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Nationalism, Mauritian Style: Cultural Unity and Ethnic Diversity

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—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)

Nationalism is a kind of ideology (or secular religion) which holds that there should be congruence between cultural boundaries and political ones (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991 [1983]). This essay discusses what such congruence should entail; notably, whether or not it necessarily means that the members of a nation ought to belong to the same ethnic group for the concept of nationhood to be meaningful. The empirical material to be discussed in some detail derives from Mauritius, a polyethnic island state which is probably less atypical, globally speaking, than European evidence on nationalism may suggest.¹ A main contention in the present essay is that nationalisms quite different from the European ones are being developed in various countries. Particular nationalisms, and perhaps especially emergent ones, ought therefore to be examined comparatively.

Virtually all the nationalisms studied systematically thus far by anthropologists and other social scientists have been ethnic in character: These nationalisms justify their state-building projects by postulating a shared past and shared culture on behalf of the citizens or potential citizens encompassed by a particular conceptualisation of the nation. A fair number of studies deal with the relationship between minorities and hegemonic ethnic groups in states, and some of them analyse minority movements as nationalisms (for example, Heiberg 1989; Handler 1988; McDonald 1989). However, few of the more

¹ Field work in Mauritius was carried out from February through November 1986 and from December 1991 to March 1992.

than 170 states in the world are proper nation-states if by that term we mean countries in which the bulk of the population is considered a single ethnic group with shared culture and a shared past. In Gellner's phrase, nation-states tend to contain groups with entropy-resistant traits. These groups either refuse to be assimilated or are denied the right to assimilate. However, the term entropy-resistant may be unfortunate because it suggests that polyethnicity is inevitably a problem for nationalism. As a matter of fact, many nation-building projects in the world do not aim at eradicating cultural variation. Thus, only very few African countries are founded on an ethnic principle (and among these, only Somalia is more or less ethnically homogeneous); in Central and South America, the Caribbean and Asia, there are also many states in which the official state ideology does not openly represent one of the ethnic categories or groups that make up the citizenship but, rather, claims to represent all citizens, regardless of their ethnic identity. Since these states were not founded as ethnopolitical projects, many of them would be threatened by potential fission or civil war if the state were to become too closely identified with a single ethnic group. Three main strategies have been pursued by modern states in order to avoid this situation: First, the state can be strongly dominated by one group, which also controls the military force (Guyana is one of many good examples of this classic "plural society" solution); second, ethnicity can be underplayed systematically, and the state ideology can focus on civil rights, instead of ethnic commonalities (for example, in Tanzania and in the South Africa envisioned by the ANC); and third, the state may represent itself as an agent of compromise between ethnic groups by openly acknowledging that distinctive, endogamous groups based on self-ascription co-exist in the state and by guaranteeing their rights as culture-bearing groups. These three options are not mutually exclusive.

Because of its general bias in the direction of European and North American history, the recent outburst of theory and research on nationalism has largely failed to account for such cases.² It would probably be fair to say that French and German nationalisms have been the classic cases for the theory of nationalism. Contemporary nationalisms may, however, turn out to be very different in character from these classic ones, not least because comparatively powerful ethnopolitical movements have recently emerged in many parts of the world, including the industrial north. Members of many minority groups refuse to become assimilated into a majority or dominant ethnic group, and culture, as well as ethnic histories, have become objects of pride rather than shame.

Non-ethnic nationalisms may be regarded as something other than nationalism. Anthony D. Smith (1983) suggests that "nationism" is a descriptive term for African state ideologies but that the more conventional notion "plural

societies," used about poly-ethnic polities in general, tends to stress asymmetrical power relations or competitive relationships between groups and implicitly or explicitly disregards the possible existence of shared ideologies (such as a shared nationalism) in polyethnic societies. Such ideologies may well exist even if the inhabitants of a society belong to different ethnic groups.

Conversely, although Gellner (1983) and others correctly argue that state ideologies in industrial society must encourage some form of cultural homogeneity, this does not rule out the possibility that they may simultaneously encourage cultural diversity. Although education, the media, and the labour market will tend to create some forms of cultural homogenisation regarding "the same people living in the same place," self-conscious minority identity movements may also emerge from processes of modernisation (compare Friedman 1990; Eriksen 1991c, 1992b). These movements of ethnic awareness and ethnopolitics need not be secessionist in character and are therefore not necessarily nationalist in the strict sense of the word. Instead, they may coexist with a nationalism which to a greater or lesser extent may acknowledge their existence. Extreme cases of non-acknowledgement in recent history are represented by Japan and Turkey; by the Ainu of Hokkaido, who were not acknowledged as a minority at all until 1987; and by the Kurds of eastern Turkey, who are still referred to as "mountain Turks." An extreme case of acknowledgment is represented by Mauritius, which provides the empirical material for the present essay. My aim in the following discussion of Mauritian nationalism is to provide an unusual empirical context for the theory of nationalism and, thereby, to argue that nations may emerge from very diverse "cultural materials" which need not postulate shared origins and which need not, therefore, be ideologies of metaphoric kinship or ethnicity. The study of nationalisms, such as the Mauritian one, can also serve as a reminder that, although the origin of nationalism may be European or nearly European (compare Handler and Segal 1992), this kind of ideology has, after having been extended to a global scale, taken on a great number of local shapes. As Joyce, Gellner, Smith, and many others would surely agree, nationalism is essentially a political doctrine about "the same people living in the same place" and their relationship to the state, but both the terms "the same people" and "the same place" can be highly problematic—in Mauritius as well as elsewhere.³

TWO TRENDS IN MAURITIAN NATIONALISM

Mauritian Ethnicity

Mauritius is an island-state in the south-western Indian Ocean, some 800 kilometres east of Madagascar and just within the Tropic of Capricorn. Its surface is 1,850 square kilometers, and its population of slightly over a

² Nor, it might be added, has South American nationalism, which is distinctive in several interesting ways, been studied in this comparative context: It predates most European nationalisms and emerged in non-industrial societies.

³ A rare example of a detailed analysis of a non-European nationalism, which brings out both similarities and differences in relation to European nationalisms, is Kapferer's (1988) analysis of Sri Lankan nationalist symbolism and practice.

million consists exclusively of the descendants of immigrants who have arrived in consecutive waves since 1715. A multi-party parliamentary democracy, Mauritius peacefully moved to independence from Britain in 1968, becoming a republic within the New Commonwealth in 1992. The history of Mauritius is complex. Although France lost the island to Britain after the Napoleonic wars, the French cultural and political influence remains strong till this day. The main groups of immigrants have been French planters (eighteenth century), African and Malagasy slaves (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), Indian indentured labourers (nineteenth century), and Chinese merchants (early twentieth century). The spine of the Mauritian economy has always been sugar, but since the early 1980s, a very efficient industrialisation programme has succeeded in diversifying the economy, raising the material standard of living perceptibly, eradicating unemployment, and stifling emigration (see Leffler 1988; Bowman 1990).

The number of ethnic groups that make up the Mauritian population varies: There may be between four and twenty-four ethnic groups, depending on the social context (Eriksen 1988, 1992). The four ethnic categories reified in Mauritius's Constitution are the Hindus (52 percent), the Muslims (16 percent), the Sino-Mauritians (3 percent) and the general population (29 percent). The latter is a residual category containing most of the Christians in Mauritius. There are three main religions: Hinduism (several denominations, altogether 52 percent), Roman Catholicism (30 percent) and Islam (largely Sunni, 17 percent). Buddhism is also practiced by many of the Sino-Mauritians, who tend also to practice Catholicism.

Officially, as many as fifteen languages are spoken in Mauritius; in practice, the number is much lower. English is the official language; French is the language of the media; and a French-lexicon Creole, *Kreol*, is the mother tongue of a growing majority of Mauritians. Bhojpuri, the Bihari dialect of Hindi, is still widely spoken, particularly in rural areas; and many Sino-Mauritians speak Hakka at home. However, virtually all Mauritians, regardless of their mother tongue or ancestral tongue, are fluent in Kreol by the early 1990s and understand French. The question of the relative status of different languages is the most important political problem concerning post-independence attempts at reconciling shared national identity with discrete ethnic identities (Eriksen 1990).

Ethnic folk taxonomies tend to diverge from the official one, which was originally designed by the British in the late 1940s to ensure that all main ethnic groups were fairly represented in the Legislative Assembly. Most Mauritians would agree that the following ethnic groups exist in the island: the Hindus (which locally means Hindus of North Indian origin), the Creoles (Catholics of largely African descent), the Muslims (of North Indian descent), the Tamils and Telugus (of South Indian descent, whose spokesmen sometimes claim that their religion is Dravidian and not Hindu), the Marathis

(Hindus from Maharashtra state), the Chinese (or Sino-Mauritians), the *gens de couleur* or mulattos, and the Franco-Mauritians (the roughly 2 percent of French and British descent). All of these groups (with the possible exception of the Creoles, compare Eriksen 1986) have rules of endogamy, practiced with highly varying degrees of rigour, and myths of shared origins.

A locally widespread perspective on Mauritian society depicts the island as a "plural society" profoundly divided between ethnically based, antagonistic group interests (Furnivall 1948; Smith 1965). Some of my informants have sometimes even gone as far as to claim that the main reason for the absence of widespread ethnic violence is mutual fear. On the other hand, Mauritius is more and more frequently cited by foreign observers as a multi-ethnic success story which has skillfully avoided minority repression and created a political culture stressing the importance of a fair ethnic division of power (compare Simmons 1983; Bowman 1990).

The present discussion will focus on the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in Mauritian society. First, I shall describe attempts at creating a shared Mauritian identity without interfering with ethnic identities; then I consider the relationship between nationalist ideology and social relations. Finally, I shall describe two modes of being Mauritian.

Concepts of Nationhood

At the outset, we should note that the very word, nation, is no less unproblematic in Mauritius than elsewhere and that its meanings are largely locally defined. When, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the radical MMM party launched its slogan, *En sel lepep, en sel nasyon* (A single people; a single nation), there was much confusion.⁴ "What else can you expect," comments a journalist retrospectively, "considering that *nasyon* in Kreol usually means *jati*." Early in my fieldwork, I asked a Creole if he conventionally tipped waiters. "*Selman ban nasyon*" (Only nation people) was his rather puzzling reply. Later I was to learn that this meant he only tipped waiters who were fellow Creoles. At another occasion, I introduced two African students to a group of urban Creoles. "*Mo kontan zot parski zot nasyon*" (I like them, 'cause they belong to my nation), said one of the Creoles, addressing me. During a political discussion with a group of Hindus, somebody mentioned *ban ti-nasyon* (the small nations), referring to the impure castes. Again, when my brother came on holiday to Mauritius and we would 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 of the same nation).

⁴ 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. An excellent study of the phenomenon of the MMM and its development from socialist utopianism to pragmatic centre-left politics is Oodiah (1989).

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 is *en lil* (an island) or *en peyi* (a country). Only people speaking a Kreol heavily influenced by French language and corresponding concepts would normally describe Mauritius as *en nasyon*. The word is used normatively in political rhetoric; the MMM has been mentioned, and in addition, the word is listed in the Trotskyite group LPT's Kreol-English dictionary (*Ledikasyon pu travayer*, 1985) as meaning simply "nation." Other politicians tend to avoid using the word altogether and would rather talk of *le peuple mauricien* or *tu ban Morisien* (all Mauritians) when invoking the concept of national unity. They are less likely to be misunderstood.

The Kreol word, *nasyon*, has, in other words, several meanings: *jati* or caste (*ti-nasyon*: low caste), ethnic community, race, language community, and nationality or nation-state. All these meanings connote a people in some way or other, but several of them are mutually exclusive. The plurality of meanings of the word, *nasyon*, indicates some of the social identities being negotiated and thereby shows that the project of Mauritian nation-building is far from having been fully accomplished.

The Relationship Between Ethnicity and Nationalism

Compared to many other post-colonial polyethnic states, such as Malaysia, Guyana, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, the case for national identity nevertheless seems strong in Mauritius. No ethnic hegemony could possibly establish itself officially without a devastating civil war, and political separatism is definitely no option because the territory is too small. Yet the everyday reproduction of ethnicity in casual interaction provides important frames of relevance—both as ethnic organisation and as ethnic identity—in civil society. Any credible invented nationhood must therefore take account of the ethnic variation in the island. As evident below, there are essentially two complementary ways of undertaking this task in Mauritius.

Mauritians from different "communities" participate in uniform political, educational, and economic systems.⁵ As Grillo (1980), Gellner (1983), Anderson (1991), and others have noted, this is probably a necessary condition for nationalism to be successful as a popular movement but is hardly a sufficient condition for it to overrule and eventually replace competing ideologies. Nationalist ideology must additionally present itself as more persuasive (at the level of representations) and probably as more beneficial (at the level of action) to its adherents, than competing ideologies, such as ethnic ones or ideologies based on class (Eriksen 1991a). Ethnic, class-based, and nationalist ideologies are not mutually exclusive, however—indeed, most Mauritians support all three from time to time—but they operate in some of the same

fields of discourse and action, notably in the labour market and in politics. There is, in other words, a partly competitive relationship between these symbolic systems; particularly in the labour market, where particularist ideology (such as nepotism) confronts universalist ideology (meritocracy and bureaucracy). Nationalism and ethnicity may certainly co-exist in industrial societies.⁶ This could be the case in politically authoritarian systems in which ethnic groups are ranked and cultural plurality is confined to homes, mosques, and the like. Co-existence between ethnic and nationalist ideologies is also possible in a democratic capitalist society, in so far as ethnicity does not interfere systematically with principles of meritocracy (modern capitalism) and bureaucracy (modern democracy). In official Mauritian nation building, particularly since 1968, the political authorities have tried to implement this kind of compromise in legislation, politics, the labour market, and civil society. Competition between nationalist and ethnic ideologies and practices does not, therefore, 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 and not elsewhere. Nationalist ideology in Mauritius does not propose to do away with ethnic identities altogether, only with the forms of ethnic organisation known as communalism, that is, ethnically based particularism in politics and the labour market. In order to succeed, a Mauritian nationalism has to be invented so that it does not interfere with the reproduction of ethnic identities; at the same time, it should not represent one of the ethnic groups, lest the remaining groups protest.

The Search for National Symbols

As ethnic ideologies invoke custom, ancestral languages, and shared myths of origin as their ultimate core, so do conscientious nation builders search for symbols of shared meaning that can justify unitary national strategies and persuade lay actors to sympathise and participate. Symbols of national unity are difficult to construct and justify in independent Mauritius, as they must simultaneously be non-ethnic in character and appeal to the target group; because their ethnic identity remains important to most Mauritians, it is difficult to accomplish both aims.

The most widespread public symbols of "Mauritian-ness" are largely inherited from colonial times. This continued use of colonial symbols and history as national symbols is much less controversial in Mauritius than in most African and Caribbean countries. In Mauritius, there was no violent discontinuity from colonialism to independence. Conflicts over independence were internal and scarcely involved the colonial power directly. Most of the Franco-Mauritians stayed on in the island after the general elections in 1967, when

⁵ The Mauritian state is already much more active than what is common in the third world and has the rudiments of a welfare state.

⁶ As Epstein (1978) has remarked, the most 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, even after the second and third industrial revolutions.

the pro-independence factions won by a slight margin. If it had not been for the French and British colonialists, there would have been no Mauritian society—and people are aware of this.

The national flag consists of four horizontal stripes; 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.⁷ The national coat of arms depicted on bank notes, coins, postage stamps, and official publications was introduced in French times and has been retained unaltered: 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. Since then, she has gradually been replaced by local politicians, in most cases 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 nineteenth-century governor Sir William Newton, eighteenth-century governor 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 Port-Louis in the mid-nineteenth century and beatified in 1978, is also recognised as a great Mauritian by Christians and non-Christians alike. Crucial events in Mauritian history, such as the battle of Grand-Port (1810), which eventually led to the loss of the erstwhile Ile-de-France (Mauritius) to Britain, the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers (1835), and independence (1968) are also frequently invoked as events documenting the existence of a truly Mauritian national identity.⁸

A main advantage of using colonial symbols in constructing the Mauritian nation is their uncontroversial nature. Mauritius never went through a period of intense resentment and anti-colonial political mobilisation. The island's independence was negotiated and never fought for (44 percent of the population voted against it), and the political continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial period is often stressed in official accounts of Mauritian history. Besides, colonial symbols do not represent any of the constituent ethnic groups of the island and can, therefore, just like the English language (which is no Mauritian's ancestral language), serve as compromises. On the other hand, for the very same reason, such symbols may be perceived as empty and

sterile, as they do not resonate with the real-world experiences of the citizens. This problem can be overcome in two ways: One may either try to fashion a shared Mauritian identity which has a content closer to the citizens' shared experiences or try to devise an ideology of multiculturalism, depicting the nation as being identical with its constituent parts. Both of these possible solutions to the problem of nationhood are riddled with contradictions, and I shall deal with them separately. The first of the two examples presented below is an attempt to apply a kind of multiculturalism as a national ethos. The second example represents an attempt to transcend ethnic identities altogether, replacing ethnic symbols with national ones without interfering with ethnic classifications and distinctions.

The Nation as Mosaic

The variety of traditions, races and languages frequently mentioned in descriptions of Mauritius is potentially a source of national pride. This is manifest in Mauritians' behaviour vis-à-vis foreigners, in tourist brochures, and so on. (In many actual social situations, however, multi-ethnicity is experienced as a strain rather than an asset.) The trend of nationalism which represents the nation as being identical with Mauritius' cultural diversity can be labelled *pluri-culturalisme mauricien*. Its main normative value is tolerance, and it depicts cultural diversity as an end in itself. The following example illustrates its logic.

During the week preceding the annual Independence celebrations (called republic celebrations since 1992), a large number of "composite cultural shows" are organised at local community centres and at sports stadiums. I have attended several such performances (in 1986 and 1992). Typical was the show performed in the village hall of Bambous, a large, ethnically diverse village, in March 1986. The show included 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, but the chairman of the district council used Kreol in his opening and ending speeches.

The aim of this performance was to display and encourage "unity in diversity"; among other things, the organisers wished to accustom spectators to the traditions of ethnic groups other than their own. In a word, such shows strive to give significance to metaphors of "organic wholes" composed of incongruous elements but fused in the common destiny of the Mauritian people; that is, the whole (the show) was intended to signify an entity qualitatively different from its parts (the separate entries). Such a composite cultural show propagates subjective perceptions of being integrated on a higher systemic level—from communal or ethnic to national identity. The majority of 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 until recently. Independence

⁷ 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.

⁸ In 1985, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery was organised after intense 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.

celebrations are thus intended chiefly as redefinitions of cultural reality through offering new metaphors and symbols to define social identities. 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 may thus remain unchanged for a while). An individual defining herself or himself as being a member of a nation rather than a specific ethnic group in a particular context, will then modify her or his representations relating to politics, economic relationships, marriage strategies, friendship, and so forth, and then proceed to modify her or his patterns of action.

This strategy is not necessarily successful, even at the abstract level of folk representations. For one thing, the concept of "unity in diversity" represents a contradiction in terms to many Mauritians. National unity can be taken to imply loss of distinctiveness (identity), whereas to remain distinctive may seem to preclude national unity. Further, the practical reproduction of ethnic personal networks (in matters, say, of work, marriage, and friendship), is still believed to pay off as long as the wider social context remains unchanged. The two, ethnic identity and ethnic agency, cannot, therefore, be done away with by means of certain cultural policies. When the channels for, and content of, successful careering are changed, however, new patterns of representation and action are more likely to emerge.

Ramgoolam's Funeral

Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam (1900–85) was Mauritius' prime minister during the first fifteen years of independence. A Hindu from the numerous Vaish caste, he led the Mauritian delegation during independence negotiations in London in the mid-1960s. During the election campaign of 1967 he led the pro-independence parties to a narrow victory and 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 he succeeded in persuading the leader of the anti-independence bloc, the eloquent Creole Gaëtan Duval, to join his first government (see, for example, Simmons 1983:191–2).

In 1982, when his Labour Party lost the general election to the MMM-PSM alliance, Ramgoolam, disappointed, reluctantly accepted the post of Governor General (a position Mauritius retained until becoming a republic). Now the political loser, he received the pity of his opponents and was simultaneously in a position to stay aloof from petty quarrels. Although he was bitter with the electorate that failed him, 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 judgments were rarely mentioned publicly; until the publication of Sydney Selvon's biography (Selvon 1986), even non-commissioned biographies of Ramgoolam were testimonies to his never faltering glory. Not all of them were written by Hindus.

Because the ceremony accompanying the cremation of Ramgoolam's body was relevant for virtually every Mauritian, I shall therefore go through it in some detail. The news of Ramgoolam's death was carried on radio and television on December 15 and in the newspapers on the following day. Through state advertisements, citizens were encouraged to show their *Chacha* (Hindi for teacher) a last honour by taking part in the procession leading to the botanical gardens of Pamplemousses, where the ceremonial cremation of the corpse was to take place the next day.

The procession started from Ramgoolam's home, a colonial mansion at Réduit. A very large number of people filled the courtyard. At noon, the yard was considered full; and newcomers were denied access by the police. A Hindu religious ceremony was then 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 was placed on it by close relatives.

The journey towards Pamplemousses began around 1:30 pm. The police band heading the procession played Chopin's *Marche funèbre* as they left Réduit. 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 had to travel the thirty kilometres to Pamplemousses by bus if they wished to witness the incarceration of the body.

Huge crowds of onlookers had gathered on sidewalks 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*. Churches along the itinerary rang their bells in approval of what was primarily 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 Handel and repeated the performance of Chopin's Funeral 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, as well as high officials and foreign guests, paid their last respects, 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

lam's son went through the last motions strictly according to Sanatanist Hindu tradition, eventually lighting the funeral pyre.

The religious parts of the ceremony did not deviate at a single point from tradition. Orthodox Sanatanism, still the largest Hindu denomination in Mauritius, is by no means a majority religion. Unlike some countries, there is no pan-ethnic, nationalist, or humanist alternative to religious burial available in Mauritius. (Besides, any resentment towards Hindus has nothing to do with Hindu religious practices.) The acknowledgment of the churches has been mentioned; there is in general a spirit of religious ecumenism 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 by 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),⁹ the organisers 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 substantial content to pan-ethnic Mauritianism. Classical European music is not very popular in Mauritius; it belongs to nobody's real or fictitious traditions and can therefore easily be accepted as neutral by the entire nation.¹⁰ The national anthem, which sounds much like any other national anthem, with lyrics in English written by a Francophile Creole poet, was also sung at Pamplemousses.

The very visible parts played by the police and paramilitary forces (the 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. Neither the police nor the SMF have a very strong position in Mauritius, compared to larger and more powerful states. The 500 men who make up the lightly armed SMF, which is the closest the state comes to having an army, are rarely involved in violence; their most important duties are peaceful (guarding, extinguishing fires, skin diving). The idea of a military coup d'état is a joke. 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 heavily dominated by one ethnic group. Through conspicuous display of their uniformed and armed forces, the state representatives conveyed to the people that law and order were being maintained on a national level and that this was done in a just way, not according to ethnic membership (the uniforms are always identical).

Clothing is an important vessel of ethnic demarcation. At the funeral, very

few high representatives of the state wore traditional Indian garb. Perhaps the fact that they wore European-style suits was too obvious to be noticed, but had the prime minister (a Vaish Hindu like Ramgoolam) turned up in anything but a suit, people would certainly have taken account of it. The form of the funeral, a long procession leading to a climax, is familiar to the majority of Mauritians. Both of the two largest ethnic groups have annual events similar in form to Ramgoolam's funeral. The Hindus celebrate their Maha Shivarati feast in February by marching to a small sacred lake; the Creoles, in turn, have their Père Laval pilgrimage in September.

Had the ideological atmosphere been more *tiersmondiste*, or anti-colonialist, in Mauritius, 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 founded by Mahé de Labourdonnais. However, this did not happen; and 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.

At the funeral, the most prominently placed foreign guests were the representatives of India and of four nations along the south-western shore of the Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar, and Réunion). Although India is seen as an important ally only by roughly half of the Mauritian population and commodity exchange between Mauritius and India is almost negligible, placing the Indian representative in a position superior to that, say, of French and British representatives, emphasised Ramgoolam's origins. It also demonstrated the Hindu lobby's anxiety about maintaining good links with India. The four nations from the shore of the Indian Ocean are, in Mauritius, universally considered not only close neighbors in a geographical sense but important in other ways as well.

The Kreol language, a potential symbol of national unity, was not used by itself at the funeral but only in combination with Hindi, English, and French. This indicated that linguistic compromise is the only viable solution as long as the Mauritian population is divided on the language issue. (Interestingly enough, many of those who oppose Kreol as a national language use it as their native tongue.)

As in the previous example (the "composite cultural show"), the meaning-contexts consciously produced during this event aimed at redefining cultural reality toward shared meaning at a national level. However, the content of the respective propositions differed. Although the funeral defined Mauritianity as a quasi-religious, self-sustaining cultural system transcending the underlying "mosaic of cultures," the definition implicit in the cultural show depicted Mauritianity as being identical with the mosaic itself. Although the supra-ethnic ideology of nationhood may be perceived as a threat against ethnic

⁹ The most striking instance I witnessed was a police brass band playing Tamil religious music at a religious festival in Mahébourg in May 1986.

¹⁰ Note the parallels with the nearly universal acceptance of English as a national language.

distinctiveness, the ideology of multiculturalism may seem a threat against national unity because it tends to freeze ethnic distinctions and prevent their ultimate transcendence.

These are some of the ways in which the image of the Mauritian nation is reified and articulated. In the final part of this essay, I will describe aspects of that national identity which such reifications seek to create. First, however, it is necessary to look into some of the social conditions of Mauritian nationalism. A major factor has been the change in the labour market that has taken place since around 1983, and this will be my focus here.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Economic Change and Social Identities

Since 1986, the industrial zone (EPZ, Export Processing Zone, or *Zone Franche*) has, as a unit, been the largest employer in Mauritius. In other words, more Mauritians are now industrial workers than agricultural labourers. Significant numbers also depend on the 300,000 annual tourists for their livelihood.

A brief comparison between two coastal villages, one of which was strongly exposed to tourism during the 1980s, may illustrate some of the cultural effects of tourism (compare Eriksen 1988, for details). In La Gaulette, where most of the households have members working in hotels, people are up-to-date with European patterns of consumption: The young take great pains to adopt recent Western fashion in clothing and hairstyle; the adults invest much work in improving their dwellings; and many have bank accounts. In neighbouring Case Noyale, on the contrary, where virtually no one was employed in the tourist industry either in 1986 or in 1991–92, the dominant ethos is largely the classical, frequently stereotyped, Creole morality entailing short, unmeasured temporal units and, accordingly, a general lack of commitment to long-term strategies. The social and cultural difference between these neighbouring villages, which might conceivably have developed regardless of tourism, has certainly been accentuated by it. The dominant way of life in La Gaulette 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 La Gaulette, most of the men wear inexpensive wrist watches daily. In Case Noyale, watches are worn as jewelery at parties and sometimes at Sunday Mass.

It is of further significance that the employee at the tourist hotel has the prospect—real or imagined—of promotion. The chairman of the Village Council encompassing both villages, a poorly educated man, had begun as a waiter and was now, eleven years later, chief purser. Field labourers and fishermen, on the contrary, have little or no prospect of promotion. Nothing in

their daily practices can, therefore, serve as a model of either development or progress or simply change.

Industrialisation and National Identity

Social change as industrialisation has slightly different effects, although this, too, entails a new structuring of time and social relations. Many of the roughly 600 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 man 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 works full-time. The wages correspond to the national average (2,500 monthly rupees for full-time employees in 1992).

In this kind of enterprise, no qualitatively new type of social relation arises from the organisation of production. Compared to a small planter with similar economic assets, the main 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, as in the traditional small-planter'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). First, women increase their participation in public life. 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. There are now many households in which the women's factory work is the only source of money.¹¹

Second, inter-ethnic contacts in a wholly shared meaning-context are more numerous. 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 factories, which form the bottom segments of the hierarchies. All ethnic groups except Franco-Mauritians and Sino-Mauritians are represented among EPZ workers. The social networks activated in these new workplaces are much less dependent on ethnicity than, for example, in the cane fields, where the large majority of workers are Hindus. Although collective, syndical action is very difficult in the EPZ, a certain awareness of

¹¹ This is particularly common 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 become unemployed. During the same period, many of the women have found jobs in the new industries.

shared interests is apparent. In 1986, many non-Creoles signed a petition defending a Catholic priest who was being expelled by the government because of "subversive" (syndical) activities. This signifies a class awareness removed from gender and definitely removed from ethnicity. The relation of this awareness to national identity—that such a self-awareness transcends ethnicity—is less obvious.

The young age of industrial workers is also significant. A majority are under 25 years old. This means that most of them have reproduced non-ethnically based action sets in all social fields but the household throughout their lives. Many young industrial workers are either engaged or married to men from ethnic groups other than their own; and intermarriage, although still comparatively rare, is more widespread in industrial than in agricultural villages, probably as much the result of the pattern of settlement as the new situation in the labour market.

Meritocracy

The combined significance of social change as industrialisation and tourism can be summed up as follows. 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. The process parallels those regularly described in mainstream sociology from Marx, Tönnies, and Weber to Giddens, in analyses of the changes in European society associated with the industrial revolution and the growing significance of the nation-state—theories which have been reformulated by recent theorists of nationalism.

The industrial work place is multi-ethnic and hierarchical. This leads to increased inter-ethnic contacts and a widespread understanding of the workings of the (ideal-typical) meritocracy. The values associated with meritocracy and class struggle may thus present themselves as more relevant in daily life than those of ethnic organisation. The work 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. Also, the public participation of women is increasing, as they begin to work with other women away from the home and as their representations of other ethnic groups change. This, along with the multi-ethnic and hierarchical nature of the work place, contributes to removing some of the constraints formerly preventing widespread intermarriage.

Modernisation brings Mauritius closer to the rest of the world. First, tourists are important sources of information about Europe and Australia. Second, Mauritius has to compete with Oriental countries for markets for its textile industry; and the workers know this, having been told by management, for instance, that wages cannot be increased lest they underbid market competi-

tion and thus lose their jobs. In other words, workers are being instructed to act in a global field—the work market. Finally, the international exchange of goods is increasing, as is, accordingly, the local demand for Western consumer goods, regardless of ethnic membership.¹²

Economic change affects Mauritian lifestyle and homogenises them in some respects, creating new types of social relations in the labour market. A factor of crucial importance is the principle of recruitment to the labour market. While pre-industrial wage workers were largely recruited on geographical and ethnic grounds via the mediation of personal contacts (often relatives), workers in the industrial and hotel sectors are recruited on the basis of formal qualifications and sheer availability. Applications often have to be made in writing. New statuses or aspects of the social person thereby become relevant.

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 the ethnic identities played out in the labour market, compatible with nationalism. Moderate class struggle denotes faith in the nation-state as benefactor. Career individualism, founded in a liberal belief in meritocracy, implies equal opportunity and precludes ethnic particularism. The two are perceived as being complementary. Whereas meritocracy indicates the individual's right to unimpeded progress (and the state's duty to protect this right of unbounded freedom), unionism indicates 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, is of increasing importance in the economy. Economic planning is perceived as a public task, and ambitious programmes of economic change are being discussed in the Legislative Assembly. Granted that Mauritius the nation-state is not a minimal state but aspires to develop into a full-fledged welfare state, taxation and social benefit schemes are also increasing activities of the state. This also serves to facilitate and encourage the reproduction of individual identities as members of a nation in a number of contexts.

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

¹² An Indian intellectual, *un Indien de l'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."

as undifferentiated transcendence through relegating my own aims to second place, after the collective aims now being pursued.¹³

(Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant*, III)

The Mauritian and the World: "We" and "Us"

Following Sartre, we may suggest that there are two modes of group belongingness: we-hood and us-hood—we-as-subject and we-as-object. In this part of the essay I shall describe some aspects of these two modes of social identity in the context of the ongoing invention of Mauritian national identity. First, I focused on the symbolic justification of the two trends in Mauritian nationalist ideology as alternatives to ethnic ideologies; then, I discussed some of the social conditions for such ideologies to be effective. At this stage in the analysis, an attempt to articulate the symbolic with the social by describing the social functioning of ideologies therefore seems appropriate. The social context, it should be recalled, is one of ideological competition between nationalism and ethnic ideology. It is tautologically true that the most successful ideology in such a situation is the one that makes the most sense to its potential followers. In a situation of rapid change, old ideologies may cease to function satisfactorily by this token. The changes described here thus indicate the current potential of nationalism. It should be noted, again, that Mauritian nationalism is in some respects very different from European nationalisms.

The self-conscious plurality of Mauritian society gives its inhabitants a sense of uniqueness and can as such function as a source of national pride when it is directed outwards. "We are the tomato of the Indian Ocean," say promoters of tourism. "We go with everything." This statement implies an identity of us-hood. Mauritians are, here, Mauritian in relation to what others are. Seen from the perspective of the collectivity of we (that is, 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-Mauritian, 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 empirical context must encompass elements of both, that

¹³ Sartre's distinction between "we-as-subject" and "we-as-object" (French lacks 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 fruitfully be applied here. I use the terms tentatively in referring, on the one hand, to we, the social and cultural unit held together chiefly through its internal workings; and, on the other hand, 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. The distinction is valuable, in my opinion, because it enables us to make an important distinction: In the long run, it is not enough merely to state that identities are "relational," which we anthropologists have grown accustomed to do. One must also distinguish between external and internal relationships.

is, the internal criteria for cohesion and solidarity, as well as the communication of a difference that makes a difference to all who are not included. The process of exclusion, a fact necessary to all ideologies of social inclusion, naturally becomes more important as contact with outsiders becomes greater. The process of economic change in Mauritius has brought the islanders into increasing contact with foreigners and has in this way created the necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for consolidating Mauritian identity as forms of us-hood. I will first describe some of these processes before moving to a consideration of the possibilities for Mauritian we-hood.

New Forms of "Us-Hood": Expanding Systems Boundaries

Until recently, sports have frequently been invoked as legitimate focal points of ethnic unity. In 1982, several of Mauritius' leading football teams changed their names (for example, from Hindu Cadets, Muslim Scouts, to Cadets, Scouts); 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" group 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 did not. "Formerly, it used to be 'Hindu Cadets'; now, it's only 'Cadets', see?" However, I could not 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 me silently lit another cigarette.

Lately, other foci of group allegiances have consciously been created, notably through the establishment of a Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports. In 1986, the first Jeux des Villes de L'Océan Indien, an inter-town tournament with participation from Reunionan towns, Victoria (of the Seychelles) and Antanarivo, changed the focus of identity from ethnic group 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 where each town is socially and 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 Franco-Mauritians a few streets away.

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 years later. In 1986, a school-boy wrote in an award-winning 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 and Creoles, and so forth," one suddenly became, within a larger system of relevant relationships, "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 aspect 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 symbolic system. For this to happen, the mere sports event could never have been sufficient. The more recent *Jeux des Villes de l'Océan Indien* 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. This self-awareness became visible in the strong manifestations of national sentiments symbolically conceptualised as international sports.

The underlying processes of expansion of systemic boundaries, that is, 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 in which Mauritians potentially take part. Tourists also 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. Mauritius is being served by an increasing number of international flights (the capacity of the airport was increased in 1990). 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 interaction with the external world—in search, as it were, of a vehicle for its visible expression.

Expansions of systemic boundaries, noted above, are transformed into Mauritian us-hood in the social context of industrial, export-oriented production. From a different perspective than the factory owner's, the national authorities are painfully aware of the Mauritian industrial sector's dependence on the interest of foreign investors—and the presence of competitive sources of cheap labour. Their implicit plea to the workers goes something like this: "We've got to increase our productivity lest we, Mauritius Limited, go bankrupt." We shall now consider two examples of us-hood which are caused by expanding systemic boundaries in other regards. 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.¹⁴

Us-Hood and We-Hood in the Diaspora

When abroad, Mauritians (like members of virtually any other nationality) tend to cling together. A Muslim informant, definitely skeptical of the Creoles at home (he would tell me, sternly, "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 very 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 of and above 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.¹⁵ This example also illustrates the general theoretical 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 taking place since the early- to mid-seventies (Eriksen 1988) 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 thereby stressed that they, as Mauritian Muslims, supported the Arab world in geopolitics and, indeed, that they contributed to it.

This international ideology is 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 accommodation to the sensitivities of Washington and Riyadh" or to "an

¹⁴ The Rodriguan independence movement, existing since the mid-seventies and represented in parliament by the OPR party (Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais), shows the importance of delineating changes in systemic boundaries. (Rodrigues is a small dependency of Mauritius.) 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. Nobody thought of this 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. The formal relations within the respective delineated systems may be similar, although their substantial properties are not.

¹⁵ Even expatriated Mauritians sometimes activate ethnic networks, although they tend to be more nationalistically minded than those living in their island of birth. In Strasbourg, for instance, a large segment of the resident Mauritians are Tamils from a particular suburb of Rose Hill, many of them relatives.

authentic revulsion toward Colonel Qaddafi's admonition to Christians to read the Koran" (Bowman 1984:8), is uncertain. There are rumours to the effect that the Libyan diplomats bribed Christians into conversion (which would have upset the precarious ethnic equilibrium in the capital). Whatever the case may be, Pan-Islamism is neither compatible with Mauritian foreign policy nor with its complementary nationalist ideologies of compromise and supra-ethnic belongingness, respectively.

We-Hood: 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," and so forth), although the us aspect is perhaps always its *raison d'être* ("We're better than the X'es"—or, 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, and so forth) with the foreigner than with his neighbour. Ultimately this has 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 is a Tamil. This process cannot be measured, and it appears difficult to infer from observation. When, after all, do we know that Mademoiselle Dimba's identity as a worker becomes more pervasive than her identity as a Tamil? We do not know.

What we can do, however, is to extrapolate from what we do know: Mademoiselle Sheila Dimba, 19, is the eldest daughter of a small planter near Petite Rivière, a large, rural village with a rapidly growing industrial sector. There are three more children: two girls and a boy. Sheila passed her Certificate of Primary Education (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 Sheila. At this time, there were still relatively few women of Asian descent at the factories. The great majority were Creoles. Sheila 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 she. Because her aunt was always nearby, she could never see him for more than a couple of minutes at a 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. 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.

Concerning 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?

The girl seems to assign a higher priority in several respects to her identity as a Mauritian than to her identity as a Tamil. 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 been beneath her dignity to speak Kreol to a European like me). The fact that Sheila spends a significant part of her day in a social context in which the participants are mutually defined through sharing a task horizontally seems to have liberated her from a consistent application of ethnic taxonomies 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 situation with the division of labour in the sugar estate, the difference is obvious. At a typical sugar estate, the director is Franco; the middle-managerial positions are held by Sino-Mauritians and Mulattos; the artisans and mechanisms are Creoles; and the labourers in the fields Hindus and Muslims. The division of labour is strongly ethnically correlated. At Sheila's job, a clothing enterprise employing some ninety 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 ethnic groups (Hindus, Creoles, Muslims, and Tamils) are represented, almost in statistically representative numbers.

An ethnically similar division of labour is found in the large hotels as well. 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 asymmetries of ethnic power. 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 Sheila and her workmates at the factory. Unlike the factory worker, the hotel employee tends to consider the possibility of promotion; no unity of the "we" variety is viable here. However, the adoption of principles of meritocracy entails a weakening of cultural and social boundaries; it entails a tacit acknowledgement 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. Through the payment of increasing income taxes to the state and the receipt of increasing welfare benefits in return, the worker and 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. It is obviously much more difficult to be we than to be us, but it is not impossible.

CONCLUSION: MAURITIAN NATIONALISM AND THE THEORY OF NATIONALISM

This discussion of Mauritian nationalism and the social conditions for its emergence has revealed similarities and differences in relation to the European nationalisms usually invoked as ideal types in theoretical discussions of nationalism (see Eriksen 1993 for an overview). The growth of Mauritian nationalism confirms the widespread notion that a largely uniform system of education and an economy based on work for wages and on money exchange are conditions for nationalism as popular movements. However, it is difficult to argue that Mauritian nationalism is an ethnic ideology drawing extensively on myths of a shared past. It can be argued, perhaps, that Mauritian nationalism in its supraethnic variety ultimately aims at a social homogenisation of the population and thus at creating a nation in the sense of an ethnic group dominating the state. On the other hand, this assumption would be denied emphatically by virtually every Mauritian ideologist or politician. Notably, few explicitly favour inter-ethnic marriages, which were still relatively rare and controversial in 1992, although the frequency of such marriages has risen in later years. Mauritian politicians, intellectuals, and lay people alike stress the need for compromise and tolerance among the groups without obliterating the boundaries. Moreover, these politicians, intellectuals, and lay people insist that ethnic diversity is compatible with national unity. Minorities cannot be the enemies of the state in a country in which everybody belongs to at least one minority. Further, it can certainly be argued that the "objective cultural differences" between, say, the Creoles and the Hindus (the largest ethnic groups) are decreasing, one tangible indication of this being the spread of the Kreol language. However, these processes of cultural homogenisation are being countered by the emergence of self-conscious cultural identity movements. The homogenisation of culture need not, in other words, lead to the disappearance of ethnic identities—on the contrary, cultural homogenisation and ethnic fragmentation can be seen as two sides of the same coin.¹⁶

¹⁶ Processes of cultural homogenisation or modernisation can thus be seen as preconditions for the efficient articulation of ethnicity. Burton Benedict, incidentally, ends his study of "plural" Mauritian society with a prophetic statement on ethnic conflict: it is logically consistent but has not been confirmed by subsequent events (excepting the riots in 1968–9), possibly because the economic growth rate has been higher than Benedict could have predicted: "The ethnic divisions of Mauritius are changing. They are no longer mere categories but are becoming corporate groups. The danger of communal conflict increases" (Benedict 1965:67).

In conclusion, the case of Mauritian nationalism confirms some general assumptions in current theory of nationalism, but the Mauritian and similar cases should lead us to question others. Notably, the Mauritian ideology which symbolically connects cultural diversity and integration into the nation-state—which is being articulated as compromises (and occasionally as conflicts) between nationalism and ethnicity—indicates that it is simplistic to assume that nationalism necessarily insists on cultural homogenisation. Both similarities and differences exist and are acknowledged. In Mauritian society, there are no myths of shared origins encompassing the entire population; and ethnic distinctiveness will continue to be reproduced in the foreseeable future. Here, as well as in other analyses of identity processes, it may be worthwhile to distinguish between the us and we aspects of identities, as every social identity requires both aspects and encompasses great variation in combinations in this regard. Finally, although nations are usually made up by "the same people living in the same place," the members of nations need neither be "the same people" in every respect and every situation; nor do they necessarily live in the same place. Naturally, some of the most ardent Mauritian nationalists are permanently settled in Strasbourg, London, Melbourne, or Montréal.

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