sino-Mauritians, most of them nominally Catholics, celebrate both the Christian and the Chinese New Year. They perform most of their rituals in church, but on certain occasions, they solemnly enter the pagoda in Port-Louis.

—Hindu ladies observed at Christian Mass in a south-western village replied, when asked, that they certainly remained religious Hindus. They did not seem to understand my question about contradicting religious practices.

—Recently converted Tamil ladies, of whom there are quite a few in Stanley near Rose-Hill, always take their sandals off when entering church, sometimes even sacrificing bananas to Christian shrines. Both practices originate from low-caste Hindu ritual.

—An unknown, but probably enormous, number of Mauritians (mostly Hindus and Christians) turn to witchdoctors (*bann longanist*) when confronted with certain personal problems, although the witchdoctors represent a cosmology unacceptable within any «Great Tradition».

Significantly, Hindu and Creole *longanist*s share most of their practices and representations, which are partly of African origin (or so is at least claimed), and which contain discernable European occult, Christian, and Hinduist elements<16>.

And yet — despite this striking interchange of symbolism and substance between religions, there is virtually no public discourse about religious differences. Seewosagur Ramgoolam's warning that religion ought not to be a topic of inter-ethnic discourse, remains valid. Breach of this informal rule may have dramatic consequences. In 1984, the entire staff of the Libyan Embassy in Port-Louis were given 48 hours to leave Mauritius. The causes for the expulsion remain unclear, but it is known that the Libyans initiated a certain missionary activity among Christians in eastern Port-Louis; perhaps the people in question were paid money to convert to Islam. The strong official reaction to this indicates that religion remains a strong symbolic carrier of sectional interests. The government's reasoning was that if a sufficiently large number of Christians converted to Islam, the precarious ethnic equilibrium of Port-Louis (and of Mauritius as such) might have been upset, and the outcome would be unpredictable and possibly disastrous. — Recall also the popular focus on religious aspects of the Diard case. It was not the content of the religion as such that was at stake, but the sectional interests of Christians (notably Creoles).
If one investigates people's religious representations closely, one will find that they do not differ dramatically, and moreover, that they are very inaccurate. A Hindu need not know the first thing about the Vedas.

To attack others for subscribing to a different religion, then, is an expression of disagreement over a different issue, generally this amounts to competition over scarce goods. Had this not been so, it would have been self-contradictory for gangs of Hindus to violate mosques and churches (which in fact happened during the late 60's);

the fact that Hinduism is a «tolerant» religion does not make «tolerant» people of Hindus.

The riots before and after Independence had, on the face of it, religious difference as their main premise. The groups fighting in the streets of Port-Louis were exclusive religious groups, consisting of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. They attacked each others' places of worship, and a fair number of people were killed «because of their religion». As most Mauritians are aware today, this description of the events is misleading.

There was strong disagreement in the Mauritian population over the issue of independence (in the event, 44% voted against independence). The Franco-Mauritians and Creoles in particular feared that independent Mauritius would rapidly be transformed into Little India; that cultural bonds with France would be broken, and that the Franco-Mauritians and Coloureds would lose their privileges. Notably, the Franco-Mauritians feared the nationalisation of sugar estates<17>.

The sixties saw a strong ethnic polarisation; among other things a short-lived Tamil party and a somewhat more viable Muslim party emerged. There was social tension, heated political rhetoric, and outbreaks of ethnic violence. The Coloured politician Gaëtan Duval made statements to the effect that every woman would be compelled to wear a saree in independent Mauritius. It is said that Muslim men grew beards in this period to avoid being mistaken for Hindus, etc. Throughout, *religion* was the criterion of allegiance.

But religion, seen as a system of symbols and beliefs, has no direct relation to power, be it allocative or authorising. Around Independence, as in any other dramatic period in Mauritian history, religion was exploited as a symbolic carrier of sectional interests. Religious symbols acquired new meanings directly connected with representations of power. This «religious phenomenon» has actually nothing to do with the «syncretist» ladies who took off their sandals before entering church. Had there not been religious differences — and all other things being equal — one would have found another criterion for group membership, granted that the issue was entirely a non-religious one.

The large-scale social significance of religion in Mauritius today, viewed as a single multi-ethnic system of action, consists in its capacity as an unofficial criterion for the distribution of certain scarce commodities. It is by no means the only criterion; it forms part of a cultural «package» (Peter Berger's expression) which we may label ethnicity. Since social relations in a society like Mauritius are pervaded by notions of «us vs. them», religion tends to be subsumed under the more encompassing heading of ethnicity. Incidentally, religions are not taught in public Mauritian schools; therefore, *language* is a more relevant locus of competitive inter-ethnic discourse.

Religious «syncretism» has been dealed with as a visible manifestation of the flow of information across ethnic boundaries. The socially most significant form of syncretism is not the «mixing of religious beliefs and practices», but their replacement by a competing, more universalist symbolic system, i.e. nationalism. Religion promotes cultural integration, but contrary to the Medieaval Church, the religions of Mauritius potentially — and actually — represent exclusive and excluding forms of integration. This is becoming a problem today, now that Mauritius is scheduled to become a nation.

In anticipating a later theme (cf. chapter 5), we may remark that nationalism is currently about to replace a part of the meaning-content of the religions; as a cognitive bridgehead out into the world, a system of differences enabling the actor to relate meaningfully to the world and to act relevantly in it. If this nationalist strategy proves successful, organisational aspects of religion, as have been focussed on in this section, will lose much of their relevance. On the other hand, the meaning of religion as an inventory of replies to certain metaphysical questions need not be affected<18>.

*Organisation and identity*

Thus far, I have written comparatively much about ethnic *strategies* and little of ethnic *identity*. Indeed, if I had limited my analysis to social fields iv-v (and, to a more limited degree, field vi), where

decisions with importance for a large number of people are taken, Abner Cohen's rash statement about ethnicity being equal to certain forms of political organisation would have appeared accurate. On this level of scale, individual action-sets are spatially wide and theoretically single-stranded in character. Networks reproduced on this level are by definition problem-orientated in content; in other words, they would not have existed had their purpose not been defined from the outset, their functioning as means. The dominating type of action is goal-rational (*zweckrational* in Weber's and Schütz' terminologies).

But these processes, often depicted as manipulation of symbols, acting in order to maximise profit etc. presupposes the reproduction of shared meaning. At its simplest this denotes the need for agreement about what is to count as value. Common rules for conduct, codes of signification, and shared norms — in brief, what Schütz (1979) labels social *Relevanzstrukturen*, are vital for there to be any «negotiation» or competition at all. Agreement is prior to disagreement, whether chronologically, logically or as a potential inherent in the concept of disagreement. Negotiation and competition take over where shared *Relevanzstrukturen* stop.

Tönnies (1912, § 10) remarks that *Gemeinschaft* relations are prior to *Gesellschaft* relations. This means that action sets of vague mutual obligation («generalised reciprocity», cf. Sahlins 1972) are more fundamental than those overtly contractual («balanced reciprocity»), the former providing the cultural content and the social frame of intersubjectivity necessary for the latter to be meaningful, i.e. possible.

In its external relation, the organisation interacts, through its representatives, goal-rationally in competition with other actors (individuals or collectivities) to maximise certain scarce values, whether tangibles (such as wealth) or non-tangibles (such as cultural continuity).

Internally, seen from the member's perspective, the collectivity provides an external point of meaningful reference enabling himself to locate himself in a position, stable through time and solid in space, somewhere in the endless universe. If any form of ethnic organisation did not have this property, it could never have come about. This seems

obvious enough (and some would think it tautological). But in my discussion of Creole cultural identity below, my aim is also to exemplify that abundance of shared meaning is not sufficient to create an ethnic *group*, although it has in this case proved sufficient in the reproduction of a remarkably stable ethnic *identity*. In other words, the ethnic identity is here being reproduced without the agency of an interest group.

## CREOLE IDENTITIES

> «You run on *ahead*? — Do you do so as a herdsman? or as an exception? A third possibility would be as a deserter....*First* question of conscience.»
>
> —Nietzsche

As an «ethnic», the Creoles are different from the others in that they do not in any meaningful sense constitute an ethnic *group*. Their difficulties of organisation have already been mentioned. In this section, I consider ambiguities of their cultural *identity*.

The *word* «creole» is still a matter of pseudo-academic controversy in Mauritius. Notwithstanding its additional meaning as <a> language(s), definitions of «a creole» range from /anybody born in an island/ to /a White born in a colony/. In Reunion next door, «Creole» is still widely used about White Frenchmen born in the island, as opposed to «Zoreils» — those born in metropolitan France. Blacks are referred to as «Cafres/Cafrines», Coloureds sometimes as «Creoles bruns». In Mauritius, «Creole» conventionally refers to Christians who do not claim European or Asian ancestry; this includes Blacks<19> (of largely

African ancestry), Coloureds (of mixed origins), «Chinese-Creoles» and Christians of Tamil descent whose families converted and changed their names several generations ago. In other words, the term «Creole» inevitably denotes a *residual category*, whose members have language and religion in common, but who do not usually perceive themselves as a group.

Today, there is no unambiguous *phenotypical* difference between Blacks and Coloureds, although there is an obvious correlation between skin colour and standing in society. One may well be pitch black and yet be a member of the exclusive *gen de couleur* Racing Club of Rose-Hill; one may belong to the poorest category of fishermen in the obscurest village in the south-west and yet have fair skin — I know examples of both. This does not mean that the actual colour has no significance whatsoever, but its empirical importance can be proven to be much less than actors tend to believe. Skin colour, which is often the first personal characteristic a Creole notices when encountering another, is the most basic «grid» category (Douglas 1978) or principle of internal classification within the ethnic, but it always operates together with other criteria. The terms «Black» and «Coloured» as applied in this section refer exclusively to socio-culture<20>.

The main division within this untidy category of people, comprising some 28% of the Mauritian population, is based on differences in *lifestyle*: Coloureds belong by definition to the middle class and Creoles to the working class. Due to certain features of (i) Creole culture and local organisation, and (ii) the conventional pattern of careering among Coloureds (or Creoles turning into Coloureds: cf. below), the discontinuity between the two, when it develops in actual ongoing processes, severes more social links than the case would be within any other ethnic. Insofar as the class discontinuity is already present, the two categories have little mutual contact although it must be emphasised that exceptions seem to grow more frequent currently.

The Blacks are by far more numerous than the Coloureds; the latter probably numbering some 30,000 people of a total of some 280,000.

The Rev. Patrick Beaton (1977 <1859>) describes his perception of the Black ethos in noting that the Mauritian negro was «plump, shiny and good-humoured, but devoid of ambition, foresight, honesty and truth» (p.14); he, a Protestant missionary bitter that most Blacks remained Catholic, also complains over their «blind, unreasoning credulity» (p.78). Beaton also notes that

> «The Negro's wants are so few and simple that they could be easily supplied by two days' labour every week (...) and if the poor Negro can make enough to supply his daily wants, he is a philosopher enough to be satisfied. He only labour that he may enjoy with the produce of his labour that *dolce far' niente* which he esteems the highest happiness of which his nature is capable.» (p. 86)

In a slightly different wording, the same passage could have been written last week by a non-Creole Mauritian. In fact, in a recent semi-academic book on Mauritius, the Mauritian non-Creole A.R. Mannick (1979:65-66) distinguishes, like myself, between two categories of Creoles: (a) the Coloureds or *gens de couleur* of mixed European-African-Indian descent, (b) the blacks of African origin. About the latter group he mentions that they «dearly value their independence» and that «some ... still have their original tribal superstitions» (*loc.cit.*). At several points in his book does he make it quite apparent that he considers category (b) the most primitive, least developed segment of Mauritius' population, and this is a widespread notion. An industrialist retorted, when I asked why there was no industry in south-western Mauritius (an area largely peopled with Creoles), that I would never have invested there myself, had I known the people.

The quotation from Beaton, properly interpreted, suggests that central parts of Creole culture have remained virtually unchanged since the abolition of slavery, judging from my own fieldwork in Creole localities and from later written sources (such as Benoit 1985). In

household organisation, on the other hand, there have been marked changes, most of them direct responses to the exigencies of the church and the economic system (cf. Allen 1983). «Matrifocality» has become rare, divorce is rare, and people beget fewer children. These changes on the level of social organisation in field i seem to have had little impact on the *ideational systems* which remain intersubjective among Blacks and which give direction to their actions.

An important value pertains to *friendship between men*. Friendship is here codified in a manner making it an obstacle to social mobility. Friends are constantly obliged to *consume* together, to spend money on each other, in order that their mutual bond perpetually be reconfirmed. This takes the shape of common consumption of alcoholic drinks in the afternoons and on days off, small loans not to be paid back and not to be mentioned, and sharing of various other consumption goods. If a man has money left after he has bought his rice, he is obliged to spend some of it on his friends, whom he meets in field ii every evening. The pressure to spend is enormous, and people have a remarkably accurate knowledge of each other's economic whereabouts. He who drinks from the common bottle without ever contributing is considered a *krever* (a miser); a very unpopular character in Black society; he who saves his money and spends his leisure time with his family becomes an outsider.

Work is considered an evil which should ideally be avoided. Absenteeism is relatively widespread, and is justified with reference to the deeply entrenched value of *individual freedom*, one probably originating in the context of slavery. Allen (1983:10) notes that:

> «Reports by the various district magistrates throughout the 1840s commented repeatedly upon the almost unanimous refusal of the ex-apprentices to return to the sugar estates.»

Labour in the cane fields is still associated with slavery, and a Black should really be in dire need before accepting it.

Freedom is generally perceived as freedom *from* family, spouse and employer; freedom *to* spend the days drinking and playing cards with one's equals. Hierarchies are despised.

*Long-term planning* is accordingly considered a great sin among male Blacks. They acknowledge that planning is theoretically possible; that one has to sacrifice in order to gain in the long run, but their concepts of freedom and friendship forbid them to do so. The proverbially frugal and prudent Hindu is perceived as a fellow who has no sense of the good things in life: «What does a fat bank account help you if you're seventy and have never tasted good whisky?» The stereotypical urban Black gambles at the horse races with members of every other ethnic on Saturdays. If he wins, he spends his money on perishables (clothing, taxi rides and parties for his friends). The degree of success is measured in level of consumption.

These basic values are constantly being reproduced within the locality. In a certain sense, they conflict with the values of field (i), where the housewife has a strong position. The female Black ethos may be described as one of *respectability* (cf. Wilson 1978 for Caribbean parallels): the good woman goes to church and keeps her house and children clean. There is conventionally a tacit agreement between the parties that field (i) belongs to the wife and field (ii) to the husband, and possible contradictions between the respective ethical systems are accounted for in terms of natural differences between the sexes.

As the man (still) is the main breadwinner in most Black households, his economic judgements are decisive. The actors' strong normative emphasis on *immediate returns* implies a temporal structure of short relevant units and a practice which can be reconciled with it. Both the conditions are filled in field (ii), where typical informal social contexts in Black milieux involve the peer group in the bar/the shop, the club and the sports field. The virtual impossibility of saving money follows from the demand of immediate returns, but indeed accumulation of anything at all, be it material or non-material, is very difficult in the short time spans within which Blacks live. *Investment* does not fit into the normative system, and is disapproved of by the «moral community».

Enduring formal organisation is also likely to be absent from Black localities. The religious Père Laval cult has no organisational focal point operating at the locality level; sports organisations are unstable and unpredictable, and political participation is low. The particular form of friendship and the values reproduced through it are parasitic on ambition very much in the same way that the male West Indian cultural reproduction as «crab antics»<21> (Wilson 1978) functions.

The Blacks are not endogamous. When choosing a spouse, the profound hostility against long-term strategies is again evident. Spouses are chosen individually on the basis of personal sympathies; marriages are *not* monitored by elders with the well-being of the kin group in mind. The family structure is flexible; maternal and paternal strands are reckoned equally, and genealogies are shallow and inaccurate. The flux of temporary residents in a household is to a large extent arbitrary; close and distant kin alike may stay a period if necessary, and it is not tactful to ask them for payment.

Blacks are integrated on the kinship level to the extent that they help their relatives in practical and economic matters, but the returns are immaterial: they do not pool money for the children's education or for building a house or buying shares; in the field of *kinship solidarity*, as elsewhere, the principle of immediate returns obtains.

Family boundaries are fuzzy, and so are categorical ones. A steady flow of personnel and information to and from the locality ensures this. Lacking a strong organisation enabling them to act corporatively, lacking a self-assertive culture with its own texts — and indeed, lacking the social and cultural resources necessary to create and reproduce strong boundaries, Mauritian «Creoledom» inevitably diversifies as the lack of compelling and detailed rules for life careers within the Black lifestyle renders its actors receptive to novelty.

Or so it would seem. In fact, the basic community values outlined above are uniformly endorsed by Mauritian Blacks, whether in the fishing village, in the working-class suburb or in the mixed township. Shared representations *not* intrinsically linked with values, on the other hand, exhibit marked variations.

My first period of fieldwork took place in a fishing village, where the structuring of field iii seemed to account for cultural differences between Black Creoles and Hindus. The Blacks were fishermen, and routinely accounted for their slovenly economising by referring to the uncertainty of their work. True, their pay, received daily, varied considerably and if I suggested that they open a bank account, most would invariably reply something like,

> «But hey, *matlo* <fellah>, you don't really mean this. Tomorrow I might make five rupees, the next day perhaps a hundred. There's no point in not spending everything now, 'cause you never know, see? Besides, I might drown tomorrow — what pleasure would this cash give me then?»

The Hindus of the village, most employed by the local sugar estate, received fixed monthly wages and were thus in a position to plan their spendings accurately. A particular form of practice entailed a particular pattern of spending, it appeared. But then, continuing my research among the dockers of north-eastern Port-Louis, I found them to defend the same values of equality, friendship and independence as the fishermen. Interviewing employees on the management level, I was told that the Blacks regularly asked for an advance by mid-month, which the other dockers (Hindus and Muslims) did not. In other words, the Black ethos is being reproduced independent of economic practice.
A description of the dynamics of individual social mobility in the Black community helps explaining how this normative system can be reproduced, despite its apparent disadvantages, in an increasingly competitive society where ethnic organisation has proven a vehicle of careering to members of every other ethnic.

*Social mobility*

As mentioned above, the codification and practical form of friendship are parasitic on ambition. An ambitious Black must therefore change his ethics, and in the same movement, he changes ethnic membership<22>.

He cannot continue to waste his money on drink and snacks, nor to waste his time idling with friends. He will have to sever his ties with the «moral community» dominant in the neighbourhood, and if in a village he will nearly always move out; — both because of ill feeling and because of lack of job opportunities. This also has a basic practical aspect: upon reaching a certain financial position (which doesn't have to mean more than possessing more cash than one intends to spend this instant), the conventional practices of constant sharing become very unprofitable; particularly since one must have regarded them as undesirable in order to reach this position in the first place.

Given the egalitarian ethic, the man who wants to *get somewhere* through education, investment or other conscious careering, is abhorred and sometimes associated with Franco-Mauritian *fierte* (pride). Successful climbers, who thus illustrate the practical permeability of social boundaries, are denounced as *bann snob* (snobs) or *Kreol fer blan* («Creole-make-white»). A man who has always «been somewhere» is accepted. But a Black who tries to improve his social status is, as it were, breaking a law of nature: he is washing off his birthmark.

Individuals who embody an ethic different from the one dominant in Black fields ii will not succeed in converting the others. They are always a minority; they will stop seeing their old friends and eventually leave the locality. The local culture then remains unchanged. The climbers live in town or on the posh seaside, and rarely visit their native home; sometimes they actually severe their ties with relatives still in the village/ghetto. Anxious to be accepted in their new Coloured environment, they now redefine their simple relatives as a shameful vestige of the past. It is also a fact that few Creoles, whether Black or Coloured, enter business in a manner enabling them to employ large numbers of relatives. An informant, a self-defined Black politician, expresses bitterness against the Coloureds who, he claims, could have

helped the Blacks with economic and organisational facilities but have declined to do so.
The dominant Black ethos (cluster of values) is not compatible with social mobility. Rather than be modified, it coexists, unchanged, with the Coloured ethos in a manner largely parallel to the French/Kreol diglossia (cf. pp. 189-196).

*Coloured cultural identity*

Once in western Port-Louis, a light-skinned Creole, whom I knew to be a skilled worker, gave me a lift on his motorcycle. «You a Creole?» I asked. «Yes,» he said. «Not a *gen de couleur*?» I asked. «Nope, *mo enn kreol*<23>». «But your skin is very fair,» I countered. He then turned around and explained that there was no such difference as the one I insinuated. «We're all Catholics, we all go to the same church. See?» «But what about those people in Rose-Hill with all their clubs and nice suits...they're Creoles just like yourself?» «Ah no, *those* people, they're *bann milat* (mulattoes),» he said. In other words, the distinction is definitely not one of «race».

When describing his category «Creoles (a)», the Coloureds, Mannick (1979) largely echoes Baron d'Unienville, who wrote, some 150 years earlier that

> «The freemen <la population libre> not only shares, but possess to an even higher degree, the spirit of vanity for which the Creoles <les creoles> are reproached.»
>
> (D'Unienville 1838:255).

Adapted to our times, this means that the Coloureds (=*la population libre*) represent the same cultural values as the Franco-Mauritians (=*creoles*) but do so to an even greater extent than the latter. Be this as it may, attempts by Coloureds to associate themselves with the Franco-

Mauritians are as ancient as the Coloured community itself, i.e. it begins with the history of Mauritius. In a semi-documentary novel from Mauritius, Alexandre Dumas père describes (1974 <1843>), the struggle of a Coloured gentleman, an owner of many Blacks whom he treated kindly, that he might be accepted in white high society. Drawing on sources from the same period as Dumas wrote, Ramdoyal (1977) notes that the Coloured middle class, fearing its own position, was opposed to the abolition of slavery. Allen (1983: ch. 4) further notes that members of the Coloured population of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century rallied against the colour bar in a very articulate way, many of the island's leading intellectuals already then being Coloureds. They fought for the right to marry Franco-Mauritians, to be admitted to the same schools and buried in the same cemeteries. Allen also notes that the Coloureds were said to have been extremely cruel to their slaves (1983: 98).

The phenotypical and social differences between Coloureds and Blacks, obvious during slavery, have eventually grown less marked, partly as an indirect result of the massive immigration of Indians during the second half of the 19th century. The «real Mauritians» united against the immigrants. There has been much intermarriage and social mobility in both directions, but as noted on several occasions, Black and Coloured culture remain mutually exclusive. They have the Catholic religion and preference for French as a second language in common; this has sometimes been sufficient to align them politically, but in other fields, there is mutual antagonism and crucial cultural discontinuity.

While Blacks are spatially distributed in varying density all over Mauritius, Coloureds are urban. They are particularly numerous in Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill and Quatre-Bornes, half-way between «Black» Petite-Rivière and «White» Curepipe.

Blacks and Coloureds have very different general patterns of careering. None of them have had vested interests in land during this century. As Blacks are manual workers, so do the Coloureds invest in *education*, which along with *cultivated manners* is an important Coloured value. Although few of them state that French is the language they

conventionally use (Mauritius, 1984-6), mastery of the French language is an absolutely necessary qualification for acceptance in Coloured fields ii, such as bars and clubs.

A strikingly high proportion of Mauritian journalists and newspaper photographers are Coloureds; it is fairly easy to get the impression that the entire professions collectively bear the surname Michel. Disproportionally many are also authors, lawyers and high-ranking public servants (although the proportion of the latter is decreasing). It is believed that very many of the Coloureds emigrated to Australia around Independence, fearing the metamorphosis of Ile de France into Little India. The Coloureds, lacking high birth and inheritance, have been dependent on individual merit in careering. This has opened the Coloured community to outsiders (ex-Blacks and earlier, ex-Indians<24>), provided they possess the required qualities. These qualities consist in a particular perception of what is to pass as «real Mauritianity»: the Coloured notion of being the «Real Mauritians», i.e. belonging to the only ethnic that has its *origins* in Mauritius, is very widespread — and has indeed been defended in a recent academic work (Orian/Arno 1986).

Many of the Coloureds lead precarious lives, financially on the bottom rungs of the middle class. Yet their lifestyle is very different from that of urban Blacks with comparable income. They do not spend all their evenings out with friends; they would rather go to their club and buy their own and nobody else's drink — or stay at home with the wife and children. On Sundays, many of them go to Mass, a practice sneered at by the more boisterous Blacks. In general, Coloured culture, whether male or female, is closer to female Black than to male Black culture. *Decency* and knowledge of appropriate European ways are important resources in Coloured culture, thus vaguely but efficiently demarcating itself vis à vis its «poorer cousin».

Coloured clubs are very different from Black ones. The latter are shacks where cards and dominoes are played on an uneven table, while the Coloured *cercles sociaux* are housed in old colonial-style mansions with bar, dartboard and billiards table prominently placed, and further facilities according to its standard. Like the Black clubs, the Coloured

ones are rarely frequented by women (although membership is nowadays in principle open to women). In some of the *cercles* most of the members are public servants, journalists and teachers; in those of better reputation, the proportion of professionals (lawyers, dentists etc) is higher. The clubs periodically arrange lavish balls (with high entrance fees) where style and manners are on show, and literary evenings where intelligence and high spiritual level are displayed. French is naturally the language most commonly spoken (but the members speak Kreol in field (i)); conversation often deals with literature and the dreadful state of the country. Dress, although usually informal, always includes shirt and tie<25>.

Socially, the Coloureds, lacking the genealogies of the Franco-Mauritians and the strong community feeling of the Blacks, present a likely case for massive anomie. Culturally, they have traditionally opted for undiluted Frenchness; in public life they still represent an educated elite although their power in the public sector has diminished since the enfranchisement of Indo-Mauritians from 1948.

The Coloureds' need to dissociate themselves from the Blacks is illustrated in their emphasis on formal ritual, but also in politics. During a recent election campaign in a predominantly Catholic (Coloured/Creole/*petit-blanc*) town ward, a Coloured candidate was introduced like this: «X is a *good* Creole, he's not a silly bugger like Y and Z». Y and Z were both self-defined Blacks (Y was, phenotypically, Coloured) with modest backgrounds and radical inclinations; X was a very fair-skinned and cultivated man with diplomas from Sorbonne.

Caste divides the Hindus in similar ways, but this has not prevented them from organising corporatively, politically or otherwise. In the case of the Creoles, none of their two «complementary» ethical systems enable them to organise. The Black ethos, although collectivist, precludes the endurance of any strategic group, while the Coloured distaste for the «primitive Blacks» presently precludes a pooling of resources. When the two vote for the same political party, they align with Muslims and Tamils against Hindu political hegemony.

But as society changes, so changes the ethnic configuration. Fifty years ago, Indo-Mauritians had no formal political rights. A Coloured medical doctor then founded the Mauritian Labour Party and managed to unite Indian canecutters and Black dockers in moderate class struggle (cf. pp. 81-88). The two next leaders of the Labour Party were also Creoles, but their following was increasingly composed of Hindus with increasing political power and improving internal organisation. Eventually the party's founder left Labour in disgust over the Hindu takeover. Similar processes are common in the history of Mauritius, and so they will doubtless be in the future. All I have argued in this section, is that during the first eighteen years of independence, normative and representational systems inherent in Creole *cultural identities* have worked efficiently *against* the formation of an ethnic *group*.

## NOTES

1. The Aryan ethnic may be broken down into several more or less endogamous sub-groups (see figure, p. 54). This has at the moment little relevance in campaigns for general elections (which Table 1 refers to), although it certainly does in other contexts.

2. In former classifications, Tamils and Telegus (both Dravidian peoples from Southern India) have not been recognised as separate ethnics; they were conventionally included in the Hindu community. Politically, this category is ambiguous. Telegus, descended from indentured labourers, tend to vote with the Hindus, whereas Tamils are divided in rural and urban factions. Rural Tamils are roughly in the same position as the Telegus. A majority of the urban Tamils, on the contrary, belong to higher castes; many trace their family in Mauritius back to the turn of the 18th century when many Tamils arrived as merchants and skilled workers from the French settlement in Pondicherry. They tend to join political forces with the Creoles.

3. There is widespread discontent that the «General Population» has not been broken down into Franco-Mauritians, Coloureds and Creoles; although the three ethnics nowadays are largely thought to vote for the same political parties, they remain discrete in other respects. Be this as it may, there is no clear-cut «boundary» between Coloureds and Creoles; they are perhaps best considered sub-groups of the same ethnic (cf. discussion, pp. 109-124).
There are probably approximately 20,000 Franco-Mauritians (slightly less than 2% of the total population).

4. The Rodriguan electorate, some 15,000 people, largely Catholics, is included.

5. It is sometimes suggested that the real problem of communalism in Mauritius might actually be one of *nepotism*. Nepotism is largely activated in the labour market, in politics and in the national educational system, i.e. on a high level of scale, and it may therefore be argued that nepotist practices, misinterpreted as communalism on lower levels of scale, determine ethnic relations generally. My material suggests that this hypothesis is only partly correct: non-kinship based communalism is also widely practiced on a high level of scale, although nepotism is preferred if available (which is directly implied in the practical application of taxonomic levels).

6. I have this from a very reliable source, but cannot reveal its name nor any details.

7. I followed the first case personally; the second one was described to me by the central character, and reconfirmed by two others.

8. But not always; cf. e.g. caste climbing in India or any other type of successful «grass roots» movement.

9. Baker lists this as Hindustani *tout court*, but I believe most of the transmissions must have been in Bhojpuri.

10. 64 papers were presented at the conference. 9 were in French (six presented by members of the «General Population», three by Indo-Mauritians), the remaining 55 in English. The leftish organisation LPT wished to present their contribution in Kreol, but were denied the right.

52 of the papers were written by Indo-Mauritians (here comprising Hindus, Tamils and Muslims), 11 by members of the «General Population» and 1 by two Sino-Mauritians.

11. Urdu was used in Muslim ritual until the early seventies, when its place was taken by Kreol. Today, it appears that Arabic is gradually becoming the only language of the mosque.

12. I have personally interviewed three census takers; all admitted manipulating with the answers given when they were «obviously wrong».

13. (a) and (b) are the essence of conversations with two imams and a leading Muslim politician, while (c) captures the feelings of the average Mauritian Muslim.

14. This is legitimate in public; caste separatism is not.

15. A method to be avoided is therefore that of certain «cultural anthropologists», interviewing the most knowledgeable of the «natives» in order to develop the fullest, most systematic image of the «culture» in question — and thus avoiding the gruesome task of penetrating social reality in its full, paradoxical richness.

16. A *longanist* of my acquaintance insisted that he was a devoted Christian, and explained the Eucharist as a «ritual designed to purify the atmosphere and to exorcise the *mauvais air* («bad air») from the participants» — an interpretation couched in entirely non-Christian terms and shared by many of the people in the village.

17. In 1968, *one* of the twenty sugar estates was purchased by the Mauritian state.

18. The distinction between levels of meanings indicated here, corresponds to Obeyesekere's (1981) distinction between the *personal* and *interpersonal* meanings of symbols.

19. «Black» is not used as a taxonomic term in Mauritius. People of more or less pure African/Malagasy descent are referred to as *kreol mazambik*

(«Mozambiquan Creole») or *kreol malgas* («Malagasy Creole»), both of which are pejorative. Kinky hair is teasingly described as *seve mazambik*, etc. The terms are most commonly used *within* the Creole ethnic.

20. The symbolic or metonymical qualities of colour were described by the black, blind artist Stevie Wonder in an interview (*Rolling Stone* magazine, 1986). As a boy, he did not *speak* like a Black and could therefore not be identified as one by other blind individuals. At school, a fellow pupil — also blind — once confided that he was happy that Stevie came to their school, «— but there are some black kids here that you've got to watch out for.» The boy reaches out to touch Stevie, and exclaims: «Hey! I didn't know that you had *soul hair*!»

21. The crabs attempt to climb out of the bowl. The edges are slippery, and they climb over each other's bodies. When one has reached the edge, he is being dragged down by the others, also attempting to slip out.
Wilson's metaphor is not a perfect fit, since most Blacks are not, unlike the crabs, climbing up the edges.

22. With apologies to those of my Black friends who have proven me wrong: this remains the rule — they remain the exceptions.

23. In Mauritian usage, «Creole» means what I label «Black Creole».

24. Formerly, conversion to some variety of Christianity was a great asset in individual carreering. According to Tinker (1977) there is «reason to suppose that Dr Laurent [leader of early 20th century Mulatto political group *Action Libérale*] was partially Indian by origin» (p 327).

25. There are many parallels between the Mauritian Coloureds and the Creoles of Sierra Leone (Cohen 1981), but the former are clearly less successful in the manipulation of symbols to their advantage than are the latter. They're not freemasons either.

# 4. SOME ALTERNATIVES TO ETHNICITY

The present study has so far focussed on the reproduction of ethnicity in the various fields and levels of scale where Mauritian society is reproduced. Partly for this reason, alternatives to ethnic classification, organisation and identity, which are considered in this and in the following chapter, are described *as opposed to* ethnic identity and organisation. However, the «bias» that this implies, is ultimately justified in the fact that Mauritians themselves think, act and classify in a similar way: ethnicity is usually seen as being logically and ontologically prior to its alternatives. Ethnic differences usually make a difference, even in social contexts founded on other differences.

Certainly, a great number of situations incorporating members of different ethnics are accounted for in ways with no exclusive or even important bearing on ethnic differences. As mentioned (chapter 2), personal acquaintances are frequently excepted from stereotypically founded prejudice, and many networks in all six fields are based on a variety of non-ethnic criteria (although the ethnic element usually somehow enters at some point). In the bulk of this chapter, I exemplify how particular groups and individuals in particular contexts strive to defend representations of society as being divided primarily along non-ethnic lines. I describe the most important non-ethnic models as meaning-contexts, and consider particular cases of social organisation and cultural identity along such lines. Apart from the last two sections, on youth clubs and intermarriage, the *zweckrationale* (goal-rational) aspect of action is dominant in all the examples.

Since chapter 5 deals exclusively with nationalism, this most pervasive «alternative to communalism» is not considered here.

## THE CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF NON-ETHNIC MODELS

*Class organisation*

Since the foundation of trade unions during the first decades of the century, and later through political parties, there have periodically been successful attempts to redefine the pervasive conflicts of Mauritian society as based on class rather than community (cf. e.g. Oodiah 1986; Virahsawmy 1978, 1985; Simmons 1982: 52-70). In her political history of Mauritius, Simmons writes:

> «The ethnic divisions between the French, the Creoles, the Hindus, and the Muslims shaped Mauritian society. But just as important were the class distinctions between the elite and the laborers and small planters. (...) Divisions in Mauritius in 1937 were based primarily on class rather than ethnic community, and so was the violence.» (1982: 52,54)

Repercussions from the economic depression of the 1930's struck heavily on countries like Mauritius, little cogs in the great imperial machine. 1936, a year of island-wide popular riots, also saw the foundation of the Mauritian Labour Party/Parti Travailliste Mauricien by the *gen de couleur* medical doctor Maurice Curé. Remarkably,

Curé's two successors to the leadership were both Creoles like himself, although the bulk of the electorate were eventually Hindus and Muslims. After the 2nd World War Curé, worried about the increasing influence of educated Hindus in the upper echelons of the party, changed his position several times vis-a-vis the party he had founded. «Curé did not like the rise of the workers of Indian origin under the leadership of Dr. Ramgoolam», notes Varma (1981), implicitly referring to the constitutional reform of 1948, virtually introducing the one man-one vote system and thus, enfranchising thousands of Hindus and Muslims, «suddenly alter<ing>... the political balance on the island» (Simmons 1982: 103). Curé's concern was shared by his successor, who, in the aftermath of the 1948 election «complained of the tendency of rural voters to select candidates from their own community» (*ibid*.:107):

> «<This tendency> is due to the non-political education of the Indian labourers or to their desire, after all legitimate, to elect Indian representatives instead of candidates of the coloured population or any other community. Even some of the Indian candidates are more conservative than the white Franco-Mauritian conservatives.»
>
> (Emmanuel Anquetil cited in Simmons 1982:107).

Simmons's own comment to the 1948 elections is that «<t>he real victors were the Hindus» (*ibid*.:109).

Dr. Curé, for his part, remained an on-and-off member of the Labour party until the mid-sixties, a period of accentuated communalism presaging the 1967 General Elections (in practice a referendum over independence). At this point he took an open stance against Labour, aligning himself with conservative non-Hindu politicians on a purely communal basis. When the Labour weekly *Mauritius Times* celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Labour Party in March, 1986, the newspaper thus had to admit that the party's founder (who died 1977) had become a «national disgrace» towards the end of his life, and that it

was «difficult to understand» his change in attitude towards the «labour movement».

Curé's political development actually related situationally to the two major principles of social division being reproduced in Mauritius; class and community. During the economic crisis of the 1930's, the main conflict was perceived as being class based. Curé's class rhetoric was politically successful across communities; he, an educated Creole, represented the stereotypical *gen de couleur* intellectual: the go-between. After the constitutional reform of 1947, Curé, worried about the increased Indian influence, oscillated to and fro, uncertain of which conflict to emphasise. Then, during the independence struggle of the 1960's, the basic conflict persuasively presented itself as communal. The conservative Creole politician Gaëtan Duval now threatened that if Mauritius were to be independent, all women would be compelled to wear sarees; he launched the slogan *Malbar nu pa ule* («We don't want Coolies»), and generally exploited communal sentiments to an extreme degree. Curé went along with this, despite the profound political differences between himself and Duval's *Parti Mauricien*.

We now turn to the activation of potential social divisions in independent Mauritius. Despite the short time-span involved (20 years, early 1988) the political barometer has since Independence swung, apparently, from predominantly ethnic politics to class politics and back.

The riots around Independence were, as we have noted (chapter 3), expressed in discourse and action as a question of the ethnic division of power, allocative and authorising. In other words, the riots were ethnically-based, and no ethnic remained collectively neutral. Then, from 1969, the explicitly anti-ethnic MMM party emerged as a major political force forging strong links with trade unions, particularly in Port-Louis (cf. MMM 1985, ch. 1). MMM leaders argued that the Creole dockers and the Hindu labourers had common interests against the Franco-Mauritian «sugar barons» and the growing Hindu state bourgeoisie — and in this they represented virtually a word-for-word repetition of the labour movement of the 1930's. To support the MMM apparently signified a wish to replace communal divisions with class

struggle. The new party represented an alternative to the model of communal conflict; a replacement of the old division with a new division signifying a new social order and a juster society. Can this explain the phenomenal success of the early MMM? Probably not. (For a closer analysis of the development of the MMM, see pp. 60-62 and pp. 180-185). Class divisions are perceived as important by Mauritians, but people also tend to stress their correlations with ethnic ones. In social fields i to iii, people conventionally point to links between economy, political power and ethnic injustice. «*Azordi, tu pu malbar*» is a very common expression among Creoles and Muslims alike («Today, everything belongs to the Hindus») — and they justify their statements by selecting events from fields iv to vi which support it.

One Creole informant, a factory mechanic in eastern Mauritius, showing me around his village, pointed to a large canefield.

> «This belongs to a so-called smallplanter,» he said. «The government has done everything to help smallplanters, they don't pay any taxes or anything. You reckon this *malbar* is a small, poor guy who needs help? *Ayo*, he's the richest bugger in the village!»

In this, he implicitly refers to the government's programme to aid small-planters; furnishing bank loans, relieving them of taxes, etc. And he went on: «What have those people done for us Creoles? Phew!» In fact, the village had many poor smallplanters as well (one of them my friend's closest neighbour). The one example selected for me was a rare case and besides, this man employed many fellow-Hindus, kinsmen and non-kin, at extremely low wages.

The macro-facts are the following: There are 33,000 smallplanters in Mauritius, who among them possess 66,000 arpents of caneland (1 arpent = approximately 1 acre). 70% of them have plots of less than 2 arpents. My informant must have known this; in the *cité* where he lived, there were numerous poor, smallplanter Hindu families. This didn't change his argument. Further, due to the ethnic division of labour in the sugar industry, Creoles have traditionally been better off than the

Hindus in plantation areas — and to a great extent they still are. My informant himself earned about 20% more money than his Hindu neighbours. In other words: Rather than join forces with his Hindu neighbours, against the capitalist structure of ownership, he indirectly supported the Franco-Mauritian «sugar baronies» against increasing rights for Hindu smallplanters.
Later in our conversation, I asked him about the MMM. He replied: «It's a good party. I like Paul. He's one of us. He can tackle the *malbar*. Not like Duval, the bloody traitor.» He refers to Paul Bérenger, the MMM leader, and to Gaëtan Duval, a prominent Creole politician, and who then went into a coalition with the winning Hindu party. Duval's «treachery», then, consisted in collaborating with the traditional enemy (the Hindus). I said: «But there's plenty of Hindus in the MMM?» My informant retorted: «Those belong to the *ti-nasyon* (low castes), so they're not really Hindus, see? Besides, they don't have much of a say with Paul around.» Although the conflict between Bérenger's MMM and Duval's PMSD has fairly consistently been presented (in field vi) as a conflict between socialism and liberalism or, more generally, as «Left« and «Right», this lay voter (and he is far from being the only one) chose his party on a communal basis. As we have seen, the lay voter's model is not consistent with fact: in emphasising Duval's «treachery», he magnifies the glory of Bérenger. (Other working-class Creoles did exactly the opposite.)

Mauritius has no umbrella organisation for its trade unions. On rare occasions, notably during the MMM-led «general strikes» of 1970 and 1979, unions of diverse ethnic composition have briefly collaborated against government policies (field v) and social injustice (monitored in field iv), and in these particular situations, social class was obviously perceived as a much more important variable than ethnicity. «It was fantastic,» said a youngish Hindu informant (now a clerk in Quatre-Bornes, then a transport worker) who had participated in 1979. «It was as if the words *malbar, laskar* and Creole had no meaning any more. We were all united, supporting each other, we knew our unity was founded on a deeper truth than communalism.» Other informants who

also professed to have participated in the strike, less theoretically inclined than this man, stressed the material gain aspect of the multi-ethnic «general strike». «It was necessary; we were miserable. We badly needed better wages,» explained an elderly Creole from eastern Port-Louis. Whatever the «true nature of class struggle», the latter statement seems more representative than the former. For once, union leaders and opposition politicians had succeeded in persuading people that the potential material gain was greater if workers from all communities collaborated in fighting the rich and powerful, regardless of community; than if they put the blame on each other. The fact that the strike was only moderately successful in terms of real material gain on part of the participants, then helps explain why no similar collective action has taken place since. In my field material, there is hardly any indication at all that changes in popular representations of political oppositions derive from models of society different from the zero-sum game, and the values involved are nearly invariably (a) individual prosperity (acquired in field iii, measured in field i, displayed in field ii) and (b) global institutionalisation of own cultural pride, i.e. more power, collectively, to own ethnic in the public arenas of power and discourse (social fields iv, v, vi).

As already noted on several occasions, *definitions of truth, conceptual and normative, are always relative to a particular meaning-context*. Granted that the improvement of one's material conditions is already defined (by the lay actor) as something reminiscent of a competitive zero-sum game, any specific model for action must incorporate an argument that it somehow *plays the game better than* a different model. In other words, during these very encompassing strikes, class conflict was *truer*, as it were, than ethnic conflict. Why is it not usually so?

A tautological (deductive) way of answering this question might be to say that this is because the taxonomies and stereotypes discussed on pp. 53-72 are more frequently and more persuasively reproduced in people's minds, than the model of class divisions depicted in Table 6 and Figure 4 below. And obviously this is perfectly true, but how and why? The Mauritian Left blames the mass media (field vi) and government propaganda (field v). But with a few striking exceptions,

none of the leading Mauritian mass media of the 80's can be said to promote communalism — on the contrary, the large newspapers<1> take great pains to remain neutral. Indeed, newspaper articles and editorials criticising social injustice with no primary communal connotations are much more common than articles criticising communal policies.

The continuous reproduction of the ethnic division of labour (fields iii-iv) is doubtless important here. In order to acquire a job, it is, as we have seen, a crucial asset to know someone in a position to help, whether employer or employee. Insofar as the individual project consists in acquiring and retaining a satisfactory job, it is empirically true that intra-ethnic acquaintances on a vertical axis are much more useful than inter-ethnic ones on a horizontal axis.

The primacy of ethnicity over class is also being reproduced (notably in fields i-ii — situations relating to ritual and pattern of consumption) as *cultural continuity* within any ethnic, across social classes. Despite social differences, people from any community have common mythology and ancestral language, common dietary habits (this at least ideally) and religion. Mauritians in daily intercourse (fields i-iii) are concerned with *lifestyle*, and continuously compare their own lifestyle with that of other ethnics. Ordinary people admire successful people *from their own community* and aspire to share their lifestyle. They find it reasonable that there are rich and poor people, for after all, do they not themselves harbour a secret dream that they might themselves become rich one day? Simultaneously, they do not approve of the way of living of wealthy Others. «Stupid bugger J*** (a successful Hindu),» said an elderly Franco-Mauritian lady during a rather sumptuous dinner party, «he could have had anything he'd like for supper, and there he is — in the kitchen with his fat wife, eating *dholl puri* and *faratha* with his disgusting greasy fingers...» This means that she thought this Hindu's high standard of living a waste of resources; he didn't have the good sense to know how money should be spent. The attitude is commonplace among poor Mauritians too: wealthy people ought to conform to their own lifestyle ideals.

The political success of Gaëtan Duval can largely be understood along this lines. During former election campaigns, he has frequently thrown lavish parties, presenting his (then) working class Creole electorate with large amounts of rum and food. «That's a good Creole,» responds the electorate. «Even if he's rich, he's one of us.» Whatever the contents of his politics, Duval expertly contrasts (hedonist) Creole and (frugal) Hindu lifestyle ideals in his campaigning, accentuating ethnic conflict without a word. Being the only remaining overt Creole communalist in national politics, yet collaborating with the Hindu-dominated government against the MMM, Duval has at the moment (1988) no other option than to state his communalist bias implicitly.

A common saying goes: «If a Creole has ten rupees he spends fifteen, but if a Hindu has ten rupees, he spends seven.» I have known Creoles as well as Hindus to quote this as an argument for the superiority of their own cultural values.

Social differentiation on an ethnic basis thus becomes much less palatable than class differentiation. Every Mauritian knows that both operate, but usually, the former is resented while the latter is accepted. Since Independence, political groups close to the European left have attempted to redefine society as class-based rather than ethnically-based. Their model looks like this:

| EXPLOITERS | AMBIGUOUS/PETTY BOURGEOIS | EXPLOITED |
|---|---|---|
| Foreign capitalists | Lower white-collar | Canecutters |
| Higher white-collar (Fr, H, M) | Petty bourgeoisie | Dockers (Cr) |
| Sugar barons (Fr) | Academics | Misc.workers |
| Rich traders (All but bl.Cr) | Journalists, teachers | Unemployed |
| Industrialists ( » » ») | Doctors, lawyers, priests | |

**Table 6. Classes according to the Mauritian Left**

The failure of this class model of Mauritian society largely results from an underestimation of the importance of cultural identity as meaning first and foremost ethnic («communal») identity:

**Fig. 4. Model of the correlation between class and ethnicity in Mauritius according to the Left.** (After *Revi Lalit* 56, p. 15)

Since 1982, the Maoist party *Lalit*, with its educational organisation *Ledikasyon pu Travayer* (LPT, «Education for Workers»), has been the most vocal spokesman for class struggle in the island. The LPT/Lalit have, during their existence, «done everything its members could to reinforce and even create non-communal societies, such as trade unions, health societies, cooperative schools, funerary societies, local councils, workers' education, parent-teacher committees, women's movement, students' groups, saving schemes, etc.» (*Revi Lalit* 56: 6-7). Most people know something about LPT/Lalit, but few support it. The organisation's lack of popularity is, certainly, in part due to its rhetorical form, invoking a large number of concepts alien to the potential electorate (classical Marxist jargon). But at the same time,

very few of the people I have discussed the matter with are willing to agree with Lalit's postulate of the «ontological» primacy of a class analysis of Mauritian society. «In a way, Lalit may be right,» a typical statement goes, «but it's impossible to go along with this, 'cause we rural Hindus would lose in any case.» In brief, the existence of social classes is widely acknowledged, but class as such is abstractly *unthinkable* removed from community: The informant cited regards himself as being more basically a Hindu than a worker, and whenever he has to choose between the two statuses he tends to choose the former — which is due to his perception of his cultural identity as an aspect of his interpretation of the current zero-sum games. In the discussion of lifestyles and social differentiation above, we noted that the normative aspect of the zero-sum game over material gain was ethnically determined. Since there is no shared and universal working-class culture in Mauritius, uniting Creole and Hindu, rural and urban workers etc. in a habitus, a way of life, the popular socio-cultural basis necessary for the Lalit/LPT ideology to spread is absent, be it as «sensible» (in actors' eyes) as it may.

A final remark on class and ethnicity, somewhat beside the point but somehow significant: Among the very poorest people in Mauritius<2>, ethnic differences have little importance. Intermarriage is frequent, and the quest for daily survival encourages cooperation rather than competition. Besides, the poverty of the people in question sets them apart as a distinctive group; different from moderately wealthy people regardless of ethnic membership. The stigma of utter poverty, then, is an ascribed status stronger than the ethnic status.
Conversely, it is to some extent true that class transcends community among the very rich as well. It is widely known that certain rich Muslim families of Port-Louis entertain links of courtesy and formal friendship with some of the wealthiest Franco-Mauritian families of Curepipe.

*Rural-urban opposition*

Theories of neo-colonialism contrasting town and countryside are not readily applicable to the Mauritian context. Distances are short and the system of public transport excellent for a «Third World» country, and most Mauritians move from village to town and back with ease. Nevertheless, there is a cultural discontinuity between rural and urban Mauritius which cannot readily be accounted for as ethnic in nature. When I was about to leave «my» village in the south-west, the local Creoles warned me against living in a particular Creole quarter in Port-Louis: «many of those townsmen are smart crooks», «there's so many pickpockets in Port-Louis» etc. Not a word was said about the ethnic membership of the «crooks». Within the Hindu ethnic, a more dramatic division obtains: in the countryside, particularly in the north-east, there are people (mostly women) who cannot go alone to town because they, Bhojpuri-speakers, don't master Kreol. Although virtually all under 50 speak Kreol, Bhojpuri is widely used in this part of the island — even, in some cases, in communication between Hindus and Creoles (cf. Stein 1983). It is also widely held (although no solid data exist) that high-caste Hindus tend to live in town and low-caste Hindus in the country. The racial unrest of the late 1960's was largely an urban phenomenon, centred on eastern Port-Louis<3>. Most villages have a mono-ethnic majority, but there are always minorities. Visible ethnic differences are as marked in the country as in town (dress, religion, pattern of consumption), yet fellow villagers are united in their being peripheral. The unity becomes visible when they are confronted with urbanity:

While residing in a coastal village, I once took the bus to Quatre-Bornes with two villagers (one Hindu, one Creole) — our going together was due to my friendship with both; they were not mutual friends. On several occasions in town, they would discuss features of urban life; the shops, the cinemas, the market, the motorcars — and they agreed that life was better in the village (more quiet and safer). They behaved as friends, even paying for each other's drinks. Back in the village, however, there was no sign that a bond had been forged:

the Hindu went to his family and the Creole to his peer group, and they did not subsequently meet independent of my agency (and, under four eyes, they both expressed hostility to the other). In other words: in town, their common status as villagers overruled their discrepant ethnic statuses; whereas it is hardly too bold to assume that had they remained in town for a period, with kin or otherwise, the significance of common origin would gradually have faded as they would have acquired (partly) ethnic-specific, urban cultural competence. Conjectures and divergences are analogous to those of class, discussed above. Rural identity sometimes overrules the ethnic one, but actors usually perceive the cultural continuity with members of own ethnic in town as being stronger than that with Others in the village. This is, among other places, reflected in election results.

At the same time, Hindus are in majority in most rural areas, while non-Hindus form the urban majorities. When the Hindu politician Harish Boodhoo launched his party, the PSM (*Parti Socialiste Mauricien*, field v) around 1980, his virulently communalist campaigning was directed almost exclusively towards Hindu villagers. In his rhetoric, Boodhoo denounced the decadence of town life, the dishonesty of (urban Hindu) civil servants and Labour Party leaders, and praised the virtues of the hard-working village life and the Bhojpuri language.

His campaigning succeeded in briefly segregating the Hindu community into an urban and a rural faction<4>. Boodhoo's representation of the rural-urban differences would look something like this:

| RURAL | URBAN |
|---|---|
| Poor | Rich |
| Illiterate | Sophisticated |
| Peripheral | Central |

| Tradition | Modernity |
|---|---|
| Moral | Decadent |
| Bhojpuri | Kreol |
| Exploited | Exploiters |

**Table 7. Rural-urban dichotomies**

The first four «rural diacritica», held to be true by most urban Mauritians, would also incorporate rural Muslims, Tamils and Creoles. The fifth and sixth dichotomies exclude the Creoles who are, in this perspective, as decadent as townsmen, while it is probably true that he received a fair number of rural Tamil and Muslim votes. Boodhoo's stress on traditional Indian values (he presented himself as a modern-day Gandhi) was met with applause from the Coloured politician Gaëtan Duval, who stated (in a newspaper interview in 1982) that Boodhoo's frank communalism suited himself perfectly, because it would encourage Creoles, feeling their communal rights threatened in the MMM/PSM coalition, to vote for his plainly communalist PMSD party.

In sum, Boodhoo's move aggravated rather than alleviate ethnic tension. And we have seen examples suggesting that like in the case of social class, the rural/urban opposition doesn't normally operate without being informed and dominated by ethnicity either.

*Locality-based unity*

In village politics, the ethnic aspect of competition is conventionally undercommunicated. In the course of a semi-formal interview, the chairman of a Southern village council stated that

> «here, in the village hall, we do not want people to come and talk politics. I want to develop my village, and those who want to

accompany me are welcome to join, regardless of their community. Politics divides; we need unity for our village to develop.»

Note that when saying «politics», he means or connotes «ethnically biased politics». In his opinion, the popular divisions that this entails, constitute an obstacle to (normatively positive) change. The council chairman thus contrasts «politics» and «development». His council is composed of nine elected and three nominated members (the latter chosen by the District Council); there are nine Hindus and three Creoles (two of the latter women, all the former men). In this village council area, comprising three villages, about 60% of the inhabitants are Creoles, the rest Hindus (excepting the Chinese shopkeepers and their families). However, there has not in recent years been more than one list of candidates. Now, the chairman's own village has a Hindu majority, and since the early 1970's it has taken over as the local centre: it has grown rapidly in size and prosperity, whereas the two Creole villages have remained virtually unchanged for decennia. When asked how this development could be explained, the council chairman replied:

«In L., we have a spirit of cooperation and faith. Note that the Creoles, too, are better off here than their fellows in C. and P. We are also closer to the hotels, a fact that ensures employment and encourages discipline.»

What is the role of the village council in this process of change?

«There isn't a lot we can do. We have very little money, and depend on the Village Development Officer and his ministry for funds. What we do when we need to have something done, is to send petitions to him and to the minister in question. The new dispensary was funded by the Ministry of Health after a long campaign involving petitions etc.

Many people come to see me every week, and I help them as far as I can, writing letters to the bank for personal loans, giving advice etc.»

Why are C. and P. being left behind?

«It is their own responsibility. The Village Council is theirs, too. If they're not interested, so what?»

A nodal person in many contexts of field ii, notably those relating to local development, he largely depends on people's own initiative in order to act on their behalf. Most of those who came to see him were kinsmen or at least fellow Hindus: During a fortnight in 1986, 16 individuals came to his house for advice or direct help with a task relating to their personal prosperity and thus, in his eyes, village development. All were from L., his own village. 8 were close or distant kin, 6 other Hindus and 2 were Creoles.

C., a village of some 660 inhabitants, is about 2 kms. north of L. (which has now (last census, 1983) 1,100 inhabitants). Put together, the two villages constitute a single locality (field ii) in some respects: between them, they have only one church, one temple, one post office, one cafe, one welfare centre, one village hall and, until recently (October 1986), one dispensary. The shop in C. has a poor selection of goods, and villagers tend to buy much of their food at one of the two shops in L. There is much informal interaction between Hindus of the two villages, but little between non-related Creoles. When there is a social event at the governmental Welfare Centre in C., youth from L. attend — but they can frequently be discriminated from the locals from their looks. The young Creoles of L. tend to dress in a fancier, more European way; the girls tone their skin, and many of the boys have Rastafarian dreadlocks. There is a joking relationship between these two categories of local Creole youth, but those from L. tend to communicate superiority. The latter are being talked about behind their backs:

«Hey, what does this guy think he is...f***ing snob! Thinks he's a white man just because he works at the bleedin' hotel. It's like my father says, the Creoles of L. ain't real Creoles no more. More like the *bann malbar* <Hindus>.»

In this context, there are strong indications that locality overrules community, although intermarriage is virtually unheard of. In the *baitka* of L., there is actually a Creole member (a rather unusual case). The Creole-founded sports club (a branch of *L'Organisation Fraternelle*) has an increasing number of Hindu members. In L., further, the division of labour (field iii) is less ethnically-based than in C. There are, for instance, seven Hindu fishermen and eight Creole labourers; members of both communities work at the hotels. Mixed groups of youngsters can often be observed «It's a good thing that the village develops,» says a middle-aged Creole mechanic, «and we've got nothing against the Hindus here in L. We may be different from the Creoles in C. and P., but they are still our brothers. Come the General Elections, and our vote is for the MMM.»
Under what circumstances, then, can we say that locality overrules ethnicity? In this particular case, the perceived context is obviously one of rapid local progress distinguishing the local unit from the backward surroundings; the spirit is very much, as the council chairman says, one of «pulling together for the common good». Competition follows regional rather than communal lines, and the prerequisite in the form of shared culture and lifestyle (which we found not to exist in the case of Lalit's class model) is that of *modernity*. Modern ideals of consumption have reached L. through links with the five-star hotels nearby, and working for the French-owned hotels has instructed villagers in modern «bureaucratic» or «industrial» forms of discipline.

A different process, but displaying the same crucial characteristic of collectively organised competition along regional, not communal lines, took place in an ethnically mixed village (field ii) of about 1,500 inhabitants in eastern Mauritius. This was the problem: A pipeline through the village was projected by the state. The course of the pipeline was already decided; it was to follow the coast along the

shortest possible line. Many villagers were discontented; over half of them lived a considerable distance from the closest point where one might install a public tap. Through their representatives in the village council, they organised a petition and put pressure on their fellow villagers for a «solution that might benefit the majority of the villagers». Nothing eventually came out of it — the decision had already been taken on a higher level (field v). But this *ad hoc* action is interesting in that it cut across ethnic and even kin ties: The self-appointed leader of the action was a male Creole, and the largest ethnic of the upper section of the village was Hindu; while Creole families were in majority in the lower section. His brother-in-law, also a member of the Village Council, opposed the motion.
I visited the village about fifteen years after this had taken place, and found no indication that any permanent fissure along spatial lines had developed. Marriage was largely regulated by ethnic rules, and the informal social groups were more or less mono-ethnic, composed of men from different parts of the village.

The shared cultural orientation necessary for collective action is here narrower, more of an *ad hoc* character than in our first example. Thus it was not to be expected that the conflict should lead to a permanent social reconfiguration. Once the issue was decided and the statuses of petitioner/anti-petitioner made obsolete, the ongoing interaction based on those socio-cultural statuses relating to kinship, work and religion, served to reinstall status quo<5>.

*Feminism*

Little (1978) writes about feminism, or rather community feeling between women, as a «countervailing force» in African ethnicity. Meaning shared by women from different ethnics is, Little argues, sometimes of greater situational importance than the meaning shared between men and women of the same ethnic. Granted the obvious male bias of my own material, I should perhaps be careful about claiming

anything substantial about this with reference to Mauritius. The following notes do not, therefore, entail a definite conclusion.

—Formal participation (field v):
In the Legislative Assembly, there are currently 3 female MLAS (out of 70); two of them Creoles, one of Muslim origin (married to a French Jew).
There are three feminist organisations in Mauritius. The *Mauritius Alliance_of Women* stresses complementarity with men and agrees basically with the traditional sexual division of labour. Its members are, most of them, from the Hindu middle class. The *Muvman Liberasyon Fam,* linked with LPT/Lalit, is a modern marxist feminist group, organising courses in «feminist consciousness», petitioning for reforms in the legislation on abortion, etc. Finally, the *Ligue Feministe*, which has possibly ceased to exist, is (was?) a tiny radical group of university-educated women from all communities, publishing pamphlets clearly inspired by European leftish feminism. Its social importance is marginal. Generally, none of the three formal women's organisations have significant influence in the political institutions of field v.

—Informal contacts (fields i-ii):
During my stay in the village of C., there was an International Women's Day meeting at the *Centre Social*. Creole women were well represented at the meeting, where a female MLA held a speech — but there were virtually no Hindu women present. The next day, I asked two youngish Hindu women of my acquaintance why they hadn't come. Both admitted that they would have liked to, but their husbands wouldn't let them. This is one of numerous instances confirming ethnic-specific differences in the position of women. While some Hindu and Muslim women envy the Creoles' greater personal freedom, they tend to despise the latter's (presumed) loose sexual morality. (Of the approximately 15 prostitutes active in one of Rose-Hill's suburbs, at least 11 are Creoles.) Creole girls, conversely, frown at the thought of pre-arranged marriage (still the rule among Indo-Mauritians).

In field ii, the local space, there is some female inter-ethnic contact at the grocer's and perhaps at the public water taps; there may be a joking relationship between Creole and Hindu women, but they hardly invite each other home for tea and cookies. Granted that women of all the large communities (including Creoles, if to a slighter degree) are by and large confined to the household (field i) in their daily activities, unity of women is not currently an operating force in social change.

—The new factories (field iii):
The industrial revolution in Mauritius largely affects young women, and it potentially creates unity along the dimensions of class *and* gender. Over 70% of the employees in the EPZ are women (Yeung and Yin 1986). Earlier, Creole girls were overrepresented (Oodiah, pers. comm.); as the sector has grown, so has the proportion of Hindu and Muslim girls (no exact figures exist). Some of the smaller factories are family businesses and thus mono-ethnic. But in the larger industrial estates, women from all the three largest ethnics work together. Here, groups of Creole and Indo-Mauritian girls can regularly be seen taking their lunch breaks together, and in this, they arguably represent a new modality of inter-ethnic contact (cf. pp. 197 ff.).

*Youth*

Youth connotes honesty, purity and *espoir* — hope — in Mauritian public discourse. The success of the MMM is perhaps linked to the fact that its candidates in the 1970's were young and reputedly honest (by contrast to Ramgoolam's middle-aged politicians, who were frequently rich men with dubious reputations). The 1976 general elections in certain respects opposed the young and the old: While the average age of Labour candidates was 50, the MMM's candidates were on an average 32 (Simmons 1982:195).
A cultural «generation landslide» between the young and their parents is almost a universal phenomenon in human society. The statuses

linked with young age often connote radicalism and sometimes naive optimism. This holds true for most Mauritian fields of discourse, too. Widespread programmatical anti-communalist statements, as I have found much more frequently among those below 25 than among their elders, should therefore perhaps not be accorded great importance as signs of social change. Insofar as there are significant changes in socialisation, nevertheless, one may informedly guess that certain changes may come about in society as such, later on.

Three important variables relating to the socialisation of the young have been modified during the last 25 years. First, the educational system has increasingly been universalised — a larger proportion of children take the CPE (Certificate of Primary Education) annually, implying that today's young have wider areas of shared meaning than their parents. Second, only those under 25 have grown up wholly in an independent nation-state where the importance of national unity is repeatedly stressed in public discourse (field vi). Third, the period since 1960 has seen the rise of nominally non-ethnic youth organisations, notably the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, but there has also been a revitalisation of ethnically-based youth clubs — actually boys' clubs (Hindu *baitkas*, Muslim *madrassahs*, and Creole *clubs fraternels*, the latter founded in 1969). In the towns, only non-ethnic youth clubs are now recognised by the municipal councils. In the case story which follows, the issue is whether this legislation (field v) is likely to promote non-ethnic unity among the young (in networks in field ii).

This concerns one of the many youth clubs in western Rose-Hill (field ii)<6>. Nominally, the club is non-ethnic and is therefore allowed to use public sports arenas etc. In fact, however, the club has but one non-Hindu member, a Creole who joined last year, ostensibly in order to be the goalkeeper on the football team. This young man rarely frequents the clubhouse (a shack where cards and dominoes are played in the afternoons). Other Creole youngsters in the neighbourhood hold that he was paid a bribe to join the club, which would otherwise not have been recognised as a legitimate youth club. I don't know whether this is true, but doubt it.

Dev (Hindu, 18), the son of a tailor, is the most outspoken anti-communalist of the approximately 18 members of the club. Having failed his SC (School Certificate, i.e. «O» Levels) once, he is now making a second attempt. He has had a brief fling with a Mulatto girl, and viciously defends the ideology of intermarriage (see below). Initially, it was due to his initiative that the Creole kid joined. Dev's negotiating with him was applauded by his friends in the club, who saw in this a strategic move to gain them support from the Municipal Council. According to the unwritten rules of «non-ethnic» youth clubs like this one, people from outside the ethnic don't usually apply for membership.

But Dev would like the club to be truly multi-ethnic, «a model for Mauritian youth». Once, he brought a Tamil to a club meeting, presenting him as a *mam* (mate) who considered becoming a member. The President of the club, clearly not keen on accepting the young Tamil, was less than amused. The situation was embarrassing to him and the other members, as it seemed to compel them to make the implicit rule explicit, and in a wider context, to break a Mauritian «taboo» («Never make communalist statements when there are Others present»). Upon my first visit to the club, the President had explained that «anyone can become a member, sure, we don't have communalist policies here». In this situation, he rapidly found a solution, stating in a matter-of-fact way that this would have to wait until the General Assembly at the end of the year, when the young Tamil's application would be considered. The statement seemed ridiculous to myself (the club was in fact a very informal organisation), but none of the nine boys present smiled. Dev, torn between rivalling allegiances, was in a rage. «How come you invented this rule just now?» he shouted. «Now come on,» said someone, «look at this place, d'you think there would be space for everybody here? We can't have everybody as a member.» Sensing he had lost, Dev walked out, shouting that he would never set his feet in this *lakaz krapo malbar* (house of Hindu toads) again.

Later, I met Dev in central Rose-Hill, and asked him about the club. He said he didn't go there any more, adding in an apologetic tone that «Mauritians are like that, stupid people». A brief survey of young

men's personal networks in the area proves him partly right: the youth clubs and street gangs are largely mono-ethnic, but there are also pluri-ethnic venues for voluntary encounters, such as the cinemas, religious centres, dancing schools, cafes and evening classes. As a rule, there is nothing to suggest that the personal networks of young Mauritians are less «communalist» in content than those of older ones, although young people are usually more vocal spokesmen for the abolishment of ethnic boundaries than are their elders.

*Intermarriage*

The nationalist slogan «unity in diversity» denotes a sharp distinction between public and private life<7>, where inter-ethnic unity (or rather, non-ethnically based social organisation) is demanded in every context perceived as *public*, i.e. conceptually linked with the interests of the Mauritian people as a unit. «Unity» (universalist representations and practices) is the legal and ideological ideal of the public service, the political and educational systems, and the economy (our interactional fields iv, v and vi). Seen from the perspective of action (as opposed to structure), the official ideal for Mauritian society is the *meritocracy*. On the other hand, the officially acknowledged «diversity» is ideally to be confined to «private life», that is, fields i and ii. «Diversity», i.e. ethnic differences are generally positively sanctioned in religious practices (clearly a «public» type of activity), use of and ideologies relating to language, marriage and informal networks generally.

It is widely held by Mauritians that ethnic conflict is spurred by strategies laid by politicians or more generally, in public zero-sum games (fields iv, v, vi). In most of the material discussed in this and the previous chapter, this would be a reasonable interpretation. In the last one, concerning the youth club in Rose-Hill, the model of the zero-sum game won't do unless we reduce the ambiguity of the situation to a concept similar to Bourdieu's *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 1977, 1980), conceptualising *meaning* as a scarce commodity maximised in a competitive context. Below I examine the usefulness of such an option,

after describing a type of situation where it is chiefly cultural meaning which is at stake.

There are no official figures describing the frequency of inter-ethnic marriage<8>. The practice is not encouraged by politicians or mass media (fields v-vi), and it is positively discouraged by religious leaders and most parents. Yet inter-ethnic alliances are not uncommon. Consider the following cases.

(a) Marie-Claude (*née* Shivandra), 29, resident of a coastal village (660 inhabitants, large majority of Creoles), married the Creole Jean ten years ago. They have three children together, who are considered Creoles. She runs a *tabagie* (sweetshop) close to the village's school, and Jean works at the coffee factory nearby. Possessing their own house and television set, they are well off by village standards.

When Shivandra was baptized as Marie-Claude at the local church in order to marry Jean, her widowed mother did not attend the ceremony (although the latter, profoundly and eclectically religious, is frequently to be seen in church). Nor did she wish to receive her daughter in her home afterwards. Marie-Claude moved in with her in-laws, as is the custom among Hindus and Creoles alike, and after a few years, the couple had saved enough money to build their own house. By now they were virtually next-door neighbours to Marie-Claude's mother, who lived with two younger children. Throughout the period, Marie-Claude attempted to visit her mother; she brought presents for her birthday and for Divali, she even sent her postcards — but the mother didn't let her in. «You left us then,» she would shout (in Kreol) from the kitchen window, «don't think we've forgotten!»

Marie-Claude's brothers regularly come to see her and bring news of their mother. The younger, Ram (25), whom I knew, is still insistent that his sister had made a mistake. «She's just getting herself into trouble like that,» he says. «It's not that I've got anything against Jean, but he is a Creole, see, and my sister is now a member of a Creole family — not a Hindu one any more. Man, that's serious!» Jean, for his part, does not conform to our stereotype of the «happy-go-lucky» careless Creole. He is a hardworking man who entertains few informal

links with the fishermen's peer groups, he takes great pains to dress decently, and the entire family is sometimes seen in church at Sunday Mass. People say he was like that even as a teenager, that is before meeting his wife-to-be. As far as Jean's family is concerned, they were only mildly opposed to the marriage. Both his parents are alive, and they are on good terms with Jean and his wife.

Today, Marie-Claude says she made a mistake in marrying Jean. «We were so young and very much in love,» she explains, «we didn't think about the practical difficulties that would come later.» It seems that these difficulties exclusively pertain to her broken kin and ethnic ties: Her customers, virtually all of them Creoles, treat her very kindly and symphathetically, as if apologising on behalf of her mother. Marie-Claude still considers herself a Hindu. «When I married Jean, it wasn't because I wanted to become a Creole. And I'm not. But people are talking...I know some say 'There goes *fam malbar kreol* (Hindu Creole woman)' when I walk by.»

Marie-Claude's and Jean's decision to marry was a private choice with no intended public consequences. Yet it contributed to a polarisation of ethnic identities in the village. Villagers were reminded of their differences when confronted with this anomalous couple.

(b) Aline, a young woman from a light-skinned but working-class Creole family living in a *cité* near Rose-Hill, has two elder brothers. One of them is married to a very dark Creole, the other is engaged to a low-caste Hindu girl. Aline resents both about equally for their respective choices — although only the second case is one of inter-ethnic alliance. «I don't like very black people,» she says, and adds, «and I don't like *bann malbar* either.» Her mother, on the contrary, is only hostile against the Hindu girl. Her other daughter-in-law, the dark-skinned Creole, is, after all, *nasyon* (fellow Creole) and therefore acceptable, while the poor *malbar* girl, although about to be baptized, remains polluting, as it were: *Malbar res malbar*, the mother explains; «Once a Hindu, always a Hindu».

As far as Aline is concerned, her cultural ideals, to be confirmed in choice of spouse, are European: The more European, the better. Since

her elder brother's wife looks like an African, she can't be any good. According to her, the perfect husband (for herself) would be a foreign white, second choice a liberal (=«not stuffy») Franco, third a *gen de couleur* or any light-skinned Creole. With regards to the prospect of marrying somebody not included in these categories, she equates physically black Creoles with *bann madras*, Tamils, as a last option. She is favourably inclined towards anything she considers upwards conversions through intermarriage. Her mother, on the other hand, represents Mauritian Creole culture: Anything non-Creole is suspect. Thus; when I visited the family for the first time, the mother believed me to be Aline's boyfriend: she was friendly in a very sarcastic way — whereas Aline herself exhibited me as something like a scarce commodity. This intra-ethnic value disagreement, present in field i, is thus unfailingly activated in issues to do with marriage. In fact, what both Aline and her mother are up to amounts to *saving the symbolic capital* of their respective cultural sub-systems. Intermarriage represents dilution and irretrievable loss of ethnic-specific meaning, which is — from their point of view — limited and bounded. If culture is reified thus as an object, then bits can be sliced off from it. Intermarriage in the near family is, then, the ultimate loss of true Creoleness.

Aline's brothers also have similar representations of their culture, but the normative interpretation is different in this respect. To the elder, it is no deviation from Creole custom to marry a black Creole; to the younger, marrying a Hindu girl is a manifestation of shared Mauritianness. To Aline, I (a White foreigner) was no outsider; to her mother, I was. As always in Mauritian ethnicity, the system of representations is shared by the antagonists, but the normatively charged interpretations differ.

(c) A third example of attitudes and practices relative to intermarriage, suggesting a possible process of change, is a young couple from one of the towns. D. and S. (both in their late 20's). They are both academics educated in France. D. is a Tamil («of Tamil origin» as he says) from an urban low-caste family. S. is an Aryan Vaishya from a rather

affluent family. They were still at school when they decided to marry. D.'s parents were critical of the alliance on religious grounds, but they knew it was little they could do: D. identified with the European left, and left the impression that he did what he liked. Eventually, his parents were reconciled with their son's heretical decision: S., after all, was of impeccable descent. In S.'s family, the problem was rather one of class. D. says, «The first time I reluctantly came to her house, everybody asked me who I was. *Ben*, I replied I was a student. What they actually wanted to know, was *who were my parents*. This really turned me off...» However, D. was accepted as a prospective son-in-law in this upper-middle class, very Europeanised environment.
The couple returned from their studies in France in 1982, got married according to Hindu *and* Tamil rites («to please the families») and moved into a flat in one of the best residential areas. Today, both their families are satisfied with the marriage, which is definitely one being reproduced in a cultural realm beyond ethnicity.
The taxonomic distance between urban low-caste Tamils and middle-caste Hindus is relatively short. Had one of the two been Creole or Franco, they would have faced much more serious trouble.

Patterns of intermarriage naturally vary — ethnically and geographically. A few examples illustrate the point.

— Within the Hindu and Muslim communities, «upwards conversions» are nearly invariably approved of<9>.
— In some countryside areas where these groups are very small, intermarriage between Tamils and Telegus is not considered «intermarriage» at all.
— Muslim leaders accept intermarriage, but conventionally insist that the outsider, whether man or woman, convert to Islam. I have known urban Creole men to go through such a token conversion.
— Children of mixed alliances are usually considered members of the «General Population» or Creoles. (The parents sometimes proudly

proclaim that their offspring are simply Mauritians — that their only ethnic identity is «Mauritian».)
— The rate of intermarriage is higher in towns than in villages, and seems to be particularly high in recently settled «rurban» areas close to the new industrial estates around Port-Louis<10>.

The differences in the social organisation of the marriage institution should also be noted. Indo-Mauritian traditions insist that the parents monitor the marriages; this custom remains strong, notably in the countryside, and explains why Marie-Claude's mother's reaction (case a) was so much stronger than that of Jean's parents.
In other words, the meaning of a term like «inter-ethnic marriage», although apparently clear enough (cf. footnote 8), greatly changes with the cultural and structural context. The cases and further notes above thus further confirm our basic notions that (a) ethnicity only has (changing) meaning in actual ongoing processes, and (b) the *ethnic* («ethnic group») takes its substantial content from the contexts in which it is being reproduced, — in other words the ethnic itself depends on a particular frame of relevance in order to «exist». These situational frames of relevance (or language-games if one prefers) are enormous in number, even intra-ethnically, because social and cultural boundaries are not objectively fixed but ambiguous. Thus Aline (case b) may credibly argue the relevance of a representation of endogamous Creole sub-ethnics based on colour but not class — a model her mother rejects.

Intermarriage presupposes intramarriage, and insofar as it is correctly perceived as a deviation, it may serve to strengthen the respective group identities (in a roughly Durkheimian fashion). But the practice must also be considered as applications of a variety of «bridging principles» between cultural differences. After all, e.g. Aline (case b) still sees her brothers; her Hindu sister-in-law comes to their house on Sundays etc. In this way, intermarriage does contribute to breaking down social and cultural ethnic boundaries, and its potential outcome

— the melting-pot — is perceived as a real possibility, and a *national* challenge (cf. chapter 5).

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS: COMMON DENOMINATORS OF MAURITIAN ETHNICITY

Like the members of every society, Mauritians possess a large number of social statuses, linked with particular varieties of their cultural identities. In this passage, to be read as a preliminary conclusion to the investigations up to this point, I describe some of the properties of the Mauritian socio-cultural universe as we see them, partly inferring from the presented interpretations of field material, partly from a hermeneutical «reading» of the Mauritian *ethos*. Focussing on types of *relations* within a set of social systems, my theoretical endeavour shares its *Gestalt* with a major leitmotiv in Mauritian public life, namely, the search for cultural common denominators and, for the entrepreneur, the wish to see them grow.

The conclusions are preliminary in more than one sense. Notably, I have consciously disregarded most processes related to nationalism and social change in this discussion. In other words, these conclusions about the relevance of ethnicity in Mauritius will be modified and corrected by the findings of the last chapter, dealing with processes which have only just begun to modify the socio-cultural reality as it is described below and in the four first chapters of the study.

In this chapter, we have seen the potential and sometimes very real importance of gender, class, locality and possibly age as properties of the person-in-situations. I suggest that these, along with ethnicity (chapter 3) and nationality (chapter 5) be seen as *meta-statuses* rather than «statuses»: i.e. fundamentals in the cultural production and reproduction of the social person, which nevertheless never or rarely are sufficient as providing detailed instructions for conduct<11>. Their power lies, rather, in their potential of generating varieties of meaning-contexts tailored to particular situations. The meta-statuses are *ambiguous* like symbols, and social situations are open to differing interpretations.

(a) *The substantial content* of Mauritian ethnicity is not easily pinpointed. The official ethnic classification, which most Mauritians accept as more or less accurate, is inconsistent. Hindus and Muslims are defined according to religion, but until 1962 they were both defined according to subcontinent of origin. The Chinese, or Sino-Mauritians, are defined relatively to their geographical origin. The General Population is a residual category; all or nearly all its members are nominally Catholics, but all the Catholics do not «belong» to the General Population. If there is doubt about the actual origin of a person, he or she was classified there officially and known elsewhere as «some kind of Creole».
As previously mentioned, ethnicity is locally associated with one or several of religion, language, geographical origin, phenotype, place of residence and, in a certain perspective, class membership. Emphasis is laid situationally on one or several in a purely *ad hoc* manner, and all these «ascribed characteristics» of groups or individuals, have metonymical potential in the social creation of meaning.

(b) *Ethnic pressure groups* are organised along various dimensions: ancestral language, religion, caste, economic interests or political ambition. Ethnicity, a profound and many-faceted characteristic of the

shared representations of Mauritians, is invoked in public, overtly or covertly, as a uniting principle whenever somebody needs the support of a large number of people in a competitive context. Ethnicity has proven the most powerful uniting principle partly because it refers to people's ultimate identity; deeper than class membership, more relevant in daily life than nationality — and sufficiently vague with regards to substantial content to be manipulated in potentially infinite ways. Yet «it» remains an aspect of the social person which enters into the definition of most public situations.

(c) Another important modality of ethnicity, elaborated in the previous and following chapters, consists in the widespread use of *ethnically-based networks in individual careering*. (Note, however, that class and/or nationality are practically possible alternatives to ethnicity as foci of pragmatic identification in many situations, particularly here.)

(d) Through the consistent application of ethnic *taxonomies and stereotypes* in accounting for inter-ethnic situations (though not necessarily in the interaction itself, cf. the exigencies of the dictum of the highest common denominator), mutual ethnic identities are conventionally reproduced and reified during socialisation, as «inert» properties of the individual. The intra-ethnic reproduction of stereotypes facilitates the task of understanding a world of immense complexity (not least because of the presence of other ethnics), and gives meaning and direction to one's own efforts (as member of a superior ethnic).
The application of stereotypes also indicates that the ethnically complex Mauritian society is not staggeringly complex on the level of the lay actor, whose conceptual schemata of the social world are simplistic.

(e) The sometimes slightly organised *collective consciousness about a shared Lebenswelt* and lifestyle (or *habitus*) within an ethnic draws its persuasive power from notions relating to characteristics listed in (a). As I have shown in numerous examples throughout this chapter, few if

any non-ethnic identities available in the globally shared cultural universe are conceptually and practically viable unless in some way linked with ethnicity (e.g. as its negation...).
The main theoretical point here is that ethnicity is, in practice, *not* an inert, categorical property of persons (although folk models tend to depict it like this, cf. (d) above) but a property of the *relationship between people*_acting in situations and contexts — and as such, its meaning changes with the context.

(f) Within the shared, but ambiguous, Mauritian system of symbolic ethnic representations, it is reasonable for a Creole to claim (to other Creoles) that they are poor because the Hindus have acquired a larger share than deserved; Muslims may agree that the non-Muslim decadence is a threat against the purity of their young; Francos easily and programmatically blame the non-white populations for the «state of the country» (which, according to many of them, is pitiful),— and they all know of each others' complaints. These ethnic skirmishes and discontents are all part and parcel of the shared Mauritian culture. Virtually everybody periodically feels discriminated against on an ethnic basis, which obviously encourages organisation along ethnic lines rather than any other option. *Notions of competition founded in (ascribed) ethnicity* constitute an important focal point in shared Mauritian culture.

(g) Organisational unity on an ethnic basis connotes the perpetuation of a way of life people cherish and feel threatened by the Others. It is, for instance, quite likely that the strong position of the Catholic Church in Mauritius<12> is at least partly due to its practical functioning as the organisational and symbolic vessel of a way of life *as opposed to* other ways of life nearby.
All this engenders *a normative justification for ethnic membership* where the ethnic is organisationally united on principles of *us-hood* which are prior to those of *we-hood*: it is primarily in an ethos of *ressentiment* (Nietzsche) that the ethnic reproduces its social unity (in the competitive practices of its individual members) and reproduces

self-consciousness as a relevant socio-cultural unit. Any child knows that she is e.g. a Tamil and that this means she is *not* a Hindu or a Creole. The difficulties in propagating nationalism stem partly from this basic orientation: Mauritian nationalism, internationally peaceful and non-expansionist, is fundamentally an ideology of *we-ness* (cf. Chapter 5).

(h) Ethnic identity may theoretically be seen partly as an unsought outcome of competition for jobs in field iii; sometimes it is an acknowledged prerequisite for this competition; it is, nevertheless, *always perceived as being an aim in itself*, as a symbolic carrier of individual belonging, ordering the world, furnishing aims and directions for thought and action. This element must be present even if inter-ethnic relations are characterised by constant confrontations. Identity is prior to organisation, although it may be reproduced (through socialisation) in a cultural realm largely defined by inter-ethnic *relations* rather than by the substantial cultural *content* of the ethnic in question. This implies, among other things, that Barth (1969) is theoretically wrong in suggesting that if patterns of behaviour become identical, ethnicity vanishes. Differences that make a difference need not be located to action in ethnicity: the physical appearance of middle-class North American blacks is sufficient to devaluate the real estate market when they move into certain townships.

* * *

The workings of ethnicity in Mauritius must be related here, however briefly, to certain macro-features of society. First, the ethnics are *not spatially located*. Second, there has always been considerable inter-ethnic *overlapping in the division of labour*. Third, Mauritius is a *parliamentary democracy*. Fourth, there is *no aboriginal population nor a majority ethnic*.
These points imply that inter-ethnic relations are necessarily widespread, and that problems related to them must ideally

(normatively) be solved through open and perpetual compromise. (Practices such as nepotism are concealed.) Granted a shared definition of a global public space (fields iv, v and vi) ideally above ethnicity, this policy of compromise does not necessarily imply the breakdown of social boundaries; partly because ethnic interests are pursued informally within these national fields, partly because the ethnic identity is reproduced in the private and local fields i, ii and iii. (This is discussed more extensively in the final chapter.)

*Forms of ethnic organisation*

In a discussion of African political ethnicity, Parkin (1974) introduces a distinction between «congregational» and «interpersonal» ideologies. The former is applied to forms of organisation, like religious ones, that «emphasize unambiguous membership of 'congregations'» (p. 124); the latter e.g. to bilateral kinship, where «ambiguity of membership enables the system to work, and membership itself is often expressed as a network of interpersonal kin ties» (*ibid*.). A congregational ideology of ethnic organisation then entails a high degree of *visibility* of the stable corporate group it engenders, while the personal networks of the interpersonal ideology remain invisible to the outsider, and the members are only corporately organised when faced with a particular issue. As Parkin notes,

> «<i>deologies of this kind are rarely, if ever, mutually exclusive, and it depends very much on a society's particular cultural prescriptions as to which is emphasized for specific activities.» (*Ibid*.)

The reproduction of an ethnic over a period of several generations demands that elements of both «ideologies» be present. As Parkin himself stresses, both of them «set up and maintain ethnic and other socio-cultural boundaries» (Parkin 1974:155). These ideologies or normative orientations can be activated within any of our six abstract

social fields, but obviously the congregational ideology must (globally) be monitored on a large scale, while the interpersonal ideology should be an aspect of every informal social relationship. The activities of ethnic pressure groups, alluded to in chapters 2 and 3 (and below, in ch. 5), are organised partly as hierarchical congregations (e.g. petitions) from field v to field ii and back, partly as purely large-scale agency from actors ostensibly representing their entire ethnic. In both cases, «interpersonal» ideologies ensure the smooth setting-up of the corporate group, while the «congregational» aspect serves as self-justification of the group. Runglall the MLA (pp. 40-43) is subjected to «congregational pressure» by the Hindu organisations, but ultimately it may be his non-hierarchical, «interpersonal» links with colleagues that persuade him to remain in the Hindu ethnic bloc in Parliament. More generally, congregational ideologies are probably more commonly used in Mauritian politics (pressure groups) than in Africa, as the ethnic problem is widely acknowledged if implicitly, and the rights of minority groups are recognised. Notions of democratic «fair play» encourage the formation of congregations.

Further, there are great inter-ethnic and regional variations as to the importance of the two kinds of «strategies». A few examples: First, from my exposition of Creole norms and practices, it is apparent that the Creole ethnicities are being reproduced without any strong congregational ideology. This results in poor political performance. Second, variations in kinship systems connote different strategies. The unilineal Sino-Mauritian patriclans, for instance, are unique in Mauritius and facilitate stable, bounded (and «congregational») kin networks. Third, the congregational aspect of ethnic ideology is, as a rule, most useful on a global (here: national) scale. Mauritius is a small island, and a base in interpersonal organisation will do for virtually any purpose («interest») below the national level. That is, the interpersonal networks unite only briefly as semi-formal to formal «congregations» (corporate groups) when faced with issues demanding collective action. Whenever one encounters a stable «congregation», be it the All-Mauritius Hindu Congress, the Catholic Church or the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, one may be almost certain that it collectively

acts on a national level (fields iv, v, vi) — the only exception known to me being the Sino-Mauritian patriclans. The other ethnics will rather activate wide, vaguely bounded bilateral kinship networks in similar competitive contexts. Parkin, summing up his hypothesis on forms of ethnic organisation, suggest that such networks

> «can persist as important mechanisms by which people, sometimes of specific ethnic and cultural categories, can find jobs, housing and political privilege ... But such networks do not by themselves seem to provide a sufficient ideology for the political organization of categories and their transformation into interest or pressure groups.» (1974:150)

This hypothesis fits the Mauritian material perfectly, and is valid in other competitive contexts than the political ones as well. The strong congregational ideology of the Sino-Mauritians, embedded in their unilineal descent system, has enabled them to reproduce their privileged economic situation through cooperation in and across bounded, semi-formal descent groups. In the other end of the continuum, the Black Creoles, with their shallow genealogies and widespread use of classificatory kinship, working together with a strong cultural bias against hierarchies, have a terrible record as to organising along formal or semi-formal lines; i.e. reproducing goal-directed collectivities<13>. The other ethnics or «sub-ethnics» can be located between the two extremes, some of them (notably Francos and high-caste Hindus and Muslims) tending towards the structured, hierarchical organisation.

Finally, it must be noted that the congregation presupposes the interpersonal network and not vice versa; in other words, the latter is prior to the former, much in the same way as *Gemeinschaft* («community») is prior to *Gesellschaft* («association»), and, as we have maintained in several contexts, that identity is prior to organisation.

We have now viewed Mauritian ethnicity from a variety of angles. Ethnic *membership* (individual level) functions as an asset of varying importance in the labour market. It is also activated as a resource when collective action is required, while this agency in turn is monitored from the formal or informal leadership segment of the ethnic *organisation*. (Cases of this, seen from the perspective of the organisation, are the discussions of politics, language and parastatals in chapter 3). Although ethnicity is usually played out in competitive contexts, following rules of competition on one hand and norms of compromise on the other, there is a non-competitive («symbolic») aspect in nearly every case considered. Sometimes, the individual actors might have more to earn (utility) by organising along non-ethnic lines than using ethnicity as a symbolic vessel for collective action. But ethnic *identity* (meaning) has, up to now, empirically proven itself too pervasive, too fundamental in the individual's definition of self and others, for such organisations to persist and overrule the ethnically-based alternatives.

In economic and political matters, there is inter-ethnic agreement as to the desirability of the defined goals (property and power); this condition of shared meaning must be fulfilled *a priori* in order that competition may come about at all. The inter-ethnic disagreements as to the local and global *use* of the two forms of power (authoritative and allocative)<14> are due, as I have tried to show, (a) to divergent interpretations of symbols, (b) to systematic local variations of normative values within the shared system of representations — in other words, the persistence and significance of distinctive ethnic (or sub-cultural) identities. To anticipate one of the examples of the next chapter: The issue of the place of Oriental languages in school curricula is an obvious case of a competitive issue (all agree that education is desirable) charged with ambiguous meaning. Thus, the competition goes on along two dimensions: (i) each actor attempts to

win the supposed zero-sum game about the place of individual languages in school curricula, (ii) each actor tries to present his interpretation of the actual situation as being more universally *true* than the others'.

Although it is certainly true that important aspects of Mauritian ethnicity can be revealed in studies of purely competitive contexts, such a procedure could never explain the *persistence* of organisation along ethnic lines where other, possibly more viable, alternatives are available (class and nation), nor the role played by non-strategic («symbolic» in sociological jargon) agency and representations in the production and reproduction of Mauritian multi-ethnic society. What makes Claude (pp. 31-33) hate Hindus? Why did Marie-Claude's mother so strongly disapprove of her daughter's marriage to a Creole (pp. 149-150)? Why do the Muslims of Port-Louis fear the legal sale of alcohol in their neighbourhood (pp. 68-72)? Why did Creoles emphasise père Diard's religion and not his political attitudes when he was evicted (pp. 86-88)? How do *baitkas*, political parties and unions like the Hindu Teachers' Union recruit their members and ensure external support? ... Ultimately we must concede that a person's socio-cultural identity, ascribed by self and others, reproduced in daily life, is the *raw material* necessary for ethnicity to organise in competitive contexts. The reproduction of ethnic identity is a necessary condition for the formation of ethnic groups in the political sense, and is a much more fundamental aspect of «ethnicity» than the latter.

Structural factors such as those mentioned above and in Chapter 1, contribute to explaining the continued viability of ethnic diversity. Expressing the official attitude to ethnicity in an inaccurate, Parsonian manner, we might say that *instrumental* ethnicity (=competition) is disapproved of, while *expressive* ethnicity (=meaning) is encouraged. This makes sense economically and politically.

In principle, all agency might probably be accounted for as strategic conduct (if, for instance, we consistently apply Bourdieu's concept of «symbolic capital»), but this is not necessarily more illuminating than regarding action, as I do, as having distinctive strategic and symbolic

aspects — stressing that the production and reproduction of shared meaning through symbolic intercourse is a necessary prerequisite for every form of competition.

Economic growth, industrialisation and rapid change in other sectors of Mauritian society, affect the content of this shared meaning. There are tendencies suggesting the emergence of a reconfiguration of Mauritian identities and interest groups — along lines other than ethnic ones. This problematic is the underlying concern of the last chapter, on ethnicity, nationalism and change.

## NOTES

1. I refer chiefly to *Le Mauricien* (circulation 20,000), *L'Express* (15,000) and the Sunday weeklies *Le Nouveau Militant Dimanche* (c. 10,000) and *Week-End* (30,000).

2. My material is on squatters on the outskirts of Port-Louis. In the neighbourhood, there are Creoles, Rodriguans, Tamils and Hindus. Many families are mixed, but the configuration Creole=Aryan Hindu was only encountered once.

3. The concept «locality as a social field» clearly does not have the same significance in town and village. Generally, networks are «denser» in the countryside, meaning that social relationships involve a larger average number of statuses.

4. In the 1982 election, Boodhoo's PSM were in a «tactical alliance» with the MMM (which, incidentally, led to Lalit's splitting from the latter). The next year, the MMM went alone to general elections, Boodhoo having joined forces with the Hindu-dominated MSM. In the town constituencies, the MMM vote remained virtually unchanged; in the countryside it declined drastically.
The MMM/PSM alliance also, of course, divided the *rural* Hindu vote.

5. This second example further indicates the importance of the *spatial* aspects of social life: a dimension emphasised in the concept of social fields. On the macro-level, the spatial set-up of the island; its size, position and actual distribution of ethnics, are important non-sociological background variables when we try to account for the practical necessity of policies of the highest common denominator.

6. Vinesh Hookoomsing, who has carried out linguistic research in the area, describes the youth clubs as «beads on a necklace» (personal communication): they are next to each other, they look pretty much the same, but have different colours (i.e., recruit from different ethnics).

7. I do not propose a definition of the «real» nature of public and private spheres. Here I follow the conceptualisations currently used in Mauritius.

8. «Inter-ethnic marriage» means unions involving members of different ethnics. Marriages between Hindus of different castes or sub-groups are included, and they may be just as difficult on part of the protagonists, as any other configuration. During my ten-month stay in Mauritius, I learned of no less than five successful double suicides by young couples whose parents had refused them to marry because of caste policies.

9. A Muslim may convert upwards by marrying a member of the theoretically endogamous, prosperous Meimon and Surtee «high-caste» groups.

10. I have as yet only sample data on this, but the tendency is obvious.

11. It is a trivial sociological fact nowadays, but: people do not act according to the expectations and norms inherent in their social statuses: the latter are rather important premises for choice (conditions for action). Choice itself is in principle unpredictable.

12. «Creoles» in relatively mono-ethnic Seychelles (Benedict 1982) and Caribbean islands such as those described by Wilson (1978), Kuper (1976) and Eidheim (1981) — otherwise similar to Mauritian Creoles —, exhibit much less religious devotion and participation than do the latter. Mauritian Creole

families are stable and divorce rates low; churches are crowded on Sundays (although mostly by women).

13. The ethnography documenting this is not included in the present text, but I intend to present it at a later occasion.

14. In stressing that power has local and global uses, I mean to emphasise that power does not only exist in social fields iv, v and vi. The cases of the two servants in Curepipe and the Sino-Mauritian restaurant in Port-Louis (pp. **-**) give examples of the ethnic use of power on a smaller scale.

# 5. NATIONALISM

«—But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
—Yes, says Bloom.
—What is it? says John Wyse.
—A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
—By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the past five years.
So of course everyone had a laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
—Or also living in different places.
—That covers my case, says Joe.
—What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen.
—Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland. »

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1984 <1922>: 329-30)

Compared to other recently founded «pluri-ethnic» states, such as say, Malaysia, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, the case for nationalism seems strong in Mauritius. No mono-ethnic hegemony could possibly establish itself officially without a devastating civil war, and political separatism is definitely not an option for anybody. Yet we have seen many examples of the practical reproduction of ethnicity as providing ultimate frames of relevance (both as organisation and as identity) in civil society. This final chapter deals with practical attempts to establish unitary nationalist ideology, and the conditions for its emergence as a symbolic system capable of overruling the «particularistic» ideologies.

When, in the 1970's, the MMM launched its nationalist slogan *Enn sel lepep, enn sel nasyon* («A single people; a single nation»), there was much confusion. «What else can you expect,» comments a journalist retrospectively, «considering *nasyon* in Kreol means *jati* and not nation like in French...» Early in my fieldwork, I asked a Creole if he conventionally tipped waiters. «*Selman bann nasyon*» («Only nation people»), was his rather confusing reply. Later I was to learn that this meant he only tipped waiters who were fellow Creoles. At another occasion, I introduced two African friends to a group of urban Creoles. «*Mo kontan zot parski zot nasyon*», said one of the Creoles, addressing himself to the Africans («I like you, 'cause you belong to my *nasyon*«). During a political discussion with a group of Hindus, somebody mentioned *bann ti-nasyon* (»the small *nasyons*«), referring to the impure castes, the not-twice-born, the *shudras*. Again, when my brother came on holiday to Mauritius and we'd exchange the odd phrase in Norwegian with others present, people might tell each other that »*Zot pe koze so langaz, anfen, zot mem nasyon*« (»They're speaking their language; you know, they are the same *nasyon*«).

Mauritius, on the contrary, is rarely talked about as a *nasyon*. If asked »What is Mauritius?», a native of the island might reply that it's *enn lil* (an island) or *enn peyi* (a country). Only people speaking a Kreol heavily influenced by French language and corresponding concepts could conceivably describe Mauritius as *enn nasyon*. The word is used normatively in political rhetoric; the MMM has been mentioned, and in addition, the word is listed in LPT's Kreol-English dictionary (Ledikasyon pu travayer 1985) as meaning simply «nation»<1>. Other politicians tend to avoid using the word altogether, and would rather talk of *le peuple mauricien* or *tous les Mauriciens* when invoking the concept of national unity: they are less likely to be misunderstood.

The Kreol word *nasyon* has, in other words, several meanings: (i) Jati or caste (*ti-nasyon* = low caste), (ii) ethnic community, (iii) race, (iv) language community, (v) nationality or nation-state. All the meanings connote «a people» in some way or other, and current usage suggests

that most Mauritians don't abstractly consider themselves *a* people presently.

Mauritians participate in uniform political and economic systems<2>. This is probably a necessary condition for nationalism to be successful as a popular movement (cf. Gellner 1982), but it is hardly a sufficient condition for it to overrule and eventually replace competing ideologies. Nationalist ideology must additionally present itself as more persuasive (on the level of representations) and probably more beneficial (on the level of action) to its adherents, than competing ideologies (of which the ethnic ones, our findings indicate, are empirically the strongest). Ethnic, class-based and nationalist ideologies are not, however, mutually exclusive — indeed, most Mauritians support all three from time to time — but they largely operate in the same fields of discourse and action, and can replace each other both as representations and as norms; there is in other words a partly competitive relationship between these symbolic systems; particularly in the labour market, where particularist practices (nepotism etc.) confront universalist practices (meritocracy/bureaucracy). Now, nationalism and ethnicity can co-exist in industrial society<3>. This may work e.g. within a politically authoritarian, «Furnivallian» system where ethnic differences are fixed and ranked, and cultural plurality is confined to homes, mosques and the like. Such stable co-existence is also possible in a democratic capitalist society, insofar as ethnicity does not interfere systematically with principles of meritocracy (modern capitalism) and bureaucracy (modern democracy). Granted the current state of Mauritian society, the latter alternative seems the more likely. The struggle between nationalist and ethnic ideologies and practices, then, does not necessarily lead to the extermination of one or the other. Rather, the struggle is being fought out where the two systems of representations and practices conflict. Nationalist ideology does not intend to do away with ethnic identity, only with the forms of ethnic organisation known as *communalism*.

As the ethnic ideologies invoke custom, language etc. as their ultimate core, so do conscientious nation-builders search for symbols of shared meaning that can justify unitary national strategies (laid in fields iv and v, and relevant on the macro level) and persuade lay actors to sympathise and participate. Below, I analyse the meaning of national symbols current in official Mauritius, illustrated by two important cases on the national level (monitored in field v). Then I examine the political development since independence (with focus on the MMM), before discussing certain aspects of the language situation in some detail. Finally, I briefly and tentatively consider the interrelations between current social change, ethnicity, and nationalism.

## THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL SYMBOLS

Symbols of national unity are difficult to construct and justify in independent, democratic Mauritius. The public symbols of «Mauritian-ness» current today are, therefore, largely inherited from colonial times. This continued use of colonial symbols and history as national ones, is much less controversial in Mauritius than in most African countries. In Mauritius, there was no violent discontinuity from colonialism to independence. Conflicts over independence were internal and did not involve the colonial power directly. The white settlers did not flee after the referendum (where the pro-independence factions won by a slight margin). If it hadn't been for the French and the British, there would have been no Mauritius — and people know this.

The national coat of arms depicted on bank notes, coins, postage stamps and official publications was introduced in French times; it consists of a key, a star, a ship and a small cluster of palms. The meaning of its Latin legend, *Stella et Claviscus Maris Indici* («The Star and the Key of the Indian Ocean») is widely known. Until 1986, Queen

Elizabeth I of Mauritius (Britain's Elizabeth II) was represented on all Mauritian currency. She is now gradually being replaced by the first prime minister of independent Mauritius, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who also served as First Minister of Mauritius during the last seven years of British rule.
Statues of 19th century governor Sir William Newton, Mahé de Labourdonnais and Queen Victoria have been erected in front of the parliament (and nobody would dream of removing them). The French missionary Jacques Désiré Laval, working in the mid-19th century and beatified in 1978, is also recognised as a great Mauritian by Christians and non-Christians alike. Crucial events in Mauritian history; the battle of Grand-Port (1810), the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers (1835), and Independence (1968) are frequently invoked as justifications of Mauritian nationhood: shared meaning in its most encompassing sense (to do with identity) is held to lie in shared history<4>. The interest in local history is not confined to academic circles: for instance, there is a regular monthly magazine devoted exclusively to the history of Mauritius (*Gazette des Iles de l'Océan Indien*). Despite attempts to break with the tradition (notably Allen 1983, Selvon 1985), Mauritian historiography remains largely the history of men in positions of power<5>.

Certainly, the unusual «variety of traditions, races and languages» present in Mauritius is potentially a source of national pride. This is manifest in Mauritians' behaviour *vis a vis* foreigners (shared meaning as *us-hood*, cf. pp. 142-144 below), in tourist brochures etc. In actual social situations, however, multi-ethnicity is conventionally felt as a strain rather than an asset.

Some intellectuals (e.g. D. Virahsawmy 1983) are in favour of some form of *pluriculturalisme mauricien*, notions of tolerance and diversity, as a shared system of representations. The natural vehicle for this ideology is, according to Virahsawmy, Kreol:

> «It is necessary that this language liberates itself from Eurocentric domination and develops new lexical fields in order to be able to express the spiritual, moral and cultural values of all the ethnics in Mauritius.» (Virahsawmy 1983:4)

Whatever its merits, Virahsawmy's enduring engagement in favour of a national ideology of tolerance has won little popular support. Is this because an all-encompassing tolerance entails loss of own ethnic identity in Mauritius? For if a Christian accepts Islam as normatively equivalent to Christianity (i.e. he ceases to feel that his own religion is superior), then he must theoretically cease being a Christian as it no longer represents true truth.

In practice, however, it is far from impossible to reconcile tolerance with religious faith. To begin with, it should be remembered that it was a Christian priest, Henri Souchon, who, at the height of the 1968-9 unrest, took steps to create a practical mutual understanding, chiefly between Muslims and Christians, through «oecumenical» religious celebrations combining diverse forms of ritual. Still today, Souchon deferentially visits others' places of worship, engages in open dialogue with Muslims imams and Hindu pundits, and encourages others to do the same.

On the popular level, «*Sakenn pe prie dan so fason*» (»Each prays in his own fashion«) is a common proverb of tolerance, encountered in virtually every ethnic. Religion, rather than itself being the foundation of ethnic animosities, in this way functions metonymically as an identity tag, a symbol (of something different)<6>. This »something different« is chiefly, as argued in the previous chapter, a particular *way of life* (meaning) embodying — among other things — a real, potential or imagined collective *strategy for carreering* (utility) couched in ethnic terms. Insofar as the ethnics remain culturally and socially distinctive, no *pluriculturalisme mauricien* can get beyond statements of a rather programmatic nature; at the same time, this ideology presupposes that they do remain distinctive.

Virahsawmy's strategy of Mauritian pluriculturalism (which has had some influence in post-independent Mauritian politics) can be located

to a *higher logical level* (in a Russellian sense) than the individual ethnic strategies: it attempts to arrange the latter *within* its own compass. It is an ism which has isms as its subject matter. As long as ethnicity is partly reproduced as *competition*, there is therefore a practical contradiction between this «order» (of universalism) and the «species» (of particularisms) it seeks to encompass.

The first of the two cases presented below is an attempted application of a form of «pluriculturalism» as a national ethos. The second case, on the other hand, represents an attempt to transcend ethnic identities altogether, replacing ethnic symbols with national ones.

*Independence celebrations in the plural society*

During Independence celebrations in March, 1986, a number of «composite cultural shows» were performed in local community centres. I was present at one such show in the village hall of a large, ethnically diverse village. The show encompassed two Sino-Mauritian entries, two Tamil contributions and one Telegu, one European song, three performances representative of the Creoles, three each by Muslims and Marathis, and four entries in Hindi or Bhojpuri. The programme was printed in English, and the opening and ending speeches were held in Kreol.

The aim was to display and encourage «unity in diversity»; among other things, one wished to accustom spectators to the traditions of ethnics other than their own. In a word, these shows (and similar events occasionally taking place) strive to give significance to metaphors of «organic wholes» composed of incongrous elements but fused in the common destiny of the Mauritian people; that is, the whole (the show) signified something qualitatively different from its parts (the separate performances). In the terminology of systems theory, we might say that a composite cultural show propagates subjective perceptions of being integrated on a higher systemic level — from communal to national identity. Now, Mauritians are already — and have been for some time

— participants in the same economic system although their positions and degree of participation to a great extent have been ethnically determined. Independence celebrations, like Ramgoolam's funeral (below) but unlike the MMM and associated trade unions, are intended chiefly as *redefinitions of cultural reality*. If such events are successful along these lines, people will accordingly redefine their cultural universes and modify their models for action (although patterns of social action itself are more inert than their models and thus may remain unchanged for a while). An individual defining himself as being a member of a nation rather than of an ethnic in a particular context, will then modify his representations relating to politics, economical relationships, marriage strategies, friendship etc. — and then proceed to modify his patterns of action.

It is not given that this strategy should be successful, even on the abstract level of folk representations. For one thing, the concept «unity in diversity» represents a contradiction in terms to many Mauritians. National unity can be taken to imply loss of distinctiveness (identity), whereas remaining distinctive precludes national unity. Further, the practical reproduction of ethnic personal networks (in matters of say, work, marriage and friendship), is still believed to «pay off» as long as the wider social context (offering «incentives and restraints») remains unchanged. The two, ethnic identity and ethnic action, cannot, therefore, be done away with by means of certain cultural policies. When the channels for — and meaning of — successful carreering are changed, however, new representational and actional patterns necessarily result.

*Ramgoolam's funeral*

Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam (1900-85) was Mauritius' prime minister during the first fifteen years of independence. A Hindu from the numerous Vaishya caste, he led the Mauritian delegation during independence negotiations in London in the mid-1960's. During the election campaign in 1967 he led the pro-independence parties to a

narrow victory, and he is popularly considered as the man to whom Mauritians owe their political independence. Ramgoolam was a clever politician, cunning in the art of compromise and surrounded by an aura of wisdom and fairness. He earned the respect of many non-Hindus when persuading the leader of the anti-independence bloc, the eloquent Creole Gaëtan Duval, to join his first government (cf. e.g. Simmons 1982:191-2).

In 1982, his Labour Party lost the general election to the MMM-PSM alliance, and Ramgoolam, disappointed, reluctantly accepted the post of Governor General (an occupation independent Mauritius oddly has retained). Now he, the political loser, received the pity of his opponents and was simultaneously in a position to stay aloof from petty quarrels. Although bitter with the electorate, Ramgoolam thus spent his last years consolidating his reputation as the wise man of the *nation* Mauritius.

In December, 1985, Ramgoolam died. He was by then acknowledged by virtually every Mauritian as the founding father of their nation — indeed, he had become a «myth» in his own lifetime in the sense that his unpopular or mistaken judgements were rarely mentioned publicly; until Sydney Selvon's recent biography (1986), even non-commissioned biographies of Ramgoolam were testimonies to his never faltering glory. Not all of them were written by Hindus.

The ceremony accompanying the cremation of Ramgoolam's body, therefore, had to be one relevant for every Mauritian. We shall go through it in some detail<7>.

The news of Ramgoolam's death was brought on radio and television on December 15 and in the newspapers the following day. In advertisements, citizens were encouraged to show their «Chacha» (Hindi for teacher) a last honour in assisting at the procession leading to the garden where the ceremonial cremation of the corpse was to take place already the next day (December 17, 1985).

The procession started from Ramgoolam's home, a colonial mansion at Réduit which was also used as the residence of the Governor General before Independence. *Une queue interminable* of people filled the courtyard. At noon, the yard was considered full, and newcomers were

denied access by the police. A Hindu religious ceremony next was conducted, immediately after the arrival of Ramgoolam's son. At least two of the pundits performing came from Ramgoolam's native district in the north of Mauritius. The *tatri* (a stretcher decorated with flowers) was brought outside and the corpse placed on it by close relatives of the deceased.

The journey towards Pamplemousses began towards 1:30 pm. Heading the procession, the police corps played Chopin's *Marche funèbre* as Réduit was left. The *tatri* was placed in an open military vehicle, accompanied by policemen on motorcycles and followed by local luminaries in motorcars. Those not possessing their own means of transport, would travel by bus to Pamplemousses if they wished to witness the incarceration of the body.

Huge crowds of onlookers had gathered on pavements and balconies as the cortège passed through the urban centres of Rose-Hill and Beau-Bassin, the industrial estate Coromandel and the capital, Port-Louis. Throughout, the audience threw flower petals onto the *tatri*. Notably, churches on the itinerary rang their bells in approval of what was principally a Hindu ceremony.

In front of Ramgoolam's former residence in Port-Louis, the procession took a brief pause while the orchestra played a work by Händel and repeated the performance of Chopin's Funerary March. Upon reaching the Gardens of Pamplemousses at 5:30 pm., the *tatri* was placed onto the funeral pyre. Members of the police and paramilitary forces paid their last respects, as did high officials and foreign guests, as flower petals rained from helicopters. There was still a huge audience present.

Ramgoolam's son was dressed entirely in white, whereas most of the others in the front row (the Interim Governor General, Speaker of Parliament, Chief Judge, Doyen of Diplomatic Corps and certain foreign guests) wore Western clothes.

Finally, Ramgoolam's son went through the last motions strictly according to Sanatanist Hindu tradition; eventually setting fire to the funeral pyre.

The religious parts of the ceremony, then, did not at a single point deviate from tradition nor from the rules laid out in authoritative

Sanatanist texts. Orthodox Sanatanism is still the largest Hindu denomination in Mauritius, but it is by no means a majority religion. Unlike in e.g. multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, there is no pan-ethnic, nationalist or humanist alternative to religious burial available in Mauritius. (And in any case, resentment towards Hindus has little or nothing to do with Hindu religious practices.) The acknowledgement of the churches has been mentioned; there is by and large a spirit of religious oecumenism in Mauritian religious organisations.

Important elements in the ceremony seen as a whole, nevertheless, transcend ethnic boundaries. Most striking, perhaps, was the choice of music to accompany the procession. In choosing music of two European composers rather than have the police band play Indian funerary music (which is not as impossible as it may sound: similar things have happened before<8>), the administrators lifted, as it were, Ramgoolam's person above the Mauritian everyday reality of petty skirmishes to a higher, more universal sphere; this could be interpreted as meaning the level of humanity *tout court* but was, more likely, intended to give symbolic content to pan-ethnic Mauritianism. Classical European music is not very popular in Mauritius; it belongs to nobody's real or fictitious traditions (excepting perhaps increasingly marginal segments of the Franco-Mauritians) and can therefore easily be accepted as neutral by the entire nation<9>. The national anthem, which sounds much like any other national anthem, with lyrics in English written by a Francophile Creole poet, was, of course, also played at Pamplemousses.

The very visible parts played by the police and paramilitaries (*Special Mobile Force*) was not exclusively due to security measures. Uniformed rank and file had a highly prominent place both at Réduit and at Pamplemousses. Now, neither the police nor the SMF have a very strong position in Mauritius, compared with larger nation-states<10>. The 500 men who make up the lightly armed SMF, which is the closest the state comes to having an army, are virtually never involved in violence; their most important duties are peaceful (guarding, fire extermination, skindiving). Nobody perceives the threat

of a military coup d'etat as being relevant. Therefore, the police and SMF alike are fairly popular with the Mauritian population. Although there are inevitably rumours to the contrary, neither of them is dominated by one ethnic group. In thus displaying their uniformed and armed, the state representatives informed people that law and order was being maintained on a national level, and that this was done in a just way, not according to ethnic belonging (uniforms are identical).

With respect to clothing, an important vessel of ethnic demarcation, we have already noted that few high representatives of the state wore traditional Indian garb. Perhaps their wearing European-style suits was too obvious to be noticed, but had the prime minister (a Hindu) turned up in anything but a suit, people would certainly have taken account of it.

The form itself of the funeral, a long procession leading to a climax, is familiar to the majority of Mauritians. In February every year, the Hindus celebrate their Maha Shivaratree feast in marching to a small sacred lake; while the Creoles in turn have their Père Laval pilgrimage in September; both annual events similar in form to Ramgoolam's funeral.

Had the ideological atmosphere been more *tiersmondiste* or anti-colonialist in Mauritius at the moment of the funeral, some might have reacted against the unwitting perpetuation of colonial symbolism in the decision to have the procession start at the Governor General's castle and end in the Gardens of Pamplemousses, the latter founded by Labourdonnais. However, this did not happen, and anyway, alternatives would have been hard to come by: Mauritius has no pre-colonial history, and its post-colonial one is very short. Choosing sites, situations and historical persons associated with colonialism as symbols of nationhood conveniently overcomes problems of ethnically-specific symbols, although the solution cannot be permanent.

It is also a matter of interest that the most prominently placed foreign guests were (providing *L'Express* got the details right) the representatives of India and the South-Western Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar and Réunion). The latter four are

universally considered to be close neighbours, also in a non-geographical sense, but India is seen as an important ally only by roughly half of the Mauritian population (i.e., the Hindus); commodity exchange between the two countries is negligible, and geographically, Mauritius is if anything closer to mainland Africa. In placing the Indian representative in a position superior to that of say, the French and British representatives, Ramgoolam's origins were emphasised in a fashion perhaps unfortunate to nation-building, but significant in showing the Hindu ethnic's anxiety to maintain good links with India.
The Kreol language, a potential force of unity, was not used throughout the event. In different contexts and by different speakers, Hindi, English, French and Kreol were employed; compromise being the only viable solution as long as the Mauritian population is divided on the language issue. Interestingly, the mother tongue of many of those opposed to Kreol as a national language, is Kreol (cf. discussion below on pp. -196)

Like in the previous case (the «composite cultural show»), the meaning-contexts consciously produced during this event aimed at redefining cultural reality toward shared, national meaning. But the *content* of the respective propositions differed. While the funeral defined Mauritianity as a quasi-religious, self-sustaining cultural system independent of the underlying mosaic, the definition inherent in the cultural show depicted Mauritianity as being identical with the mosaic itself (seen from a bird's perspective). As already noted, the former strategy is the more viable theoretically, given the relevant parametres of Mauritian culture and society.

*A non-ethnic political party? The case of the MMM*

Benedict (1965) ends his book on plural Mauritian society with a prophetic statement:

> «The ethnic divisions of Mauritius are changing. They are no longer mere categories but are becoming corporate groups. The danger of communal conflict increases» (p. 67).

The political proverb *Sak zako bizin protez so montayn* («each monkey must protect his mountain»), defending communalism in politics, has become a common saying since. In previous chapters, I have frequently mentioned the ethnic unrest around Independence, which began more or less simultaneously with the publication of Benedict's book.
Following the unrest, the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* was founded according to not only non-ethnic but positively anti-ethnic principles, and it became the largest single political party in a matter of a few years<11>. The question asked here, is in what respect — if any — it can be viewed as a non-ethnic political party. The criteria for its aloofness from ethnic politics must be (a) its actual policies, (b) the nature of its popular appeal.

The MMM came onto the political scene at a lucky moment, when there was discontent with the «treason» of the two major parties; bitter enemies who nevertheless had formed a coalition government (Rivière 1982:84). In addition, people had been fighting and to some extent killing each other, solely because of their ethnic differences. British soldiers had to be brought in to establish a truce. «People were terrified,» reminisces Paul Bérenger<12>, and adds that «they would probably have voted for any party that seemed able and willing to maintain ethnic peace.» The MMM of 1969 was a «New Left»/neo-marxist party with strong, although hardly dominant, revolutionary elements. Their very first base of popular support was the docks of Port-Louis, where the MMM were instrumental in founding the militant PLDHWU (Port-Louis Dockers and Harbour Workers' Union) with a membership largely composed of Creoles. Eventually, an

umbrella organisation, GWF (General Workers' Federation) was founded, and still maintains strong links with the MMM.

Strategically, the ideology of the new party was sound. Its profile as an anti-ethnic party was in fact the only viable possibility at the time. The ethnically-based political «niches» were already occupied; the MMM seized the vacant «niche»: the ideology of Mauritianism or nationhood. At a by-election in Ramgoolam's own constituency, Triolet where the population is massively Hindu, the MMM won an overwhelming victory in 1971. Shortly after, the party led a «general strike» with wide participation from unions of diverse ethnic composition. A state of emergency was declared when the internal transport system broke down, and MMM and union leaders were imprisoned for most of 1972. Most Mauritians today agree that this was a shameful move by the government; it had the unpredicted side-effect of making martyrs of the young radicals, including Bérenger himself. Following its leaders' release from prison, the party was banned and general elections postponed, but eventually things «returned to normal» (in Bérenger's words). After designating Jugnauth (cf. p. 61) as Prime Minister candidate and carrying out a hurried election campaign, the MMM emerged as the largest single party in 1976. During six years in opposition, its major issues were: the return of Diego Garcia to Mauritius, nationalisation of important means of production, various extensions of the welfare state, official recognition of Kreol, and stricter sanctions against corruption. Of these five issues, the first four have a directly nationalist bias. The first, on Diego Garcia, concerns the legitimacy of its boundaries; the next two would have increased the nation state's internal power systemically viewed and the actors' integration on the national level, individually viewed; while the fourth issue aimed at establishing a common national identity.

During the brief rule of the strategic MMM-PSM alliance (1982-3), few of the proposed reforms were carried out. Nothing was nationalised<13>. There was a failed attempt to make Kreol the supreme national language. There was no money for new social schemes. The economic policies, led by an apologising Bérenger, were severe and neo-liberal (among other things, he reduced the export tax

of sugar in order to stimulate new investments). As we know, the MMM-PSM government split after only nine months in office, and slightly less than half of it, by and large Hindus, founded the MSM (Mouvement Socialiste Militant; nowadays the abbreviation stands for Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien), which won the elections of 1983 after having carried out a campaign strongly flavoured with communalism, overt and covert. A journalist, who had just returned from his studies in Paris at the time of the election campaign, claimed that «in a matter of a few months, we lost everything that was gained during the '70's», referring to increased communalism in many fields. Accusations against Bérenger included claims that he was pro-Franco (viz. his attempted reduction of export tax on sugar) and pro-Creole (viz. the language policy; cf. Bowman 1984:2). Although the split between the Bérenger faction and the Jugnauth/Boodhoo faction was largely due to different economic policies, it was perceived by many Mauritians as an ethnic split. The group of ministers who remained loyal to Bérenger was composed of 1 Coloured, 3 Muslims, 3 Tamils and 3 Hindus (2 of them of low caste); whereas all but one of those remaining with Jugnauth in the Cabinet were Hindus.

In 1984, the MMM undertook its «autocritique» and admitted that its former, slightly Utopian socialism had to be left.

«Un socialisme democratique, non-aligné et moderne» was the slogan of the 1986 MMM congress, where the *autocritique* of 1984 was elaborated on. By now, the MMM had become a socialist party *à la française*, skeptical of alliances with the global «blocs», pragmatic in economic policy, faithful to the rules of parliamentarian democracy.

Even a very close examination of the respective political programmes of the MMM and the MSM (MMM 1983, MSM 1983) does not reveal dramatic differences: both emphasise development of the welfare state, slow and cautious nationalisation of key industries — which is not to include the EPZ industries, and a staunch stand against communalism<14>. Policies that were instigated by the MMM are furthered by the current government. (Bérenger himself never tires of pointing out that the current economic success is largely due to

decisions taken by the MMM — nobody seriously challenges this statement.)

All this seems to imply that the conflicts between the two major political blocs now can be traced back to ethnic differences — in other words, that the MMM is not a nationalist party, but one that represents particular ethnics.

The material is ambigous as to the conclusion. On one hand, there is the evidence (pp. 60-62) that the importance of ethnic divisions was acknowledged in MMM strategies from an early point. On the other hand, the actual, formal policies of the party, while in power, were definitely of a «nation-building» kind.

But so are those of the presumed Hindu party, the MSM. Large-scale politics (field v) in Mauritius today in practice place ethnic membership first as a criterion of allegiance, but national interests first in definition of policies. This conforms to the dictum of the highest common denominator: the denominator is, here, the «shared interests of the nation» in a series of zero-sum games, while the negotiators (politicians acting in field v) represent ethnics.

As previously noted, Mauritians tend to interpret political events in ethnic terms. If a Franco-Mauritian Minister of Finance decides to reduce the taxation on sugar, his ethnic membership is used against him (all the «sugar barons» are Francos). Similar arguments are used if a Hindu government takes steps to improve the lot of the smallplanters. Whatever the intentions of the MMM leadership, they therefore receive their votes largely on an ethnic basis today, after the disappointment of 1982-3. From the public's point of view, the MMM was seen, until the elections of 1982, as a party capable of doing the impossible. Their main slogan, seen in the form of graffiti all over the island, remains «*L'Espoir vaincra*» (Hope will win). The party was a symbol of honesty, youth and social justice. Bérenger perpetuated the myth of the stereotypical Franco-Mauritian as an unsurpassed administrator. Everybody knew somebody from his own ethnic somewhere in the MMM. It was the party of youth and utopian hope: As late as 1986, I have met people who hold that electricity, water and public housing

will immediately be free of charge when the MMM takes over. But this attitude is no longer the rule: rather, people generally vote MMM for lack of alternative and fear of Hindu hegemony. Utopians go elsewhere.

The fact of being opposed to a Hindu bloc, along with the feedback from the electorate, leaves the MMM in a position as representative of the «minorities» (non-Hindus, possibly also Hindus of the *ti-nasyon*s) — whether this was intended or not.

It is equally clear that this would scarcely have been the situation, had the feedback from the electorate been more persistently anti-communalist or nationalist. In other words, the MMM viewed as a *system of potential policies on the national level* is unambigously nationalist, but if we regard it as a *vessel of popular interests relating to careering*, it empirically channels ethnic interests. In other words, it is widely believed that e.g. the Creoles and Muslims would improve their career opportunities under MMM rule. Whether or not this holds true in practice we don't know — apart from the obvious fact that an MMM government would almost certainly try to reduce nepotism and presumed Hindu dominance in public affairs.

## LANGUAGES IN NATIONALISM

Religion and language are the most important *formal* principles of division of the Mauritian population along ethnic lines. Both provide organisational «vessels» for the articulation of interests not necessarily identical with their formal content; both are symbolic bearers of cultural identity. Both of these aspects have been exemplified in chapter 3; in this section, I discuss language from a different viewpoint. The language discourse is considered legitimate (in fields v and vi); public discourses pertaining to religion are not. The former is therefore more important.

Religious and linguistic groups are *de facto* incongrous, and Kreol is casually spoken outside the Creole ethnic, while the Franco-Mauritians, although Catholic, do not speak Kreol between them. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the Mauritian populace speaks Kreol as a first language does not prevent interest groups from using linguistic differences, real or fictitious, as a principle of socio-cultural division. In chapter 3, I have linked this with a discussion of individual ethnic identity. Here, I consider problems of language in nation-building; first with reference to the controversy over school curricula, then examining the potential of Kreol as a *unifying* principle, as a symbolic vehicle of national identity.

*Linguistic diversity in primary education*

The Mauritian system of education, designed by Europeans, has always been relatively uniform. Since Independence, there have been policies aiming to «nationalise» it gradually, yet retaining its compatibility with European educational systems.
In November, 1984, the government appointed a committee of parliamentarians to

> «consider and report on the circumstances in which registered school candidates sitting for the Certificate of Primary Education examination may opt for ranking purposes for an oriental language from among Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Mandarin and Arabic in addition to the four compulsory subjects, namely: English, Mathematics, Geography and French». (Mauritius 1986:1)

Teaching in Oriental languages had formerly been available at private institutions and as additional subjects in some schools. The novelty of the proposition was its suggestion that Oriental languages should now

become important in ranking and thus have direct effect on the admission to secondary school.

The committee was composed of 5 Hindus, 1 Muslim, 2 Creoles and 1 Coloured; two of the members belonged to the political opposition. Some of the members eventually resigned and were replaced, and the committee responsible for the report consisted of 5 Hindus, 2 Muslims, 1 Coloured and a Tamilo-Christian.

In two consecutive press communiques released during 1985, the public was invited to witness before the commission; i.e. to suggest solutions and discuss particular issues with the committee. 109 actors responded to the communiques; 62 individuals and 47 organisations. Ethnically, they were distributed thus:

| | Individuals | Organisations |
|---|---|---|
| Hindu | 45 | 24 |
| Tamil | 5 | 2 |
| Muslim | 7 | 5 |
| Sino-Mauritian | | 1 — |
| Creole/Coloured | | 2 5 |
| Franco | 2 | — |
| Mixed Oriental | | 1<15> |
| Non-ethnic/ethnic unidentified | 10 | |

**Table 8. Participation in public hearing on language instruction in public schools**. Source: Mauritius 1986

The pressure groups in question were founded on different bases. Some were religious groups (most of these Hindu sub-categories based on caste, ancestral language and/or denomination), some represented formal language groups (such as the Mauritius Arabic Language Teachers and Students Association), while yet others were national or

local parents' organisations, teachers' unions, humanitarian groups or youth organisations.
The large majority of the individuals belonged to one or several elites (they were active in social fields iv, v and/or vi).
The very time-consuming hearings, then, took place within field v; the national political system. While it is clearly true that the hitherto dominant position of French has been due to power relations in field iv, the entire debate was this time undertaken with no reference to local economy. The preoccupation was with *fairness*, and whereas it might have been legitimate and indeed desirable to display adherence to sectional interests on level v, anyone wishing to participate on level vi, that is (here) the national press, where the issue was discussed extensively, was obliged to emphasise his or hers commitment to the common good.
The issue represented a strong challenge to the representatives of the young Mauritian nation. It was very important insofar as Mauritians attach increasing value to education<16>, and it demanded a *redefinition of the highest common denominator*. Formerly, the highest common denominator had been colonially defined and sanctioned; this time, it had to be specified nationally according to democratic rules.
In the event, a composite denominator resulted. I quote from the report:

> «(a) English being the official language and the most widely used international language should continue to be promoted and given due importance;
> (b) it would be desirable and in the interests of all Mauritians to be encouraged to learn French, which is readily acquired in the Mauritian context;
> (c) language, being also a vehicle of culture, must be given its importance in order to understand an preserve worthwhile ancestral values; and
> (d) children who do not take an oriental language would be offered a course in Cultures and Civilisations in Mauritius. »
>
> (Mauritius 1986:11)

This means, in practice, that children of the General Population would be taught *Cultures and Civilisations in Mauritius,* a course aiming at «making children aware of the rich cultural heritage of Mauritius» (*ibid.*); denoting the same variety of nationalism as the cultural show described on pp. 173-4; »Mauritianity-as-identical-with-the-mosaic». Kreol was not considered to be a language worthy of systematic instruction, and as far as I have been able to ascertain, none of the groups and individuals involved in the hearing of the Select Committee suggested that it should be.

The lack of any corporate group representing those for whom Kreol is an ancestral language is hardly surprising — despite the fact that in reality, Kreol is virtually everybody's first language — considering certain socio-cultural features of the ethnics constituting the General Population, discussed on pp. 109-124. In other words, Kreol is indexical of low social rank. However, the status of Kreol in fields v and vi has declined since the first post-independence decade (although this may not be the case in fields i and ii). In 1982-3, Kreol was used as a national language alongside English and French for a brief period.

*Kreol as a potential national language*

At the time of the French revolution, about a dozen dialects, some of them distinctive enough to be considered as separate languages, were spoken in France. The concept of the modern nation-state was developed during the same period; the peoples of France were to be integrated economically and politically on a state level. The demand for a common language as a practical instrument (in administration and the extraction of taxes) and as a vessel of national unity (in military and other matters) was strong. Today, then, some 200 years after, virtually every Frenchman speaks a variety of what was at the time the Isle-de-France (Parisian) dialect; some, however, as a second language.

Sometimes, otherwise diverse peoples have been successfully integrated into national states due to common language (Italy, Greater Germany). Linguistically plural politico-economic units are frequently either federative states (Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Soviet Union), ruled politically and/or economically by a hegemonic ethnic/linguistic group (Ian Smith's Rhodesia, USA, French DOM-TOMs, Peru) — or they are either not really integrated on a state level and/or unstable (African countries). Viewed in a perspective of *longue durée*, ethnic and linguistic groups emerge, change, and eventually vanish. Processes of ethnic and linguistic change are continuous; structurally they may be perceived as systemic adjustments aiming for stability, individually as struggles for meaningful survival.

In Mauritius, Kreol has over the last one-and-a-half century or so proven practically capable of uniting otherwise very diverse groups into a reasonably homogenous linguistic group. This does not imply that ethnic differences have been eradicated; further, the importance of language as criterion of distinctiveness remains crucial in the real or partly fictitious maintenance of «ancestral languages» (until recently known as »mother tongues») on the part of the non-Creole populations (cf. discussion, pp. 89-98).

In the following paragraphs, I apply my own field material on actual use of languages (summarised in Table 9 on p. 191<17>), to a discussion focussing on attitudes to Kreol and their ethnic and national aspects.

None of the languages is strictly confined to one or several social fields. English is rarely spoken but frequently written; French is widely written and spoken in formal or semi-formal contexts; Kreol is normally used in informal situations etc. Generally, use of particular languages depends on social situation and status activated, not on field nor interactional partners. During the break between lessons, the lecturer naturally addresses his university students cordially in Kreol; the clerk addresses his subordinate in Kreol but his boss in French (and possibly his mother in Bhojpuri); the housewife addresses the Sino-

Mauritian shopkeeper in Kreol but might speak French with the attendant in one of the posh shops of downtown Curepipe.
Popular conceptions of Kreol are, despite its near universal use in informal contexts, all but pejorative. This is partly because Kreol is associated with the despised (and publicly inarticulate) («Black») Creoles (cf. the discussion on pp. 89-98, where it appears that people of Indian origin, whose first language empirically is Kreol, tend to state that their mother tongue is an Oriental language). It is a language the Mauritians speak *malgré eux*. The language is

**(1) Public contexts**

*Field ii*
Church sermon (Catholic) F/K
Collective prayer at mosque A/K
Hindu rite H*/K
Primary school instruction K**
*Field iii*
University lecture E
Lunch break (anywhere) K
*Field iv*
Board meeting, private enterprise F/K
Board meeting, parastatal E/K
*Field v*
Speech at Legislative Assembly E/F
Public political speech K
*Field vi*
TV/radio news F/E (K)
Radio commercial K/F (E)
Press F (E)
Legend of political caricature K
Poetry K/F (E)
Play F/K
Popular literature F

| | |
|---|---|
| Cinema film | Hi/F |

**(b) Private contexts**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Field i* | |
| Conversation at home | K (Ha/B/F) |
| Conversation with servant | K |
| *Field ii* | |
| Personal letter | F (K) |
| Conversation with friend | K |
| *Field iii* | |
| Written application for job | F/E |
| Oral application for job | K/F |

**Table 9. Languages and contexts.**

Abbreviations: A=Arabic. B=Bhojpuri. E=English. F=French. H=Hindi. Ha=Hakka. Hi=Hindustani. K=Kreol.
* Hindu »Linguistic minorities» (Tamils, Marathis, Telegus) tend to use their ancestral languages in ritual.
** Officially, English is the medium of instruction already at the primary level. In practice, teachers speak Kreol (and in certain cases, Bhojpuri) in order that the pupils understand, although textbooks are always in English or French.

still widely regarded as «nothing but French badly pronounced and free from ordinary rules of grammar», as a colonial official would have it at the turn of the century. But Mauritians also fear further isolation from the international community if they were to replace French and English with the language spoken only locally: they feel their pride as *us*, the Mauritians seen under the gaze of the foreigners, threatened. Finally, I have met Mauritian intellectuals, symphathetically inclined towards Kreol, who doubt its ability to conceptualise the increasingly complex Mauritian socio-cultural reality. In their — and in many's — view, Kreol is a beautiful language in poetry and songs, an accurate one in the fields, a colourful one in the bar. But, they claim, its syntax and grammar cannot accomodate concepts of abstract and complex

character, such as those necessary in, e.g. sociological research, industrial design, or philosophical thought<18>.
The metonymical character of the «linguistic division of labour» or diglossia between French and Kreol, as perceived by urban Creoles, can be expressed thus, simplistically:

| FRENCH | KREOL |
|---|---|
| power | impotence |
| abstract thought | practical tasks |
| steak & salad | *Kari masala* |
| wine & whisky | rum & beer |
| whiteness | blackness |
| refinement | vulgarity |
| responsibility | carelessness |
| religion | superstition |
| education | ignorance |
| (literacy) | (illiteracy) |
| seriousness | jocularity |
| *bonne société* | *milieu populaire* |
| (etc.) | |

**Table 10. Normative connotations of French-Kreol diglossia**

Great efforts are made in order that the asymmetrical relationship between the two arguably most important languages in Mauritius be maintained and justified vis à vis non-Francophones. Command of French is a prerequisite for and tangible sign of high social status; the ruling class of *colons* has always been Francophone and has consciously used the French language as an important part of their ideological mystique. In books and newspaper columns, Franco-

Mauritians and Coloureds of respectable standing regularly link the decline of manners to the supposedly deteriorating position of French in Mauritius<19>. Arguing that making Kreol a national language would isolate Mauritius in the world community, they have, with a great measure of success, managed to shift the attention towards the relationship between French and English rather than that between French and Kreol. The power of defining the relevant fields of discourse, alluded to elsewhere, is visibly exerted here — in social field vi.

Representatives of France, the most important external power in the western Indian Ocean, are anxious to maintain a hegemonic position in the domain of «culture». The French cultural centre, *L'Alliance Française*, has a much higher level of activity than say, the British Council, and local dramatic groups staging plays in French receive financial support. Further, a powerful television transmitter broadcasting French programmes, aimed exclusively at Mauritius, has been installed on the eastern coast of the French DOM La Réunion.

Since independence, the taken-for-granted asymmetry between Kreol and French has been challenged in a much more serious manner in Mauritius than in the French DOM-TOMs (cf. Chaudenson 1974 for La Réunion; Bébel-Gisler 1975 for Guadeloupe and Martinique). From the beginning around 1970, the MMM used Kreol in their internal meetings, in press conferences, and of course, at public meetings. The discovery that their leader, an obviously educated and refined Franco-Mauritian, would rather speak Kreol than French, was a source of pride and wonder among the followers of the MMM.

It is likely that, had Mauritius had an ethnic composition similar to that in Seychelles, Kreol could, in the early 80's, have become a national language along with English and French. However; despite the indubitable fact that the majority of non-Creoles speak the language better than any other language, many Hindus continue to link Kreol to the Creoles; i.e., the language to the ethnic. Kreol is a language they speak *malgré eux*. Thus, when Kreol was made a national language overnight in late 1982, reactions were hostile from many quarters.

Rather than unite the diverse populations in a nation, the decision awoke latent conflicts and accentuated the popular awareness of cultural differences. It was partly over the language issue that the MMM-PSM coalition and the MMM itself split.

Changes in attitudes to Kreol closely parallel political changes. From Independence to 1982, there was a period of increasing national sentiment and class consciousness, culminating in the general strike of 1979 and reaching an anti-climax of sorts following the 1982 election victory of the MMM-PSM alliance. Nationalist and class ideology were compatible with a higher evaluation of Kreol; indeed, it might be said that the latter follows logically from the former (or conversely). Thus the use of Kreol in unusual contexts came to be perceived as a sign that a unified, just nation was about to be built; at least, such was the hope of MMM strategists. These dichotomies of the 1970's, then, were fought for.

| FRENCH | KREOL |
|---|---|
| Oppression | Justice |
| Snobbery | Comradeship |
| Stratification | Equality |
| False consciousness | True consciousness |

**Table 11. Alternative connotations of French-Kreol diglossia**

When attempting to replace folk classifications based on ethnicity with class-based ones, the cultural radicals alienated people seeing their own ethnic-dependent strategies threatened and those fearing cultural uniformisation and further isolation of Mauritius, this syndrome being epitomised in the linguistic idiom of Kreol. Perhaps the dichotomies reproduced above (Table 11) are acknowledged as «true» by most Mauritians, but their personal experience and strategies relating to

carreering, and their perceptions of social rank (which are at least true as self-fulfilling prophecies), compel them, regardless of ethnic membership, to let the other model (Table 10), overrule them.

Kreol is correctly perceived as being in contradiction to social mobility. Within the Creole ethnic, where no third language interferes with the French-Kreol diglossia, upward social mobility entails a switching of basic cultural codes (cf. pp. 117 f). The switch to French language is crucial in this movement. As noted above, literacy and seriousness are associated with French: «One cannot live in a Western way and speak Creole»<20>. Thus, the widely accepted division of labour between Kreol and French (sanctioned publicly in fields v and vi) contributes to preserving Kreol as an oral language lacking vocabulary and structures to conceptualise crucial aspects of social life in modern Mauritius. The entanglement of social status and language is self-fulfilling and remains valid until a new model of social reality, incorporating a model of Kreol as a perfectly adequate language, presents itself as a more compelling definition of what is to be perceived as relevant reality. Such a model is not at the moment viable.

## NATIONALISM, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A common national identity must, briefly, be compatible with field i, accepted and reproduced in fields ii and iii, profitable in field iv, sanctioned by field v and publicly reproduced in field vi.

The first is, as I see it, unproblematic insofar as the «Furnivallian» ideology prevalent in Mauritius encourages cultural diversity at home. Whether or not national ideology is reproduced in field ii, depends on the pattern of settlement, and the nature of the institutions, the arenas

for interaction present. I have given examples to the effect that several normative orientations may be «attached» to the shared system of representations (which is, naturally, itself evolving) in the course of practical interpretation. In field iii, the working-place, the structure and nature of hierarchies, the composition of the labour-force, and the spatial location of the enterprise seem to be the most important factors. This is discussed below. In field iv, then, where decisions affecting the total division of labour are taken, there can be no doubt that the ideology of meritocracy is most beneficial according to the internal criteria of the entire system of relations (efficiency, productivity). On the other hand, ethnic organisation (hiring of relatives etc.) may pay off better locally (i.e. to the individual owner of means of production). The political system as a whole is, in response to social change, inclining towards decisions strengthening the nation-state and influencing the five remaining fields in this direction (cf. discussion below) — although members of the state bureaucracy, seen from its aspect as fields iii-iv, still widely practice ethnic strategies (nepotism etc.). In field vi, finally, the national communicational systems, particularly the larger media, nationalism is as a matter of convention communicated overtly. Communalism is simply not *comme il faut* in this sector of Mauritian public life.

Below, I briefly discuss some consequences — empirical and potential — of social change in Mauritius, linking them to the general discussion of nationalism vs. ethnicity.

*Tourism, industrialisation and bureaucracy in the national state*

I have frequently alluded to the high rate of social change in Mauritius. By 1986, the industrial «zone» (EPZ or *Zone Franche*) was, as a unit, the largest employer in Mauritius. In other words, more Mauritians are now industrial workers than agricultural labourers. Industrialisation does not take the shape of an exodus from the countryside; the population growth rate is higher in «rural» than in «urban» areas. Parts

of Port-Louis have actually experienced a *negative* growth rate during 1972-1982 (Mauritius, 1984-6).

Rather, the change occurs, spatially located, (a) in areas formerly dominated by a rural division of labour and local organisation, (b) in newly established industrial estates outside the towns, (c) on chosen sites along the coast (the erection of hotels and *stations balnéaires*).

The cultural effects of tourism have been suggested in the comparison between the two coastal villages (pp. 139-142). In L., where most of the households had members working in hotels, people were up-to-date with European patterns of consumption; the young took great pains to adopt recent Western fashion in clothing and hairstyle, the adults invested much work in improving their dwellings, and many had bank accounts. In C., on the contrary, where nobody was employed in the tourist industry at the time of my fieldwork, the dominant ethos was largely the classical, stereotyped Creole morality entailing short, unmeasured temporal units and accordingly, lack of commitment to long-term strategies. The social and cultural schism between these neighbouring villages, which might conceivably have developed regardless of tourism, has certainly been accentuated by it. The content of the cultural form emerging as the dominant one in L. (non-ethnic, «progressive») is visibly inspired by the culture encountered at the five-star hotels. The exigencies of the work itself include absolute punctuality, which is unimportant to the labourer and unknown to the fisherman. In L., most of the men wear inexpensive wristwatches daily. In C., watches are worn only at parties and at Mass.

Further, the employee at the hotel has the prospect — real or imagined — of promotion. The chairman of the Village Council, a poorly educated man, had begun as a waiter and was now, eleven years later, chief purser. Labourers and fishermen, on the contrary, have little or no prospect of «promotion». Nothing in their daily practices can, therefore, serve metonymically as a model of «development» or «progress», or simply *change*.

Social change as industrialisation has slightly different effects, although this, too, entails a new structuring of time and social relations.

Many of the roughly 500 EPZ enterprises are small, family-owned textile factories, often located in the family's living quarters. One typical such factory, owned by a middle-aged, university-educated Hindu in Rose-Hill, has six employees: his wife, two of her sisters, one of his nieces and two of his female cousins. Only his wife was working full-time. The wages corresponded to the national average (900 Rs monthly for full-time employees).

In this kind of enterprise, no qualitatively new type of social relation arises from the organisation of production. Compared with a small-planter with similar economic assets, the difference pertains to gender: in the small industrial enterprise, most or all the employees are girls and women; in the fields, most of the labourers are boys and men. In other words, industrialisation on a small scale leads to the strengthening of horizontal female kinship bonds and, perhaps, the weakening of their male correlate. But like in the traditional smallplanter's enterprise, workers are recruited according to individual kinship bonds with the employer — and this ethnically-based principle of recruitment, incompatible with large-scale industrialisation, then, remains unchanged.

In the larger factories and especially in the industrial estates, the effects of change on small-scale social organisation are much more dramatic. Three immediate effects are obvious (and very visible):

(a) Increasing participation of women in the affected segments of the most numerous ethnics. Most of the workers in the textile industry are girls and women. This increases their freedom of movement (many Indo-Mauritian women were hardly allowed to leave the home alone) and their economic significance. I know of several households where the women's factory work is the only source of money<21>. As yet, the man remains head of household, and his wife's and daughters' wages are allocated to him.

(b) Increasing inter-ethnic contacts in a wholly shared meaning-context. Many of the larger factories are owned by foreigners,

expatriates and Sino-Mauritians, who tend not to be ethnically biased in matters of employment in the largest, bottom segments of the hierarchies. All ethnics except Francos and Sinos are represented among EPZ workers. (I tried to sample figures, but the management of certain large factories denied me access to lists of employees. Creole girls and women are, not unexpectedly, greatly overrepresented in the unions, thus their membership lists couldn't be used either.) Extrapolating, then, from sporadic observations of casual, informal groups taking their lunchbreaks, waiting for the bus home, walking to and from the bus stop etc., it is very likely (many would say obvious) that the networks activated in field iii are much less dependent on ethnicity in the new industrial estates than elsewhere. Although collective, syndical action is very difficult in the EPZ, a certain awareness of shared interests is apparent. Many non-Creoles signed a petition defending Père Diard (cf. pp. 86-88). This signifies a class awareness which is in principle removed from gender, and definitely removed from ethnicity. Its relation to nationalism is less apparent.
The young age of the industrial workers is also significant. (Many, if not most, are under 20.) This means that most of them have reproduced non-ethnically based action sets in all social fields but the household, throughout their lives. I know several young industrial workers who are either engaged or married to men from ethnics other than their own, and intermarriage is much more widespread in «industrial» than in «agricultural» villages, which has probably do with the pattern of settlement, i.e. field ii, as well as the social links formed in field iii.

The combined significance of social change as industrialisation and tourism can be summed up as follows.

(a) Workers are increasingly recruited according to universalist, not particularist criteria. This places the competitors for jobs in structurally equal positions, regardless of ethnic membership.
In abstract Parsonian terms, this can be understood as *achievement* replacing *ascription* as a leading principle of differentiation, and the process parallels those regularly described by «classical» sociologists

— from Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber to Peter Berger and his associates — when they attempt to account for the changes in European society associated with the industrial revolution and the growing significance of the nation-state (cf. e.g. Weber 1922, Berger et al. 1974).

(b) Field iii, the working-place, is multi-ethnic and highly hierarchical. This leads to (1) increased inter-ethnic contacts, (2) a widespread understanding of the workings of the (ideal-typical) meritocracy. The values associated with meritocracy and/or class struggle may present themselves as more relevant in daily life than those of ethnic organisation.

(c) The working-place is also, often, composed of people from different parts of the island. Thus, workers establish non-localised networks founded on a shared experience as workers.

(d) The public participation of women is increasing as they begin to work with other women away from the home, and their representations of other ethnics change. This, along with *b*, contributes to removing some of the constraints formerly preventing widespread intermarriage.

(e) Modernisation brings Mauritius closer to the rest of the world. First, tourists are popular sources of information about Europe and Australia. Second, Mauritius has to compete with Oriental countries about markets for its clothing industry, and the workers know this (they are being told by the management, e.g., that wages cannot be increased lest they lose the competition and thus their jobs). In other words, workers are being instructed to act in a *global field* — the world market. Further, the international exchange of goods is increasing (Yin/Yeung 1986, Tableau 8), as is, accordingly, the local demand for «Western» consumer goods — regardless of ethnic<22>.

Social change, affecting the Mauritian lifestyles and uniformising them in *some* respects (thus confirming Gellner's theory), creates new types

of social relations in field iii. Of crucial importance is *the basis of recruitment to the labour force*. While pre-industrial wage workers were largely recruited on geographical and ethnic bases via the mediation of personal contacts, workers in the industrial and hotel sectors are recruited on basis of formal qualifications and sheer availability. Applications usually have to be in writing. New statuses or aspects of the social person gain relevance. Thus, Claude and Veerasamy (pp. 31-40) can no longer take the ethnic status setup of their working environment for granted.

This new situation in turn encourages the cultural reproduction of non-ethnic identities (although this is not the only possible effect). The new «ideologies» need not be «nationalist» in character, but the most important ones are — unlike ethnic identities as they are played out in the labour market — *compatible* with nationalism. Moderate class struggle denotes faith in the nation-state as benefactor. Carreer-individualism, founded in a liberal belief in meritocracy, implies equal opportunity and precludes ethnic particularism. The two are perceived as being complementary. Whereas the latter symbolises the individual's right to progress unimpeded (and the state's duty to protect this right of unbounded freedom), the former symbolises the state's duty to establish social justice (and the individual's right to demand protection from certain aspects of the freedom of other individuals). In Mauritius, an emergent industrial society, the part played by the state bureaucracy and the organisations influencing it, what we have called social field v, is in this sense an actor of increasing importance in the economy. Economic planning is perceived a public task (cf. MSM 1983, MMM 1983), and ambitious programmes of economic change are discussed in Parliament. Granted that Mauritius the nation-state is not a «minimal state» but aspires to develop into a «fully-fledged welfare state», taxation and social benefit schemes are also increasing activities of the state. This also serves to encourage the reproduction of individual identities as members of a nation in various contexts. In the end, then, it *does* make a difference to old Cotte in C. whether he receives his monthly pension of Rs 200 from his son or from the state.

I have now delineated some of the systemic parametres in the discussion of nationalism vs. communalism. In the final paragraphs of the study, I consider aspects of national identity, seen from the perspective of the individual.

*The Mauritian and the world: «We» and «Us»*

> «Especially the fact of my being engaged with the others in a common rhythm to whose origin I contribute, serves to develop my experience of being engaged in a 'we-as-subject'. (...) I do not exploit the collective rhythm as a tool, nor do I regard it — in the sense I might, for instance, regard the dancers on a stage — it surrounds me and fascinates me without being my *object*. (...) But this is, as one knows, only necessary if I initially, through my acceptance of a shared aim and shared tools, constitute myself as undifferentiated transcendence through relegating my own aims to second place, after the collective aims now being pursued.» <23>
>
> (Sartre, *L'Etre et le Néant*)

The plurality of Mauritian society, if not manifest in the composition of the social person, gives its inhabitants a sense of uniqueness and is as such a source of national pride (at least in conversations with foreigners). «We are the tomato of the Indian Ocean,» say promoters of tourism. «We go with everything.» This implies an identity of *us-hood*. Mauritians are what they are *as Mauritians*, relatively to what others are. Seen rather as members of a collectivity of *we* (i.e. the system viewed from within), Mauritians rather tend to experience the daily multi-ethnicity as a perpetual cause of anxiety and frustration.
Self-awareness of being Mauritian *as opposed to* non-Mauritians implies a redefinition, an expansion, of relevant systems boundaries: this encourages Mauritianity as us-hood. Unity as we-hood, conversely, must be founded in shared or complementary representations of shared

practices. I will discuss these two aspects of social identity separately for the sake of clarity; it seems, however, that every actual context must encompass elements of both: i.e., internal criteria for unity, and a *difference that makes a difference* (Bateson 1972) to all who are *not* included.

(i) New forms of «us-hood» as effects of expanding systems boundaries

Sports have frequently been invoked as focal points of ethnic unity, until recently considered legitimate. In 1982, several of Mauritius' leading football teams changed their names (from Hindu Cadets, Muslim Scouts, etc. to Cadets, Scouts etc.), and the official policy is now to encourage non-ethnic sports. Yet ethnic allegiances are still strong, despite the change in names (and the inevitable odd player or two from an «outside» ethnic in every team):

Early in March, 1986, I attended the finals of a local football tournament at George V Stadium in Curepipe. I had arrived in Mauritius only a few weeks earlier, and asked my companion, a young Creole, whether the teams had any link with the «communities». He assured me that they hadn't. «Formerly, it used to be 'Hindu Cadets'; now, it's only 'Cadets', see?» However, I couldn't help noticing the very visible ethnic clustering of Creoles and Indo-Mauritians in different parts of the stand. We took our place amidst the Creoles, and predictably — when the Cadets scored, cheers and handclaps soared from the other side of the stand, whereas the people surrounding myself silently lit another cigarette.

Lately, other foci of group allegiance have consciously been created (from field v, notably the *Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports*). In 1986, for instance, the first *Jeux des Villes de L'Océan Indien*, an inter-town tournament with participation from Reunionan towns, Victoria (of Seychelles) and Antananarivo, changed the focus from ethnic to locality (large-scale). The interest in these new proposed allegiances was very low. In tiny Mauritius, where one town merges into another

in urban Plaines Wilhems from Coromandel to Curepipe, and each town is spatially differentiated according to class and ethnicity, any Creole *cité* dweller in Beau-Bassin would rather identify with Creole *cité* dwellers in Curepipe twenty kilometres away (with whom he may well be linked by means of kinship or friendship) than with the bourgeois Sino-Mauritians and Francos a few streets off.

Sometimes, however, these conscious redefinitions of systems boundaries may have social repercussions which are *stronger* than predicted. In August, 1985, Mauritius was responsible for the second *Jeux des Iles de l'Océan Indien,* an international sports tournament. The event led to a sudden upsurge of national sentiment that could still be noticed a year later (people spoke fondly of Mauritian athletes belonging to ethnics other than their own, etc.). A schoolboy, quoted in *Le Mauricien* (February, 1986), wrote in an essay that «the country of Mauritius was born in 1968, but Mauritianity was born in August, 1985». This is clearly a significant statement: From being «us, the Hindus» etc., one suddenly became, within a larger system of relevant relations, «us, the Mauritians». This system can be defined as the sum of the social relations created and activated during the *Jeux des Iles*; the important thing is nevertheless the tournament's enduring influence on the representations of many Mauritians. After the event, the system depends on certain representations shared by a certain number of Mauritians, in order to be reproduced as a relevant potential system («model»). For this to happen, the mere sports event could never have been sufficient. The more recent *Jeux des Villes de l'Océan Indien*, as noted, never led to town-based patriotism. There is, therefore, clearly an emerging self-awareness as *citizens* among Mauritians, as participants in a system of more ambitious scale than those reproduced locally; a self-awareness which became visible in the strong manifestations of national sentiments symbolically conceptualised as «international sports».

The «underlying» processes of expansion of systemic boundaries, i.e. those that made the nationalism following the *Jeux des Iles* possible at all, are those of internationally-linked social and economic change,

notably the development of communications, tourism and industrialisation. Tourists bring knowledge and awareness of the greater systems where Mauritians potentially take part, and encourage the creation of representations of a rather loftier scope than those they potentially replace. Industrialisation creates, demonstrates and reproduces a variety of these representations in practice (cf. above). Mauritius is being served by an increasing number of international flights (and the capacity of the airport is presently being increased). In addition, many Mauritians emigrated, permanently or for shorter periods, during the first decade after independence.
The enthusiasm encountered during and after the *Jeux des Iles*, then, can be traced back to a self-awareness of «us, the Mauritians» stemming from growing intercourse with the external world — in search, as it were, of a vehicle for its visible expression.

In the previous section, I noted that expansions of systemic boundaries are credibly interpreted (by the actors) as Mauritian *us-hood* in the social context of the industrial workers. From a different perspective than the factory owner's, the national authorities are painfully aware of the Mauritian industry's dependence on the interest of foreign investors — and the presence of competing sources of cheap labour. Their implicit plea to the workers goes something like «We've got to increase our productivity lest we, Mauritius Ltd., go bankrupt.» Below, I present two examples of us-hood which is caused by expanding systemic boundaries in other contexts. In the first example, the new types of social relations emerge because of geographical, physical mobility; in the second, the ultimate cause rather consists in changes having taken place *outside* Mauritius<24>.

When abroad, Mauritians (like members of virtually any other nationality) tend to cling together. A Muslim friend, definitely skeptical of the Creoles at home («You shouldn't mingle so much with those people, Tom!»), told me this about his stay as an assistant nurse at a British hospital:

> «...And every Friday night, we'd have a huge *séga* party at somebody's place where we'd drink some rum — even *I* had a few glasses sometimes... Man, there were so many Mauritians there — Creoles, Hindus, you know; it's so nice to meet fellow-Mauritians when you're far away from home.»

This is a familiar expression of we-hood, caused by an *us-hood* resulting from expanding systems boundaries — when the difference that makes a difference appears at a level outside ethnicity because the outsiders are non-Mauritians. In Britain, being Mauritian as opposed to British is more important than being Muslim as opposed to Creole or Hindu<25>. This example also illustrates my general point that ethnicity is *conditional* pertaining to persons-in-situations and not categorical pertaining to persons-as-such.

The Muslim shift from Pakistani to Arab «ancestral identity», which has taken place since the early-to middle seventies (cf. p. 95-96), can plausibly be interpreted as a wish to participate in a system of larger scale, rather than as «ethnic revitalisation». Embracing Pan-Arabism and later Pan-Islamism, local Muslim leaders stressed that they, as Mauritian Muslims, supported the Arab world in geopolitics and, indeed, that they contributed to it.
This international ideology is, unlike the *tiersmondisme* popular in the MMM of the 1970's, not compatible with Mauritian nationalism. In January, 1984, the staff of the Libyan Embassy in Port-Louis were expelled. Whether this «quixotic expulsion» (Bowman 1984:8) was due to «a judicious accomodation to the sensitivities of Washington and Riyadh» or to «an authentic revulsion toward Colonel Qaddafi's admonition to Christians to read the Koran» (*ibid.*), has been kept secret. There are rumours that the Libyan diplomats bribed Christians into conversion (which would have upset the precarious ethnic equilibrium); whatever the case may be, Pan-Islamism is neither compatible with Mauritian foreign policy nor with its internal ideologies, notably the dictum of the highest common denominator and the attempts to have it «increased».

(ii) Growing areas of shared meaning

A nationalist ideology must have elements of the *we* aspect of unity («pulling together», «sharing the fruits of our labours» etc.) although the *us* aspect is perhaps always its *raison d'être* («We're better than the *X*'es» — put more directly: «We, Mauritius the actor in international affairs, are competitive»). Nationalism becomes pervasively relevant the moment it is more interesting to a Mauritian to compare himself (his country, its products etc.) with the foreigner than with his neighbour. Ultimately this is to do with expansions of the system considered most relevant at any given moment in the actor's life. If her status as an industrial worker, and the meaning produced therein, is more important (to her) than her status as a temple-going Tamil, then she is a Mauritian before she's a Tamil. This process cannot be measured, and it appears difficult to infer from observation: When, after all, do we know that Mlle Dimba's identity as a worker sets a deeper imprint on her self, as it were, than her identity as a Tamil? We don't know.

What we can do, however, is extrapolate from what we do know: Mlle S. Dimba, 19, is the eldest daughter of a small-planter near P., a large, «rurban» village with a rapidly growing industrial sector. There are three more children; two girls and a boy. S. passed her CPE five years ago, but there was no money to send her to secondary school. For a while she helped her mother in the house and her father in the fields; eventually, the father decided that she should work at one of the new factories in the area. One of his sisters had a job there already, and she could look after S. At this time, there were still relatively few women of Asian descent at the factories: the great majority were Creoles. S. was sometimes harassed by some of the Creole girls, she says, but she also made friends with some. Two years ago, she fell in love with a Creole boy, working as a chauffeur at the same factory as herself. Since her aunt was always nearby, she could never see him for more than a couple of minutes at the time — but somehow they managed to

agree to marry. Like virtually anybody in a similar situation, she had to make a choice between her family and her lover; she chose her family and abandoned him, but she kept her job — even though her aunt quit during this period. (Had her aunt been around, I should probably never have been able to interview her.) Today, she comments,

> «It's all very silly. To me, there's no reason that I should marry a Tamil rather than anybody else. But I'm fond of my family, and don't want to offend them. After all, I'm still young. Perhaps later I'm stronger and can marry whomever I want.»

About her religion, she says,

> «I am a Tamil, but I don't know what that means. I go to the temple and I like it. Anyway, *Sakenn pe prie dan so fason* (Each prays in his/her way), I dislike the Muslims because of their fanaticism; not as people, only their religion — but Christians are very nice. Did you know that some Catholics have done a lot of good for us girls at the factories?»

Her identity as a Mauritian seems in several respects to be practically prior to that as a Tamil. The chief criterion is her openness toward intermarriage. She also perceives her status as a factory worker as an important one (referring to *nous, les filles dans les usines*, in French incidentally, as it would clearly have beneath her petit-bourgeois dignity to speak Kreol to a European like myself). The fact that S. spends a significant part of her day in a social context where the participants are mutually defined through sharing a task horizontally, seems to have liberated her from consistent application of ethnic taxonomies/stereotypes altogether. There is no relevant difference between herself and her Creole, Hindu and Muslim workmates — on the contrary, they are united in «we-hood» through the non-hierarchically shared work, and in «us-hood» as underpaid workers. If we compare this with the division of labour in the sugar estate, the difference is obvious. Where Billy (pp. 74-75) works, for instance, the

director is Franco, the middle managerial positions are held by Sino-Mauritians and Mulattoes, the artisans and mechanics are Creoles, and the labourers in the fields Hindus and Muslims: the division of labour is strongly ethnically correlated. At S.'s job, a clothing enterprise employing some 90 people, the boss is a Indian from India, who uses a youngish Creole woman as interpreter when addressing his non-Anglophone workers. The white-collar positions are held by a Sino-Mauritian, a Mulatto and a Tamil. The majority of the employees, female *«machinistes»*, work together in a large, noisy hall; here, the four largest ethnics (Hindus, Creoles, Muslims, Tamils) are present, almost in statistically representative numbers.

An ethnically similar division of labour is found in the large hotels, too. Frequently, the upper managerial positions belong to foreigners, and Sino-Mauritians are often overrepresented among those of highest rank. But further down in the hierarchy, the pattern of employment does not reflect ethnic power asymmetries. This implies that the employees in question share a representation of meritocratic principles. This further means that they face each other in a competitive situation, unlike S. and her workmates at the factory. Unlike the factory worker, the hotel employee tends to consider the possibility of promotion, and no unity of the «we» variety is viable here. However, the adoption of principles of meritocracy entails a weakening of cultural and social boundaries: an acknowledgment that everybody is up to the same thing — and here, too, there is no relevant difference between employees on roughly the same level in the hierarchy. The social context of the hotel, like that of the factory, provides a system of shared representations, confirmed in action, which is independent from ethnicity and which is — I have argued, compatible with nationalism. Through paying increasing income taxes to the State and receiving increasing welfare benefits in return, the worker and his/her family further develop a tangible understanding of the *we-hood* inherent in the abstract model of nation-building: *We* take care of each other.

Areas of shared meaning are growing in many new and/or changing fields of inter-ethnic interaction. In this much too brief discussion of

social change, I have mainly focussed on the working-place. Other fields could have been chosen; for instance, it is certainly of some interest that virtually all Mauritians now eat their rice with spoon and fork and that body gestures are interethnically identical. It could also have been interesting e.g. to extrapolate from the fact that private television sets has grown from 50,000 to 100,000 sets in five years, and its potential effects on the cultural environment in field i —or to try to predict the effects of female employment on family organisation — or to describe the French magazines most cross-ethnically popular among the youth of Rose-Hill, etc. So be it. In leaving the questions here, I admit that neither the Mauritian metamorphosis nor my analysis of it are finished. At the moment, nevertheless, the case for nationalism seems a strong one. The national symbols are available and increasingly being perceived as relevant: colonial ones, Economic Progress and Ramgoolam as «we» symbols, the Diego Garcia conflict, economic competition and ethnic diversity as «us» symbols. The relevant forms of organisation (the nation-state as an increasingly important actor locally and internationally, the functioning meritocracy as the most important criterion for recruitment to the labour market) seem to be on their way.

On the other hand, many important events in the history of Mauritius were unpredicted.

## NOTES

1. The dictionary has throughout a very strong normative bias.

2. Both of the large political parties are in favour of a strong state collecting taxes and monitoring comprehensive welfare schemes (cf. MSM 1983, MMM 1983). The Mauritian state is already much more active than what is common in the «3rd world».

3. As Epstein (1978) remarks, the important point about the American melting-pot is that it never happened; many (but probably not most) of the ethnics remain discrete after several generations; after the second and third industrial revolutions...

4. In 1985, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery was held, after lobbying and planning by the Creole interest group *L'Organisation Fraternelle*. The government, sensing a possible conflict, rapidly ruled that the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers from India should be celebrated simultaneously.

5. The national flag, incidentally, consists of four horizontal stripes; from top to bottom, they are red, blue, yellow and green. Officially, the colours symbolise (from below) the crops of the land, the tropical sun, the ocean enclosing Mauritius, and the struggle of the people. A popular interpretation holds that the red stands for the Labour Party (Hindu dominated), the blue for the PMSD (General Population), the yellow for the Sino-Mauritians, and the green for the Muslims.

6. I have myself discussed religion with a great number of Mauritians, and was as a rule unimpressed by their actual knowledge.

7. The main source for the following discussion is the newspaper *L'Express* (Wednesday, 18 December, 1985), which devoted seven large pages to an illustrated description of the ceremony. In addition, I have the testimonies of two (non-academic, non-Hindu) Mauritians who were present.

8. ...the most striking instance witnessed by me being a police brass band playing Tamil religious music at a *Cavadee* in Mahébourg, May 1986...

9. Note the parallels with the nearly universal acceptance of English as a national language.

10. Military expenditure in Mauritius amounts to 0.2% of the GNP.

11. The MMM was founded in 1969. At a local by-election in 1971, it easily won in the Prime Minister's own constituency. At the first General Election after independence, in 1976, the MMM took 34 of the 70 seats.

12. Personal interview with Bérenger, March 1986 (partly reproduced in Eriksen 1986b)

13. In their revised programme (MMM 1983), the party admits that «The EPZ and the industrial sector will be excluded from the nationalisations to be undertaken by an MMM Government» (p. 24).

14. The last point does not, in the Mauritian context, necessarily mean more than a ritual recognition of the rules for political discourse, although the MMM plan to establish «a severe legislation against any act of racist or communalist character» (MMM 1983: 39).

15. Basha Andolan is a loosely knit umbrella organisation comprising some 16 lesser collectivities, many of which deponed independently. 14 of the member organisations represent segments of the Hindu population (divided by caste, denomination and language), one represents Tamils and one Muslims.

16. The large number of organisations and individuals attempting to influence the decision of the Committee indicates this, as well as the enormous number of applicants to various schools and courses of higher education.

17. The table is inspired by a similar table in Chaudenson 1978.

18. Not having studied the syntax of Kreol systematically, I cannot tell whether this is a reasonable judgement in addition to being an ideological justification of the symbolic reproduction of the Franco- and Anglophiles's positions in power.

19. For examples, cf. de Rauville 1967, Dinan 1986; former journalist Masson's latest novel (1986) also contains fine samples of Franco-Mauritian contempt and Christian paternalism vis à vis Kreolophones.

20. The quotation is from one of Bébel-Gisler's (1975) Guadeloupean informants, and it fits the Mauritian context perfectly.

21. I have found most instances of this in the Creole suburbs of Port-Louis, where the men traditionally worked on the docks. Since the opening of a sugar

bulk terminal («*vrac*») in 1980, many have been unemployed. During the same period, many of the women have found jobs in the new industries emerging in the early- to middle eighties.

22. An Indian intellectual, *un Indien d'Inde*, a frequent visitor to Mauritius, complained about the average Indo-Mauritian: «He's not an Indian, he just looks like it. What could his spiritual life possibly look like, when he spends all his time saving for a video machine! He doesn't speak like an Indian, nor think like one.»

23. Sartre's distinction between «we-as-subject» and «we-as-object» (French does not have a word for «us») is illuminating, but his usage of the concepts («we-as-subject» as a «subjective and psychological experience», his teachings on subject-object relationships etc.) cannot possibly be applied here. I use the terms, then, inaccurately and tentatively, in referring (a) to *we*, the social and/or cultural unit held together chiefly through its internal workings, and (b) to *us*, kept together against the «gaze of the Third (Tertius)». He is looking at *us,* but *we* are producing meaning together. The two are, empirically, non-existent poles in a continuum.

24. The Rodriguan independence movement, existing since the mid-seventies and represented in parliament by the OPR party (*Organisation du People Rodriguais*), shows the importance of delineating changes in systemic boundaries. According to the OPR and some Mauritian intellectuals, tiny Mauritius has a *colonial problem* in (even tinier) Rodrigues, exploiting and underdeveloping the dependency much in the same way as the previous colonial powers (mis-)treated their colonies. (a) Nobody conceptualised this model before independence, as the relevant system in question was then the British Empire or, more specifically, the system containing Mauritius-and-Rodrigues on the one hand, and the United Kingdom on the other. The new self-sustaining system of Mauritius-and-Rodrigues provided the structural conditions for a Rodriguan independence movement. (b) The formal relations within the respective delineated systems may be similar, although their substantial properties are not.

25. Even expatriate Mauritians sometimes activate ethnic networks, however. In Strasbourg, for instance, a large segment of the resident Mauritians are Tamils from a particular suburb of Rose-Hill, many of them relatives.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: A NOTE ON KREOL

Every description of Kreol has ideological and/or political implications. Whether it is to be considered a «French patois» or a «fully-fledged language» is a highly controversial question — and, as has been shown, one with a direct bearing on ethnic relations<1>.

In choosing to regard Kreol as a self-sustaining language rather than an imperfect imitation of French, I implicitly take a stance in Mauritian politics. Significantly, the leftish politician-theorist Dev Virahsawmy wrote his M.A. on Kreol already in 1966, forging the term *morisiê* («Mauritian») in order to define the language as a national one.

Currently, there are two alternative Kreol ortographies. In the sample text below, both are demonstrated. The first (a), based on the International Phonetic Alphabet, is now gradually becoming the dominant one. It was developed by Virahsawmy (1966) and Baker (1972) and aimed to establish Kreol as a written language with a simple ortography close to the phonemic reality, rather than a French one. Throughout the present study, and in version (a) below, I have used the Baker/Virahsawmy ortography in the LPT version. The difference between the varieties pertains to transcriptions of nasalisation: Whereas Baker denotes nasalisation by inserting an *h* after the nasalised vowel, Virahsawmy (D.V. below) adds a circumflex to the vowel instead. LPT, on their hand, denote nasalisation by doubling

the consonant (usually *n*) when it is *not* to be nasalised. I have adopted the LPT variety, chiefly because it is the one most frequently used<2>.

These minor differences in transcription of nasal sounds, are illustrated in the examples below.

| Baker | D.V. | LPT | «Gallicising» | Phonetic | French | English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ahfeh | âfê | | anfen | | enfin | enfin |
| ban | ban | | bann | | bane | <p |
| kohtah | kôtâ | | kontan | | content | conten |
| kan | kan | | kann | | canne | canne |
| larzah | larzâ | | larzan | | l'argent | de l'ar |
| rohpe | rôpe | | ronpe | | rompe | rompr |
| lamur | lamur | | lamur | | l'amour | l'amou |
| lamor | lamor | | lamor | | la mort | la mor |
| filing | filing | | filing | | filling | station |

**Table 12. Varieties of spelling in Kreol**

The Gallicising spelling variety ((b) below) is occasionally used to give an «oral» flavour to quotations etc. in French language newspapers, but it is by the late 80's rarely used in longer texts.
The sample text below, which is also reproduced in rather literal, French and English translations (c-d), originates from «Lanaliz LPT lor Ekrir Kreol», in Ledikasyon pu Travayer: *Alfa Ennbuk — Liv Profeser*, p.31. (b), (c) and (d) are my own transcriptions/translations of the original text (a).

(a) Ortography based on IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)

*Lor ekrir kreol*

Buku dimunn pu dir ki li enn priorite aster-la pu «desis» enn sel metod ekrir kreol dan Moris. Nu krwar ki priorite pa la. Ena bann pwin pli inportan pu diskite.
Nu panse ki seki pli inportan aster-la se propaz kreol ekri. Buku militan ankor pe analize, teorize e ekrir an franse. Se sa ki premye problem ki bizin diskite. Problem grafik li enn problem segonder.
Kreol ekri na pa finn komanse selman a-partir 1969. Tu kalite konvansyon finn servi e pe servi. Dan tu langaz lepep, tu kalite sistem grafik existe dan enn peryod ki varye ant 20 ek 400 banane! Pena okenn reyzon kifer aster-la dan Moris bizin pran enn latitid otoriter lor kestyon grafik!

(b) Ortography based on French

*Lor écrire créole*
Beaucoup dimoune pou dire qui li ène priorité à cette heure-là pou «décidé» ène sèl méthode écrire créole dans Maurice. Nou croire qui priorité pas là. Ena banne points plis importants pou discuté.
Nou pensé qui ce qui plis important à cette heure-là, c'est propager créole écrit. Beaucoup militants encore pé analyser, théoriser, et écrire en français. C'est ça qui premier problème qui bizin discuter. Problème graphique li ène problème sécondaire.
Créole écrit n'a pas fine commencer seulement à partir 1969. Tou qualité convention fine servi et pé servi. Dans tou langaze lepep, tou qualité système graphique existe dans ène période qui varie entre 20 ek 400 banne années! Pena aucune raizon qui faire à cette heure-là dans Maurice bizin prendre ène l'attitude autoritaire lor question graphique.

(c) French

*Sur le créole écrit*
Beaucoup des gens disent qu'il doit maintenant être un priorité de décider une seule méthode d'écrire créole à Maurice.

Nous croyons que la priorité ne doit pas être mise ici. Il y a des questions plus importants de discuter.
Nous pensons que ce que soit plus important maintenant, c'est de propager le créole écrit. Beaucoup de militants analysent, théorisent et écrivent toujours en français.
Tel est le premier problème qu'il nous faut discuter. Le problème du coté d'ortographie est un problème sécondaire.
On n'a pas commencé d'écrire le créole que depuis 1969. Toutes varietés des conventions ont été employées et sont toujours employées. Dans tous languages populaires, tel ou tel système ortographique existe normalement pendant une période qui dure entre 20 et 400 années! Il n'y a aucune raison qu'on doive maintenant prendre une attitude autoritaire sur la question d'ortographie.

(d) English

*On written Kreol*
Many people say that it ought to be a priority nowadays to decide on a single method of writing Kreol in Mauritius. We think the priority should not be put here. There are more important points to discuss.
We think the most important thing now is to propagate written Kreol. This is the first problem we should discuss. The problem of spelling is a secondary one.
Written Kreol has existed only since 1969. All kinds of conventions have been used, and are still being used. In all popular languages, any ortographic system exists during a period which varies between 20 and 400 years! There is no reason that we should now adopt an authoritarian attitude on this question in Mauritius.

## NOTES

1. A question of increasing importance as segments of the Creoles gradually begin to acknowledge their «African roots» (cf. e.g. Benoit 1985), pertains to the relationship between French and African languages in the formation of Kreol — and more generally, the actual origin of Kreol (cf. Goodman 1964, Chaudenson 1974, Corne/Baker 1983). Some linguists hold that the grammar and syntax of French Creoles are of African and/or Malagasy origin, although the vocabularies are massively French in origin.

2. Other minor problems relating to nasalisation are discussed in Baker 1972:56-7.

## APPENDIX 2. ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

EPZ*Export Processing Zone*, conventionally known as *Zone Franche*; the
and was initally chiefly intended to reduce unem

LOAC*Ligue Ouvrier d'Action Chrétienne*; «Workers' Christian League o

LPT*Ledikasyon Pu Travayer,* «Education For Workers» or «Education For Work». Educatio

MBC*Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation*, a statal institution encomp

MLA*Member of Legislative Assembly*

MMM*Mouvement Militant Mauricien* or *Muvman Militan* *Morisien*. The largest single polit

MSM*Mouvement Socialiste Militant* or *Mouvement* *Socialiste Mauricie*

OF *Organisation Fraternelle*, loosely knit organisation which was set up i
*fraternels*), politics, and — to some
extent — economy.

OPR*Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais*. Rodriguan political party and

PM*Parti Mauricien*, traditionally the party of the Franco- Mauritian oligarchy and middle-

PMSD*Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate*, small but strategically impor

PSM*Parti Socialiste Mauricien*, party founded by Labour dissidents in 1979, popular in rur

SSRSir Seewosagur Ramgoolam (1900-85), first prime minister of indepe

## APPENDIX 3. SOME ETHNIC TERMS

Ilwa «*Ilois*», «Islander»; individual from one of the «Outer Islan

Kominote Community, ethnic.

Kominalis Communalist, individual promoting and explo

Konnkikonn Bhojpuri expression of ethnic solidarity, might be rendered

Kreol (i) French-derived language spoken in Mauritius, also «M
(ii) Individual of African or mixed desce

Kreol fer blan «Creole-make-white», Creole unsuc

Kreol mazambik/Kreol malgas «Mozambiquan/Malagasy Creole». Creol

Ti-kreol «Small Creole», the poorer segments of the Creoles, as c

Laskar Muslim. Pej.

Madras Tamil. Pej.

Makro Pimp, mediator, «fink»; also «go- betwe

Malbar Aryan Hindu. Pej.

Milat Mulatto, *gen de couleur*, «White Creol

Nasyon (i) Nation/nationality
(ii) Jati or caste
(iii) Community/category of people

Ti-nasyon Low caste (*shudra*)

Neg «Negro», Black Creole, very pej.

# APPENDIX 4. THE COURSE OF INVESTIGATION

The present work draws on a variety on sources, primary and secondary. What follows is an outline of the course of investigation, intended to clarify issues of methodology and epistemology which may have arisen during reading.

My interest in Mauritius emerged suddenly and unpredictably, immediately following a chance reading of V. S. Naipaul's *The Overcrowded Barracoon* in early 1985. Naipaul's dry, witty description of the sociological paradoxes which seemed immanent in the very social fabric of the island, suggested that it might be an immensely interesting, although difficult, place to undertake social research. I read whatever I could find on Mauritius and the islands of the Western Indian Ocean, and my first impression was, if anything, confirmed. My main theoretical interests were at the time processes of modernisation, pluricultural societies, and African studies. Mauritius appeared nearly perfect in this respect. In addition, very little research had been carried out there by social anthropologists, the only true anthropological monograph known to me being Burton Benedict's *Indians in a Plural Society* (1961). I had just been discouraged from attempting to study labour migrants in central Kenya — which I had originally been planning to — and in a matter of weeks I decided to undertake my first full-scale fieldwork in Mauritius.

Literature on Mauritius was scarce in Scandinavia, but eventually I received a grant enabling me to spend the month of September 1985 at the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala, Sweden. This is where I acquired my basic «pre-understanding» (*Vorverständnis*), learned the rudiments of Kreol, and developed my tentative starting hypotheses. During this period I also wrote to scholars overseas, who gave their blessing to my plans. Finally, I wrote to a Mauritian social scientist, who promised to assist me when I arrived.

The research was originally intended to focus nearly exclusively on Mauritian Creoles, and to make comparisons between their culture and social organisation and certain Caribbean areas. Upon arriving in Mauritius in February, 1986, I already knew that the Creoles were particularly numerous in the south-west (Rivière Noire/Black River district) and in the northern suburbs of Port-Louis. Accordingly, I began my fieldwork in a southwestern village, planning to move to northern Port-Louis «after a while».

During the first weeks of my fieldwork, my pre-understanding of Mauritian society proved inadequate in three respects, and this would soon alter the direction of my research significantly. (i) It was surprisingly *easy* to do my kind of research in Mauritius. Even uneducated people spoke French, and eagerly exchanged Kreol tuition for cigarettes and drinks; the Mauritians were as a rule hospitable, friendly and sympathetically inclined to my project (although they usually didn't quite grasp exactly what I was up to). In a matter of weeks, I had developed a large and very varied set of acquaintances — comprising members of all communities and social classes, in many parts of the island. (ii) The pace of social change was much more rapid than expected. Most of the literature I had consulted was published before 1980, and I knew of the attempts at economic diversification, industrialisation etc. What I did *not* know, was that there had been an enormous economic growth since 1984, particularly in the manufacturing and tourism sectors. (iii) Ethnicity proved an even more salient feature of everyday life than expected. Hardly a social relation, it seemed, was bracketed off from ethnic classification and strategies. Even in my obscure and nearly mono-ethnic south-western village, people were clearly aware that their lifestyle acquired much of its specific meaning through *difference* from other lifestyles.

Although I never actually abandoned my initial project (a comparative study of «African diaspora» in the Caribbean and in the Indian Ocean), I eventually discovered that my material on ethnic relations was diverse and rich enough to justify the present work. Ethnicity was such

a striking feature of life in Mauritius that it could rarely or never be ignored in the process of accounting for a situational context. The fascinating changes taken place in Mauritian society — they could literally be observed from one day to the next — stimulated my curiosity and channeled my action and reflection.
After four months in the island, I no longer saw my inevitable interest in general inter-ethnic relations and social change as a disturbing element, and my final six months were about equally divided between community studies of Creoles<1>, and non-located studies of ethnicity and its alternatives. I moved to Rose-Hill in June, and stayed there until my departure. Rose-Hill (pronounced *Rozil*) is a very mixed town, ethnically and in other respects; it is centrally located and close to the University at Réduit and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute at Moka, where I occasionally spent a day reading. From my base in Rose-Hill, then, I regularly went to the field sites; first, to a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Port-Louis (where I had acquaintances already), then in Rose-Hill itself (which remains a town I feel strongly attached to).

The empirical material is varied. To begin with, it may be convenient to distinguish between primary and secondary sources. The latter include text (books, newspapers, statistics) *and* theorising or analytic informants' statements. This is to say that e.g. the statement of a Muslim claiming that «all Surtee Muslims in Mauritius are endogamous», is no more to be taken at its face value than a similar statement in a book or pamphlet.
Since I regard this category of informants' statements as secondary sources, it follows that the primary sources consist of observed actions and nothing more. An act could be either a physical act or a speech act; if the latter is executed spontaneously during the course of social intercourse (cf. Holy/Stuchlik 1983: 67) it belongs to the same level of social reality as a physical act; otherwise, it must be interpreted as secondary material. Action is always ambiguous and must be interpreted by the anthropologist, who — drawing on various sources — has a particular understanding of the context. This understanding can only be adequately developed — and corrected — when the

information received *overflows*: when one has witnessed or participated in similar situations many times and one's interpretation remains, apparently, valid.

Non-spontaneous statements are not, of course, entirely useless. The *interview*, formal or informal, proved problematic, yet useful for my purposes. Granted that one already knows the society in question fairly well (one has «seen the joke», to use Geertz' metaphor), formal techniques may well be applied, although the most interesting information is frequently «between the lines». Provided one has gathered much and diverse «spontaneous material», then, one is in a position to judge whether informants give elusive or incorrect answers to questions. This then becomes a *social fact* in its own right, indicating how they define the situation, and how they relate to the particular category of aliens represented by the anthropologist. This problem does not only pertain to the context of the interview, but is present in the field generally: Throughout my fieldwork, I was told over and over again — by people whom I knew quite well — that communalism was a thing of the past in Mauritius. Through their «spontaneous actions», verbal and non-verbal, the same people displayed strong ethnic prejudices and an ethnic classification of the social world. This was, to me, a way of obtaining knowledge about the intentional and semi-intentional manipulation with symbols.

A different category of methodological problems are caused by the indubitable fact that anthropologists are neither neutral nor context-independent. Personally, I eventually developed certain sympathies in Mauritian politics, and this must surely have influenced the direction of my research. More fundamentally, I was in Mauritius to write a thesis — to reduce living practice to one or several texts (cf. Bourdieu 1980:24). I have attempted to indicate this inevitable bias, e.g. when stressing that ethnic taxonomies, as they are presented in Figure 1 (Chapter 2), possess the properties of the *text*, not those of *social reality*. There is, as far as I can see, no reason that social reality should be analogous to a text in any significant way, and the writer's reduction from practice to text, «rendering the irreversible reversible»

(Bourdieu), implies a definite distortion of social life: this reduction alone enables us to present an apparently consistent and systematic image of a particular society. To mitigate the effects, I have not stressed rules, but rather practices in this study on Mauritian ethnicity, and moreover, I have tried to distinguish consistently between my own and the actors' representations.
All this said, I maintain that my textual reconstruction of aspects of Mauritian society is a sound reduction, its advantage being, chiefly, that it is more abstract (=simplified) and ordered than the reality it represents, and that it can actually be read and criticised as text.

## NOTE

1. I undertook three such community studies: the south-western fishing village already mentioned, a relatively mono-ethnic section of a Port-Louis suburb, and an ethnically mixed ward in Rose-Hill.

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