NEGOTIATING RACE, ETHNICITY AND NATION:
DIASPORIC MULTICULTURALISM AND THE POLITICS OF
LANGUAGE IN MAURITIUS

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the tension between diaspora and nativity in the construction of multiculturalism in Mauritius, a plural, postcolonial society that showcases a variety of ethnic groups that are officially recognized in the Constitution, including Mauritians of Hindu, Muslim and Chinese descent. Yet a fourth group—Afro-Mauritians, or Creoles—are singly designated as a residual category unrecognized by the state. Although Creoles represent nearly a third of the population, their decades-long struggle for recognition has been consistently met with resistance. Creoles are also the most impoverished group and are largely marginalized from civil society and the political arena. What explains the lack of recognition of the Creole community in multicultural policy?

While scholars of multiculturalism in the West point to the continued ethnonationalism of Western countries as barriers to immigrant incorporation (Modood, 2013; Kymlicka, 1996), scholarship exploring multiculturalism and racial politics in the Americas highlights the relationship between race and ethnicity as two distinct categories that work differently for the populations in which they are ascribed, limiting the benefits of multiculturalism for racialized groups (Paschel, 2013; Wade, 2010; Hattam, 2007; Hooker, 2005). My dissertation builds on these theories by analyzing both national and transnational processes in the formation of multiculturalism—an approach that highlights the role of diasporic politics in the negotiation of national belonging. I employ discourse analysis and process tracing to analyze the relationship between the boundaries of race, ethnicity and the “civic” nation in the construction of language policy. In doing so, I uncover how and why Creole political activists have pushed for the institutionalization of
the Kreol language—in addition to other policies of recognition—but have been rejected by the government until 2012, unlike the institutionalization of Hindi, Urdu, and other Asian languages after independence.

I argue that through the state promotion of languages, non-Creole political actors have created ethnic categories of inclusion while reciprocally denoting racially-excluded others defined by their lack of diasporic cultural value. This process is shaped by what I call “diasporic multiculturalism,” where groups claiming diasporic cultural connections are privileged as being “ethnic” and those with ancestral connections native to the territory (and who can therefore lay territorial counter-claims) are deemed problematic, culturally disregarded, and racialized as “the Other.” Frameworks of multiculturalism in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and Trinidad also illustrate the transnational influence that diasporic communities wield in strengthening and re-configuring national boundaries—rather than subverting them—by constructing new processes of exclusion in the contemporary “post-racial” yet multicultural era.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

A small island located 600 miles east of Madagascar, Mauritius has been regarded as one of the world’s developmental miracles. Since its independence from British colonization in 1968, the “Indian Ocean Tiger” has experienced unprecedented economic growth and high socioeconomic development, backed by a strong welfare state that has remained stable and relatively peaceful for over forty years. Its plural human landscape includes Hindus (at 52 percent of the population), Creoles of African descent (28 percent), Muslims of predominately Indian descent (17 percent) and smaller percentages of Chinese (2 percent) and the Franco-Mauritian descendants of French colonizers (2 percent).

Mauritius is essentially a “nationless” country with no pre-modern history from which to construct a traditional nation-state. The island has experienced what Miles (1999b) terms “sequential colonialism,” in which the country has been colonized by multiple European countries with lasting impacts for the country’s modern culture. The island was uninhabited prior to Dutch settlement in the 17th century, who also brought slaves from parts of East and Southern Africa (mainly Madagascar) beginning in 1641, but was later abandoned by the Dutch and colonized by French settlers in 1715. The country was then annexed by the British in 1810, who ruled indirectly through the Franco-Mauritian population. Similar to British colonization in other island countries, large numbers of Indian indentured laborers were later imported after the emancipation of slavery in 1835, and Chinese laborers and merchants beginning in 1840.

Today, Mauritius has a plural democratic political system, an open, widely assessable media, a steadily growing middle class, a highly participatory civil society, and a
strong framework of multiculturalism that characterizes the country’s political culture. The burgeoning and active associational life of Mauritians has directly facilitated its decades-long peaceful governance and has provided a framework for the country’s rapid economic growth (Srebrnik, 2000). There are numerous non-governmental organizations, civic associations, trade unions and sociocultural groups in which many Mauritians actively participate (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Ramgutty-Wong, 2010). The media is expansive and provides an open window to a highly transparent government, allowing for critical discourse and public debate analogous to other long-standing liberal democracies.

Mauritius’ official multiculturalism has been credited for creating fertile ground for democratic governance, leading to its relatively peaceful history in spite of its racially- and ethnically-diverse population (Carroll & Carroll, 2000). Multiculturalism encompasses a set of policies, declarations, initiatives and/or discourses that seek to promote and facilitate the recognition of ethnic difference to affirm the equal value of disparately bounded groups and peacefully manage group conflict (Kymlicka, 1996; Modood, 2013). Since the 1970s, the Mauritian government has implemented a wide range of multicultural policies—from the constitutional recognition of ethnic groups to the funding of sociocultural organizations—in an attempt to integrate previously colonized populations into the national fabric on a politically equal basis. There also exists a plethora of cultural parastatal bodies, including research institutes and preservation societies, funded by the government to directly implement multicultural policies. It is little surprise, then, that participation in sociocultural associations and religious organizations are the primary modes by which Mauritians are civically engaged with their local and national communities. In addition,
these types of organizations are the most numerous and most influential associations with the highest levels of participation, in comparison with more interest-based associations (Darga, 1998).

However, there are two interrelated aspects of Mauritian multiculturalism that contradict this seemingly picturesque society. First, although Mauritians are highly active within civil society, the predominance of sociocultural and religious associations has arranged civil society into what Srebrnik (2000) calls “segmented religio-ethnic communities.” In particular, Hindu associations of Indo-Mauritians have the strongest involvement with the state, and these organizations work intimately with parastatal bodies in the provision and implementation of government services. Hindus have consistently dominated the state since the election of the first Hindu Prime Minister after independence—Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. In addition, they comprise a majority of civil servants and typically hold among the most active memberships in sociocultural associations (Eisenlohr, 2006).

Civil society is not the exclusive domain of the Hindu community however, as Sino-Mauritians and Muslims (mostly of South Asian ancestry) have also traditionally had high rates of participation. ¹ As a result of the ethnic segmentation characterizing Mauritian political life, the “generalized trust” that is typically created through civic engagement tends to stay confined within a specific ethnie (Srebrnik, 2000; Miles, 1999b). Political parties also tend to be ethnically-based and politicians typically capitalize on ethnic

¹ However, on the whole, Muslim and Chinese incorporation into civil society and the political system has largely hinged on their relationship with the majority groups. At different political moments, both groups have shifted their alliances and mobilized with either Hindus or Creoles in politics, occasionally cutting across ethnic, religious or class lines.
group rhetoric to win elections (Kasenally, 2011). While Mauritians may publicly accept symbols of national unity and oneness, private and social affairs are regulated through religion, ethnicity, and culture, and most citizens adhere to their own identities and traditions in private life.

Secondly, one particular group of Mauritians—Creoles (or Afro-Mauritians), who are understood on the island as those with Afro-Malagasy ancestry—are generally marginalized and excluded from civil society, government, and the economic market. As a group, they have had markedly different developmental outcomes than other Mauritians. While the country’s economic growth has led to high socioeconomic development, this development has become increasingly ethnically stratified, creating “pockets of poverty” that disproportionately contain the Creole population (Mathews & Flore-Smerekziak, 2005). Rodrigues, Black River, Port Louis, and other predominately Creole provinces are areas with the lowest education assessment scores, highest poverty rates, highest unemployment rates and lowest levels of land ownership (Bunwaree, 2001).

Most striking is that Creoles make up nearly a third of the population (as the second largest group) but are unrecognized in the Mauritian Constitution, unlike Hindus, Muslims and the Chinese, whose groups were each officially recognized by the Mauritian government with the first post-independence constitution. The country’s “Best Losers” system—a quasi-consociational system of ethnic political representation—grants guaranteed electoral seats on the basis of these official categories to each ethnic group. Because Creoles remain unrecognized, they are also least likely to occupy political office and have the lowest levels of political representation, as parliamentary seats do not reflect their population
numbers. This lack of recognition has been further justified in the public by the popular conceptualization of Creoles as a residual group of mixed race people, Francophone in culture, with little connection to their African ancestry, despite the demands of Creoles to be recognized as a distinct group in society (Boswell, 2005).

In a democratic nation that is constructed by a diversity of cultural groups with diasporic identities beyond Mauritius, Creoles have traditionally been denigrated as a group of substantial racial mixture and have not been included in multiculturalism as a result. At the same time, Creoles have been painted in racist terms as primitive, immoral, and irrational because of their heritage as the descendants of black Africans (ibid). Because of these stereotypes, they face racial discrimination from other members of society and an ambiguous racial identity based in shame. Creoles have also typically lacked any identity with a common origin or specific culture, due to their construction as a group of overwhelming racial mixture.

With this setting, while high socioeconomic development, civic participation, and multicultural recognition characterizes the lives of many Mauritians of Asian descent, the Creole experience has been characterized by marginalization, poverty and civic disengagement, and Creoles are notably not officially recognized by the state as an ethnic group. In a liberal democracy that officially espouses multiculturalism, what does the Creole community’s lack of recognition signify? Through an analysis of language policy politics, this dissertation seeks to disentangle the precarious status of Creoles in the national imaginary (in terms of their identification, position and role in the country) by critically analyzing the discursive mechanisms behind their persistent dis-recognition.
The tension created by these contradictions led to the most tumultuous event in the Mauritian post-independence period, the 1999 Riots. The riots involved a week-long skirmish between Creoles and Hindus (including a Hindu-dominated police force) that left six dead and dozens injured. Although Mauritius has been heralded as one of the few peaceful and prosperous postcolonial countries in Africa, Kasenally (2011) dubs the country “a miracle in trouble,” as the riots marked a moment in which its peaceful “façade” has begun to erode and its increasing socioeconomic inequality has become recognized as a threat to the country’s future stability.

Mauritius’ peaceful “façade,” however, also falls in line with broader patterns of ethnic and racial stratification in many other plural, liberal democracies. Multiculturalism has been widely adopted in some form as a means by which to incorporate minority groups by shifting the focus of the state from assimilation to integration and incorporation through the embracing, and in some cases, promoting of group difference. But a puzzling outcome in the most recent decades has been the inclusion and empowerment of some minority groups and the exclusion and disempowerment of others, coinciding with increasing levels of inequality between groups. Even within a context of informal or unofficial multiculturalism, certain groups are not only politically excluded, but are not extended membership into the “state-nation” beyond legal rights to citizenship, while others are enabled to obtain ideational and sociopolitical forms of national belonging that facilitate their inclusion beyond—and sometimes even in place of—legal citizenship rights.

While multiculturalism seeks to provide an avenue for the national incorporation of groups, Creoles are generally excluded from Mauritian multiculturalism and have had
limited consideration in “diversity” advocacy policy until very recently. Creoles, as a group, have also been marginal to civil society, the marketplace and other areas necessary to facilitate their full inclusion as a community in a liberal democracy. As such, Creoles have been lost in a gulf where they are invisible in government, law and policy, and within institutions of political representation, but highly visible in society and the marketplace, facilitating their socioeconomic exclusion and preventing the development of the tools needed for civic inclusion.

I argue that Creoles are rendered invisible in a society in which multiculturalism informs the policies that maintain group relations, yet are disadvantaged as a highly visible, raced group that faces discrimination in society. Conversely, Hindus, Muslims, and the Chinese are ascribed as ethnic groups—which I contend are based on their perceived diasporic cultural value to the nation—and are advantaged in a polity that strives for the preservation of “culture” through ethnic recognition, that structures associational life through cultural reproduction and language preservation, and that carves a space in the public realm for the acclamation of diasporic ancestral identities. The preeminence of diasporic homeland ties abroad, particularly from India (Eisenlohr, 2006; Jayaram, 2004), denote a juxtaposition between diaspora and nativity in the construction of what I call “diasporic multiculturalism.” Above all, Creoles are more than simply non-ethnically differentiated—they are simultaneously excluded from the state-constructed “rainbow nation” in ways that reinforce their racial distinction because of their ability to make “native” claims to the Mauritian nation.²

² My use of the terms “native” or “nativity” in this dissertation distinguishes it from “indigeneity.” By native, I mean those peoples and cultural artifacts that are conceptualized as being born out of the local territory
The divergence in multicultural policy between Hindus, Muslims and the Chinese on the one hand and Creoles on the other is most apparent in language policy, perhaps Mauritius’ most prominent manifestation of multiculturalism in the policy realm. In many schools and sociocultural organizations, a multitude of “ancestral” languages (numbering fifteen different Asian languages—from Hindi and Urdu to Hakka and Mandarin) have been taught in the goal of culturally promoting and preserving Mauritius’ diverse ethnic groupings. Although the government abolished the direct collection of ethnic or racial statistics after the Population Census of 1982, “language of forefathers” and “language usually spoken at home” are categories on the Census that allude to the distinct ancestral connections of citizens and emphasize “ethnic” identifications that are assumed natural.

Language courses are offered at the primary and secondary levels, and include the teaching of the cultural practices, worldviews and religious connections of each language with a specific “ancestral” group (Baptiste, 2002). According to the Mauritian government, the goal of these courses is to facilitate intercultural understanding among the youth.

To assist in the institutionalization of “diasporic multiculturalism,” a proliferation of over 60 speaking unions, cultural centers and research institutions have been created by the government since independence as parastatal bodies whose central aim is to preserve and promote the various languages and cultural groups. In addition, an even larger number of civil society organizations (mainly religious temples) are regularly funded by the government to facilitate language training. Lending to their high degree of interaction with

during or after modernity. Indigeneity or the indigenous, on the other hand, implies an origin within a territory that precedes the introduction of a nation-state.
cultural parastatal bodies, sociocultural associations and religious organizations have become powerful lobbies that influence the direction and force of language policy.

The preservation and promotion of the Asian “ancestral” languages have remained a priority of the state since independence. In language education, the ancestral languages are additionally offered as optional languages to be tested in to improve their overall score on the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exam, a requirement to advance to secondary school. However, the ancestral languages have been the least commonly spoken languages over the past fifty years, with less than 3 percent of the population reporting them as the language usually spoken at home (a number that has also been decreasing). Their implementation in the public school system is part of a wider language revival movement for the protection of steadily vanishing precolonial Asian languages.

However, until very recently, Kreol Morisien—the most widely spoken language, native to the island, and mother tongue of more than 85 percent of native-born Mauritians—has been the only language that has not been included in language policy. In contrast to the Asian languages, government considerations for the institutionalization of Kreol (popularly understood as the ancestral language of Creoles, but also the mother tongue of the vast majority of the Mauritian population) has consistently been rejected in policy debates. Not only was Kreol never offered as a subject in public schools, its use is additionally excluded in government, the civil service, and other formal institutions (along with the Asian languages), which require the use of English or French. In addition, Kreol has a strong ancestral connection with the Creole community as a product of the blending of the various languages of previously enslaved Africans with French, the language of the

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3 Mauritien Housing and Population Census, 2011.
slave owners. Kreol’s inclusion in language policy has been advocated by various interest
groups since the country’s independence, but policy proposals for its inclusion have always
stimulated much public dispute and have been consistently rejected. Only in 2005 did it
first begin to be taught in a handful of pilot programs in private Catholic institutions, and
only in 2012, after considerable controversy, the government officially introduced Kreol as
an optional subject to be taught in public schools alongside the Asian languages. What did
the lack of recognition of the Kreol language—a cultural representation of the Creole
ethnic boundary—explain about the status of Creoles in the national imaginary?

My analysis shows that this situation began to change with a shift in the strategic
organizing of Creole ethnic activists since the late 1990s. Consequently, the process of
Kreol’s institutionalization was facilitated by the development of a more heavily
demarcated and newly constituted Creole ethnic boundary that has transformed the
simultaneously racial and transracial conceptualization of the group (one previously
characterized by hybridity or métissage) to an ethnic and diasporic one constituted by
culture—a conceptualization that could be accepted by and reap the sociopolitical benefits
of Mauritian multiculturalism. These processes have also stimulated reactions from Hindu
and other ethnic political actors, who sought to redefine and renegotiate the boundaries of
the nation to adapt to Creole inclusion—leading to a backlash to claims of “native”
Mauritian culture and an increasing emphasis on diasporic, ancestral meaning as the rubric
for national membership. This demonstrates that claims for inclusion in multiculturalism
are made through a negotiative process between political actors seeking to control the
national narrative, and they do so in a way that enables their respective groups to not only “belong,” but to creatively lay claims to the postcolonial “state-nation.”

**Theoretical Framework**

Several bodies of scholarship have sought to address the inconsistencies between multiculturalism and the lack of national incorporation of certain non-dominant groups in different ways. Some scholars of multiculturalism in the West point to the continued ethnonationalism of Western countries as barriers to immigrant incorporation (Modood, 2013; Wright & Bloemraad, 2012; Kymlicka, 1996), while others highlight the inherent tension between liberalism and “identity politics” that have prevented the formation of civic solidarity in these countries and exacerbated the “balkanization” of minority groups (Joppke, 2004; Fukuyama, 2007; Mason, 1999). Modood (2013) defines multiculturalism as “the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity” (p. 3), and its proponents view multicultural policies as both a psycho-social and political necessity for the empowerment of non-dominant groups within dominant-hegemonic nation-states (Modood, 2013; Wright & Bloemraad, 2012; Kymlicka, 1996; Taylor, 1992). In recent years, however, a notable retreat from multicultural policies have taken place across the West, where it has become increasingly viewed in the public as a divisive force that undermines efforts at forging national unity and political solidarity based on civic nationalism and liberal values (Meer et al., 2015; Joppke, 2004; Mason, 1999).

However, these explanations do not address the fact that some form of multiculturalism has been instituted in many liberal-democratic societies since the 1980s to
combat exclusion by creating civic paths of incorporation for ethnically or nationally
distinct groups, yet socioeconomic and civic marginalization for some groups have
worsened during this same period. They also present the question of multiculturalism as an
“either-or” situation—it either works or it does not—while overlooking the disparities
between different non-dominant groups under multiculturalism, as some groups remained
marginalized and excluded, while others within the same society experience greater
incorporation as a result of multicultural policies.

Multiculturalism is expected to assist in the incorporation of non-dominant groups
through the attainment of sociopolitical representation and civic and legal rights that
enable their collective self-determination. We would therefore expect that the Creole
community would be recognized as a minority group in multicultural Mauritius, that the
Kreol language would be among the various languages taught in primary schools, and that
there would be minimal overlap of ethnic and socioeconomic stratification between
groups. In contrast, the boundaries of the Creole community are not parallel with the
boundaries of other groups, nor are they consistent with the rubric of Mauritian
multiculturalism.

Three bodies of literature offer alternative explanations for the dis-recognition of
Creoles in Mauritian multiculturalism. First, scholarship exploring the politics of
multiculturalism and racial politics in settler societies across the Americas highlight the
relationship between race and ethnicity as two distinct categories that work differently for
the populations in which they are ascribed, limiting the benefits of multiculturalism for
racialized groups (Paschel, 2013; Wade, 2010; Hattam, 2007; Hooker, 2005; Gunew,
1997). These works study the different ways in which immigrant groups, indigenous groups and Afro-descended populations engage in politics in diverse democratic countries that subscribe to some level of multiculturalism.

Second, the literature on ethnic politics and nation-building, mainly in postcolonial societies, focus on processes of social closure and the formation of “ethnicity” as a symbolic boundary, as well as on conflict and conciliation between relatively equally-bounded groups (Wimmer, 2013; Laitin, 1998; Eriksen, 1992; Laitin, 1992; Horowitz, 1985). Following the work of Barth (1969), boundaries are understood as largely symbolic categories of human organization that both stem from and contribute to social inequalities. Barth posits that an analytical focus on boundaries themselves is important because they highlight social processes that regard culture and cultural difference to be taken as given, when in actuality, people draw from a range of cultural attributes from which their contingent identities become salient depending on the social context. These identities are primarily relational and oppositional. In this way, ethnic, racial or national identities are social constructs existing at the boundaries of social interaction, and less salient in the daily lives of individuals than commonly assumed (Wimmer, 2013; Brubaker, 2009; Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

Individual identities are fluid and reflected dualistically and interchangeably in everyday practice (Laitin, 1992). But group boundaries—manifested through the categories and symbolic representations applied to collectives of individuals—are top-down social constructions that become realized through official recognition, representative institutions, group practices that are structurally produced and replicated by public policies and market
forces, or some combination of the above. My research is therefore analytically and theoretically focused on group boundaries, and for this reason, I analyze the policy arena of multiculturalism, where ethnic political actors compete across civil society, political society, and the state in the delineation of group boundaries from the top down, and where contestation for the state recognition and support of groups takes place.

Mintrom and Williams (2013) define public policies as “any actions taken by governments that represent previously agreed responses to specified circumstances... with the broad purpose of expanding the public good” (p. 4). Public policies in the contemporary liberal-democratic state are influenced by negotiations between the state and society, specifically within civil and political society. Through public policies, not only are official census categories reconfigured or maintained, and public benefits parceled out, but national, ethnic and racial identities are reproduced through policies that dictate public education, cultural conservation, the sanctioning of national holidays, and other ways in which states endorse national and group narratives (Billig, 1995). Public policies therefore help actualize the extent and scope of belonging and membership in society.

Moreover, the ethnic politics scholarship moves beyond the focus on the national incorporation of minority groups to highlight the contemporary construction of national boundaries of membership through nation-building. From this frame, they show that many contemporary liberal democracies have been principally tasked with forging “state-nations” after decolonization and/or democratization that must accommodate both equal ethnic recognition and national unity. With a focus on the joint construction of ethnic and national boundaries, ethnic politics in postcolonial societies highlight the dimensional
nature of these boundaries, as well as the negotiation that takes place between groups throughout this process. In particular, Mauritius provides a case study in which we can study this process more precisely, because there exists no substantial settler population claiming territorial conquest or an indigenous population fighting to preserve or reclaim the land, and thus no pre-modern claim to “the nation.”

But because there is little cross-field conversation with scholarship in racial politics, and because the above-mentioned processes are typically analyzed in a vacuum, this literature is limited in understanding broader processes influencing how and why groups as collectives become excluded. This is especially pervasive due to the widespread tendency to replace the study of “race” with the study of “ethnicity” (or making race a subset of ethnicity), to use race and ethnicity interchangeably, or to focus exclusively on race and racialized groups or exclusively on ethnicity and ethnicized groups. As follows, there are questions still left unanswered in these bodies of literature: What are the exact mechanisms by which groups are designated “racial” rather than “ethnic”? Are these configurations specific to local contexts or do they represent wider global patterns of group designation? Are they driven by nationalistic states, domestic or global patterns of neoliberalism, collective group politics, the nature of “state-nations,” or something else?

My dissertation casts a new angle that draws upon a third body of literature on transnationalism and diasporic politics highlighting the transnational processes inherent in the negotiation of ethnic, racial and national boundaries (Ben-Rafael, 2013; Gamlen, 2008; Laguerre, 2006; Anthias, 1998). Although ethnicity is typically understood as a boundary

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4 For instance, the incorporation of Haitian immigrants in the United States or Canada is usually analyzed separately from the incorporation of Korean immigrants, while minority rights claims of indigenous groups are analyzed separately from the claims of post-slavery populations.
existing within the boundaries of the nation (Eriksen, 1992), this literature regards the concept of diaspora as the extension of ethnic boundaries at the transnational level. In addition, it provides important insights into how, for many groups, ethnic boundary construction at the local level also denotes political engagement with diasporas, in addition to local group politics. Because the construction of boundaries have both transnational and national effects, exploring how the mechanisms of multicultural inclusion work from this frame highlights new ways of understanding the role of the contemporary “nation-state.” As such, while the political system in Mauritius was designed at its outset as a “state-nation,” there is a strong presence of diasporic ties to the “homelands” of India, China, and France that collectively constitute the country’s national boundary.

Language politics in Mauritius offers an important laboratory for analysis because it demonstrates how the construction of multiculturalism is influenced by notions of diaspora that may limit certain claims for recognition. In particular, I examine how and why disrecognition takes place as a political strategy of exclusion. My research therefore seeks to not only analyze how diasporic politics is utilized in the process of multicultural inclusion, but to explain the specific motives behind Creole exclusion by further exploring the juxtaposition between notions of diaspora and nativity that structure group claims for which groups can and cannot be included in the “nation.” By analytically categorizing ethnic boundaries as diasporic boundaries, my research finds that articulations of diasporic allegiance better allow minority groups to become nationally incorporated because they do not challenge national boundaries that are, mythically civic, but still hold ethnonationalist tendencies.
Kymlicka (1996) argues that critiques of multiculturalism—and its supposed theoretical dissonance with civic nationalism—is based in a faulty belief in the “myth of civic nationalism.” This myth holds that the liberal-democratic state is a neutral governing body, and in order to experience the liberal principles of equality and freedom, political membership requires a rejection of cultural and other identities. Kymlicka argues that this false belief in a neutral state masks not only the presence of an over-arching “societal culture” that represents that of the dominant group, but also the active involvement of the state in creating and promoting this societal culture through public policy. Thus proponents of multiculturalism argue that the resurgence of minority group movements for recognition, self-determination or self-governance is a legitimate response to the continued pressure to assimilate within a societal culture, and multiculturalism simply sets the terms of integration in a way that no one culture dominates over another (Modood, 2013; Bloemraad et al., 2008; Kymlicka, 1996).

This phenomenon of dis-recognition and group exclusion within contexts of multiculturalism occurs across liberal democracies where openness and inclusion forms the basis of a political culture based on individualism, equality of opportunity, universalism, and by extension, colorblindism. These principles reinforce notions that citizens must be the same to be equal (Young, 1989), and that although cultural distinction is recognized and even valued, multicultural citizens must also be able to assimilate within a plural, cultural (rather than racial) mosaic in order to participate on an equal basis. In this way, the maintenance of transnational, diasporic boundaries is an important feature in the claims groups can make for their inclusion in multiculturalism. In contrast, Creoles, as a
post-slavery population that lacks strong connections to ancestral cultures rooted abroad, have also been characterized as being born of a culture native to Mauritius and making distinct claims to nationhood based on their nativity to the island. Their inclusion in multiculturalism has thus been viewed as problematic to the state construction of a diasporic “rainbow nation.” In Mauritius—as in other liberal democracies—multiculturalism is celebrated not for its ability to include various ethnic groups in the national fabric, but for its ability to equalize groups on the basis of a common rubric of diasporic belonging. I posit that multiculturalism is a means by which distinction and differentiation can be equalized and legitimized through a rubric of diasporic cultural contribution, a process that is integrally related to the liberal-democratic state’s push towards civic nationalism.

**Methodology**

Through an investigation of the policy process, I conduct a comparative historical analysis of the institutionalization of the Kreol language and the Asian “ancestral” languages, in addition to two contentious struggles for policies of recognition that enhance our understanding of Creole dis-recognition. These policies include the inscription of Le Morne Brabant and Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage List and the historiography of indentured servitude and slavery during the Truth and Justice Commission. First, I use discourse analysis to analyze public discourse and deliberation throughout the development of these policies to map how the Creole and Indo-Mauritian group boundaries are articulated in the public sphere. I chose this approach because public deliberation is a means by which multiple interests (including the state) seek to achieve their goals given the institutional constraints of liberal democracies (including the needs of
elected officials for public legitimation and recurrent votes, the competitive proliferation of lobbying organizations, and the scrutinizing eye of the media).

The policy-making process consists of five stages, including agenda-setting (the initial “sensing” of a problem by policy actors), policy formulation (the development of policy options from an evaluation of the range of viable possibilities), decision-making (where a particular course of action is adopted), policy implementation (where policy decisions are put into effect through public administration), and policy evaluation (where the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors) (Howlett & Giest, 2013; Baumgartner & Jones, 2005). Each stage represents a discursive entrance for civil society actors, with new constraints and new possibilities for the articulation of group boundaries that shape future policy proposals, and popular media is the central platform in which this discourse takes place. Soroka et al. (2013) aptly explain the role of the media as simultaneously an actor, a mechanism, and an arena for deliberation throughout the policy process:

Media can draw and sustain public attention to particular issues. They can change the discourse around a policy debate by framing or defining an issue using dialogue or rhetoric to persuade or dissuade the public. Media can establish the nature, sources and consequences of policy issues in ways that fundamentally change not just the attention paid to those issues, but the different types of policy solutions sought. Media can draw attention to the players involved in the policy process and can aid, abet or hinder their cause by highlighting their role in policy-making. Media can also act as a critical conduit between governments and publics, informing publics about government actions and policies, and helping to convey public attitudes to government officials (p. 204).

Adopting this formulation of the importance and influence of media in the public sphere,, I draw comparative inferences across multiple “publics” through an analysis of popular mainstream and ethnic media, including the op-eds, interviews, articles and
reports of ethnic political actors in *L’Express* and *Le Mauricien* (two prominent mainstream newspapers), and *The Mauritius Times* and *Lavoix Kreol* (two prominent ethnic newspapers) between 1974 and 2012. These newspapers were chosen to balance public deliberation within more neutral sources (represented by the two former newspapers) with discourse that more directly articulated the interests, motives and perspectives of ethnic groups (*The Mauritius Times* is a Hindu-run newspaper while *Lavoix Kreol* is run by Creoles). Other newspaper sources include *Week-End* and *La Vie Catholique*. These sources were retrieved from the National Archives in Mauritius, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and through online media databases including ProQuest Newsstand, Access World News, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) and the websites of some newspapers.

Through deliberation in the media, ethnic political actors use metaphors, statements of causality, the diffusion of rhetorical symbols, and other discursive strategies to persuade government officials and the public. These devices contribute to the building of policy narratives that provide a structured and ordered understanding of the cast of characters, their perspectives, the setting, and sequential ordering of events that normatively frame policy proposals (Rochefort & Donnelly, 2013).

Furthermore, during public argumentation, how a problem or issue is defined, how it is framed, and the political narratives attached to it is specific to the structural and ideational constraints of the polity. In my analysis, I therefore pay special attention to institutional configurations of power, looking mainly at the institutional and discursive constraints on political actors. Accordingly, the questions I ask when analyzing the discourses between political actors include: What is at stake for a particular set of actors
during the deliberation of policy proposals? How were these proposals framed in the news media? How did ethnic political actors “sell” their perspectives, and in what ways were these perspectives received and translated by the state and other competing actors? Were they constrained to communicate in specific ways or were they able to articulate demands on their own terms? How did their framings and discourses fit within wider discourses of Mauritian nationhood and multiculturalism? What was the public response to policy proposals and outcomes? With this, I seek to highlight when, how and why ethnic groups in Mauritius became conceptualized as they are, and the role multiculturalism has played in these outcomes by structuring the range of public deliberation on the language issue in Mauritius.

My second approach involves a process tracing analysis of the development of cultural policy proposals within political society and the state. Here, I outline the historical and contemporary contexts in which language policy is formulated to discern how and why the Kreol language issue made it on the government’s agenda, and why in 2012, but not before. I examine the role of Indo-Mauritian (mainly Hindu) and Creole organizations and political leaders within civil society and the work representatives of both groups do in the language policy process as top-down agents (state officials, civil servants, and parliamentary members) as well as bottom-up agents (grassroots leaders/activists and advocacy organizations).

My primary sources stem from ethnographic field research I conducted in 2012 and 2013. I analyze over 50 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ethnic activists, political elites, and government officials across ethnic groups. The elite interviews ranged on average
between 1 and 1 ½ hours and involved questions pertaining to the goals, motivations and
techniques that drove these activists and elites in their pursuit of the policy areas under
study, as well as their personal ideologies and interpretations of the specific institutional
and ideological barriers they faced. I also conducted two focus group interviews—one with
youths between the ages of 16 and 18 and the other with adults between the ages of 21 and
60—whose participants were involved with Creole sociocultural organizations. The focus
group interviews each lasted approximately two hours and involved questions concerning
the identities and perspectives of participants on the policies under study. I also analyze the
content of Creole and Indo-Mauritian organizational correspondence, pamphlets, press
releases, and published and unpublished articles and books, in addition to newspaper
articles concerning the work of these organizations. Participant and non-participant
observation of Creole sociocultural organizational meetings, cultural celebrations and
policy media events were also used to gain a more holistic understanding of processes of
policy deliberation, and illuminate the dynamics between ethnic political actors and the
wider cultural norms that regulate interactions between them.

I also assess parliamentary debates, parliamentary committee reports, press
conferences, political speeches, and government publications. These sources were mainly
retrieved from the National Archives in Mauritius, the Parliamentary Library in Mauritius,
and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. My analysis of parliamentary debates in
particular focuses on how policy positions are introduced, justified, devalued or
delegitimized in political society. These approaches seek to explicate the differences
between groups in terms of the possibilities in which their group boundaries could be conceptualized in relation to the boundaries of the Mauritian “rainbow nation.”

Findings

My results show that while the preservation and standardization of the Asian languages in Mauritius has facilitated the maintenance of diasporic boundaries, the Kreol language was envisioned as having a more contentious status with the national boundary because it was spoken by most Mauritians and viewed as native to the island. This is because language policy was narrowly arranged within a multicultural framework in which national boundaries and group boundaries were negotiated through a process of cultural legitimation and a privileging of non-nativity and diasporic ancestry. Because Mauritius is conceptualized as a country of immigrants in which no indigenous populations exist, identities and ties to diasporic homelands abroad has limited the development of any central Mauritian nationality (Bowman, 1991). In effect, as Monique Dinan (1986) states, “being immigrants, Mauritians have cultivated to a high degree the feeling of belonging to somewhere else” (p. 3).

But their ancestors being among the earliest inhabitants of the island (prior to the arrival of Indians as indentured laborers at the end of slavery), Creoles began to construct a separate narrative of nativity and resistance since the late 1980s that has proven problematic to Hindu political hegemony as a rival claim to the nation. The interactions between Creole and Hindu ethnic activists in the public sphere has invoked oppositional discourses of purity versus métissage, hard work and deservedness versus laziness and undeservedness, and the victimization of indentured servitude versus the suffering of
slavery in the public imagination. Thus two competing group narratives seeking national symbolis
m have been juxtaposed in the construction of the national boundary: that of the hard-working and victimized Asian immigrant, and that of the exploited, shamed and abused descendant of slaves. These narratives work through policy proposals of languages that are either characterized as culturally valuable yet repressed and in need of protection and preservation (the Asian languages), or as the widely used yet under-appreciated language of slaves and the mother tongue of all Mauritians (the Kreol language).

The 2012 outcome of language policy—with Kreol being offered as an optional language analogous to the Asian languages yet culturally devoid in its curriculum—was the result of a contestation between the Kreol language being conceived as simultaneously an attribute of the Creole community and the national, trans-ethnic language of Mauritius. The prior misrecognition of the Kreol language reflects strategic processes of exclusion that have also sought the official dis-recognition and marginalization of Creoles as a group in society, stifling their involvement in a civil society that is structured by multiculturalism yet crucial for the full civic incorporation of its citizens.

Creole exclusion has, in turn, been a driving force in the construction of a Creole ethnic boundary by political activists within the Creole community. Increasingly over time, they have sought to more heavily demarcate the boundary of the community in a way that fits within a multiculturalist framework that gives primacy to diasporic linkage as a rubric for recognition. At the same time, Creole contestation and collective mobilization reinforces this multicultural framework because the Kreol language and Creole culture is viewed as problematically “native” to the island and thus laying an insurmountable claim.
to the Mauritian nation—a status that is also understood by many non-Creoles as mutually exclusive to multiculturalism’s emphasis on equal recognition. In the end, throughout these processes, the Creole ethnic boundary—which had previously remained inconspicuous—became demarcated, politically salient, and contestable, further incentivizing its dis-recognition.

**Organization of Chapters**

In the next chapter, I engage with four bodies of scholarship that have addressed the problem of exclusion in these areas and bring these literatures into conversation, including the literatures on multiculturalism and immigrant incorporation, multiculturalism and comparative racial politics, ethnic politics and nation-building, and transnationalism and diaspora. In addition, I further outline how the construction of ethnicity, race and nation work as processes of boundary-making through language policy negotiation.

Chapter 3 provides an historical background of the groups under study during the colonial period in Mauritius. I specifically outline the development of the Creole community in comparison to Indo- and Franco-Mauritian groups, including a brief background on the community’s relationship with the Kreol language. Through a delineation of changes in the economic system and the management of the colonial state and its political institutions, I show how these structural changes set the groundwork for the group boundaries that we see today: specifically, a Creole boundary that is raced while other groups are viewed as “ethnics” by virtue of their perpetual foreign status. More than
simply exclusion from future multiculturalism, I argue that Creoles experience a dis-
recognition by society and government that further injures their collective organizing.

In Chapter 4, I proceed with an analysis of the comparative development of
English, French, Kreol and the Asian languages in language policy, and chronicle the
competition between the languages in Mauritius in the early post-independence period.
This chapter outlines the inclusion of the Asian “ancestral” languages in language policy, in
addition to the development of a Hindu-dominated state seeking to reconfigure the
hierarchy of languages in Mauritius through the creation of official multiculturalism. It also
demonstrates how ethnic and national boundaries came into tension through the
competing ideological frameworks of multiculturalism and Mauricianisme that developed
during this period and shaped language discourse within the policy realm and the public
sphere. These frameworks represent different visions for the rubric of national belonging
in Mauritius, and ultimately demarcate a “native-foreigner” cleavage that privileges
diasporic cultural distinction and “foreignness” over “nativity” and racial distinction.

Chapter 5 investigates the formation of an Afro-Creole identity movement, which
began in the mid-1980s and developed across five different punctuations in time. These
“punctuations” include socioeconomic and political circumstances that culminated in the
creation of a more Africa-centered Creole identity, influenced by a discourse of Africanity,
as well as an increasingly distinct socioeconomic experience of marginalization for Creoles
that acted as a durably social (rather than symbolic) boundary. Creolité (embracing hybridity
and metissage in the Creole community) existed as another discourse in competition with
Africanity, but did not come to dominate within the identity movement because of the
structural circumstances in which Creoles found themselves that necessitated specific forms of civic organizing and more heavily demarcated group boundaries.

Chapter 6 then explicates the contours of two policy attempts by Creole ethnic activists to demand state recognition on the basis of their contribution to national heritage and racial justice through reparations for slavery—the inscription of Le Morne Brabant on the UNESCO World Heritage List and the creation of the Truth and Justice Commission. These policies failed to provide Creoles with more than symbolic policy representation, however, because they created tensions between racial and national boundaries that emphasized the group’s racial distinction and cultural nativity. This presented a threat to Hindu ethnic elites who scrambled to counteract these policies with competing discourses of diaspora and indentured servitude. Alike the competing discourses illustrated in Chapter 4, this later period shows that policy discourse ultimately produced an ethnic-racial divide based on the tension between Creole cultural nativity and Asian diasporic heritage. Creole ethnic activists were thus further encouraged to construct a new boundary within the folds of these divisions by ascribing their group as diasporically linked to mainland Africa.

In Chapter 7, I investigate how advocates for the Kreol language sought to re-appraise the value of both the language and the Creole ethnic boundary in multiculturalism by pushing for the adoption of a Kreol language course in the public school system and analyze state responses throughout this process. I additionally explain why the government’s response to Kreol language advocacy during and after the 2005 and 2010 elections became rapidly more receptive, but only as arguments for the language

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5 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
began to take a more interest-based rather than identity-based form. In the end, this analysis demonstrates how dominant ideological frameworks in Mauritius influence democratic institutional structures, how both influenced the trajectory of language education policy, and how this policy environment, in turn, dictated distinct organizing strategies for Creole ethnic activists in their struggle for recognition and multicultural inclusion.

While Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the role of ideas in the construction and deployment of multiculturalism as a discursive constraint, Chapters 6 and 7 highlight the role of institutions and the interests of ethnic political actors in creating policies that form more tangible constraints on the outcomes of political mobilization and policy. Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of the findings of my empirical analyses and its comparative implications in Colombia, Brazil, and Trinidad, in which I argue that ethnic inclusion and racial exclusion is enabled by contemporary understandings of civic nationalism that necessarily emphasizes the cultural, diasporic value of non-dominant groups that cannot make native claims to the nation. This therefore limits the true democratic vision of multiculturalism and its goals.
Chapter 2 – From Immigrant Incorporation to Diasporic Politics: An Integrative Approach to National Incorporation in Plural Democracies

Multicultural policies are intended to facilitate the incorporation of non-dominant groups by creating pathways to political representation, civic engagement and socioeconomic mobility. But in Mauritius—as in other countries with official multiculturalism—social stratification and inequality between groups have exacerbated since the incorporation of multicultural policies. For Creoles in Mauritius, the introduction of multiculturalism has coincided with their increasing lack of integration into society, a situation that has created high levels of socioeconomic exclusion for the community. However, Hindus, Muslims and other groups have largely benefitted from multicultural policies that have strengthened the ethnic, bonding nature of their associational life (Darga, 1998). Not only are many of their organizations and associations ethnically-based, they are also actively engaged in politics, pushing for the state institutionalization of their ancestral languages and cultural practices in addition to other interest-based goals. Why has the social, political and economic marginalization of Creoles increased under official multiculturalism, while Hindus, Muslims and other groups have instead realized the benefits of multiculturalism through much higher levels of civic engagement, socioeconomic mobility, and political representation?

While the literature on multiculturalism and immigrant incorporation in the West explain this by highlighting the tensions caused by identity politics and the continued ethno-nationalism of liberal-democratic polities, three additional bodies of scholarship
have sought to address this puzzle by focusing on the relationships between race, ethnicity and national inclusion from different approaches. First, the literature on multiculturalism and racial politics highlight how racial and ethnic boundaries are constructed by states in distinct ways to manage their non-dominant populations differently. Secondly, the literature on ethnic group politics in postcolonial democracies offer an alternative explanation, focusing on how the politics of boundary-making is deployed in constructing different configurations of ethnic boundaries that are negotiated among groups in the process of nation-building. These literatures provide several insights into why disparate levels of national inclusion exist for distinct non-dominant groups.

Third, research on the politics of diaspora enriches this conversation by going beyond the analysis of domestic systems of national inclusion and bringing into focus transnational processes, as well as how race and culture work dichotomously through the concepts of diaspora, ancestry, and nativity. Building off of these bodies of work, this chapter compares the theoretical concepts of race, ethnicity and nation within contexts of civic nationalism and provides an integrative approach to understanding why some groups have experienced the benefits of multiculturalism while others have not. In sum, the distinct ways in which racialized and ethnicized groups relate to the state represents a tension between nativity and diaspora in the liberal-democratic context that has made the Creole community specifically problematic to the goals of nation-building and national inclusion (in addition to other groups whose cultures are conceptualized as “native”). In the final section, I further explain how an analysis of language politics in Mauritius highlights the centrality of diasporic politics in the negotiation of ethnic, racial and
national boundaries that better explain how and why Creoles remain excluded in Mauritius.

**Multiculturalism and Immigrant Incorporation in the West**

The literature on multiculturalism and immigrant incorporation in the West has traditionally centered around debates concerning the inherent contradictions between identity politics and the tenets of liberalism that serve as the basis for Western democracy. These scholars mainly focus on Western democracies founded in ethno-nationalism, a process by which early states constructed a singular national race, language and/or culture with which to solidify the boundaries of the sovereign “nation-state” (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). Throughout the 19th and 20th century expansion in the inclusiveness of their democratic institutions, state building required these states to make various internal and external adaptations to maintain the national boundary. Traditionally, states either incorporated or excluded out-groups from the “nation” on the basis of their ability to assimilate into the dominant group of a singular ethnicity and/or race.

However, with increases in immigration in the latter 20th century, Western states have sought to re-negotiate the terms of political membership through changes in citizenship policy (Brubaker, 1992; Bloemraad et al., 2008).\(^6\) Beginning in the 1980s, multiculturalism was considered the principle means by which new immigrant groups could be extended rights of citizenship while subverting the assimilationist pressures of the

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\(^6\) Political membership and national belonging are two different ways to understand similar types of membership—while political membership is restricted to inclusion within laws and policies stipulating citizenship and political rights, national belonging more broadly refers to inclusion and membership within the “nation,” which can be facilitated or restricted by public policy. This includes a group’s placement in segments of the formal or informal economy and the underlying sociohistorical structure of society.
liberal nation-state (Modood, 2013). As a policy framework, multiculturalism is defined as “the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity” (ibid, p. 3).

Multicultural policies typically include affirmative action, the inclusion of minority heritages and/or languages in school curriculums, the public observation of non-dominant holidays or cultural festivals, and language translations in social or governmental services, among other policies (Kymlicka, 1996). Prior to the turn towards multiculturalism, political solidarity and a shared, civic national identity were believed to be maintained only through the assimilation of immigrant or minority groups into the culture of the dominant group. Multiculturalism rejects this assimilationist idea for one that embraces the integration of minority communities on an equal basis to that of the dominant group, asserting the equal value of all cultures in a way that preserves the tenets of liberalism and universalism.

Proponents argue that multiculturalism is a necessity for participation within democratic polities structured by the collective politics practiced within civil society and the public sphere, as, according to Modood (2013), it seeks to emphasize “being true to one’s nature or heritage and seeking with others of the same kind public recognition for one’s collectivity” (p. 2). From this perspective, the concept of multiculturalism is embedded within a more generalized identity-based politics that is understood to be inseparable, rather than mutually exclusive to the principles of democracy (Meer & Modood, 2009). In this vein, Bloemraad et al. (2008) highlight the importance of “participatory citizenship” in politically and socioeconomically integrating immigrant groups within local communities.
(such as through business ownership or community service), even in the absence of legal and formal citizenship rights. Such participation also facilitates political engagement in enacting policies and obtaining political “goods” that are specific to the local needs of both citizens and denizens. Thus multiculturalism has attempted to ensure that immigrants and minorities experience participation and belonging on their own terms—in addition to the legal status or political rights granted by citizenship—while minimizing conflict with the dominant group.

Opponents of multiculturalism, on the other hand, have declared multiculturalism a failure, focusing on its retreat in the policy arena in light of the increasing cultural clashes between dominant groups and immigrant minorities in the Western world (Fukuyama, 2005; Joppke, 2004). This scholarship points to the increased socioeconomic inequality between immigrant and native populations, the “balkanization” of immigrant and minority groups into ethnic enclaves, and the decreasing levels of solidarity and trust between immigrant and native groups since multicultural policies have been adopted (Joppke, 2004; Mason, 1999). The backlash against multiculturalism has particularly surged in Great Britain and Canada, as well as in states without official multicultural policies such as France and Germany, where it has become increasingly viewed in the public as a divisive force that perpetuates a preoccupation with difference while undermining efforts at forging national unity (Modood, 2013; Joppke, 2004). Opponents further argue that the negative outcomes of “cultural recognition” have prevented micro-level socioeconomic remedies for immigrants and minorities and spurred “self-segregation” and increased inequality as a result.
For Kymlicka (1996), this “retreat” from multiculturalism arises from a belief in the “myth of civic nationalism.” This belief wrongfully assumes that the liberal-democratic state is a neutral governing body over a polity requiring that members reject their cultural and other identities in order to experience the liberal principles of equality and freedom. While opponents of multiculturalism assume that there is a singular national culture based in liberal abstractionism, Kymlicka argues that this national culture is instead a monoculture that benefits the dominant group in power. Because of this, members of non-dominant groups should not be viewed as seeking to essentialize their cultures and ethnic identities, but seeking to “to maintain one’s membership in a distinct culture, and to continue developing that culture in the same (impure) way that the members of majority cultures are able to develop theirs” (Kymlicka, 1996, p. 105).

This false belief in a neutral state masks not only the presence of an over-arching “societal culture” but the active involvement of the state in creating and maintaining this culture through public policy (ibid). This includes through the state-sanctioning of an official language, school history curriculums, and public holidays (all of which privilege the language, history and customs of the dominant group), among other sociocultural institutions. These state-backed policies underscore the importance of understanding liberal-democratic states in terms of having national boundaries drawn based on cultural membership, rather than liberal neutrality (Zolberg & Long, 1999).

Young (1989) also argues that underlying the idea of “liberal values” in the democratic polity is the principle of universalism, which more specifically holds that the liberal individual is equal to all other liberal individuals in so far as they are alike. The
author calls this mainstream interpretation of liberal abstractionism “universality,” noting that it underscores a universal notion of citizenship based on homogeneity and the shared values among different members of a polity as the basis for equality. Therefore rights to full citizenship are only assumed upon the resignation of identities contradictory to homogeneity (such as the race, religion or language of non-dominant groups). This situation inherently seeks to erase the identities of others while strengthening the state-sanctioned identity of the dominant group as the barometer in which all other groups must conform.

Western scholarship on multiculturalism and immigrant incorporation rightly contend that the seemingly neutral institutions of the liberal-democratic state embody the culture of the dominant group, whose boundaries thus serve as the barometer of national belonging. But balancing the need to incorporate minority groups while also maintaining national boundaries of shared civic identity and solidarity remains a challenge. Although multiculturalism is theoretically intended to support the goals of inclusion, in contrast, political outcomes for some groups have diverged from the goals of liberalism under multicultural policies.

The inability of Western scholarship to adequately explain this conundrum has been influenced by its tendency to view the problem of national incorporation as a problem of “minority” incorporation into a “majority” group, which reinforces an enduring and problematic link between the boundaries of the nation and the borders of the state. From this view, a “nation-state” model is continually referenced when trying to make sense of multicultural approaches to cultural heterogeneity. In addition, this
literature also commonly focuses on immigrants while overlooking the presence of involuntary, non-indigenous yet “native” populations. These overlooked groups include the descendants of slaves in Western states, or colonized populations in settler and postcolonial societies—both of which are equally “native” to the territory in comparison to their Euro-descended counterparts—but have historically been excluded from citizenship and do not have rights to sovereignty or self-governance.

In an endnote, Kymlicka describes such groups—which fall outside of his typology of minority populations—as those that have been “created” systematically and arbitrarily through injustice. He also explains their exclusion based on the idea that their specific cultures were falsely created in comparison to immigrant or indigenous groups. Thus the author finds these groups to be culturally indistinguishable from the dominant group and therefore undeserving of separate recognition and multicultural inclusion. Kymlicka (1996) states that:

Pre-existing societal cultures which have been incorporated into a larger state are the most common groups which see themselves as distinct ‘nations,’ and which have developed ‘nationalist’ movements. But in some cases, an existing nation has undergone such a deep division, perhaps along racial or religious lines, that it has developed into two or more groups, each of which comes to see itself as a distinct nation or people, even though they continue to share a common language. If racial and religious differences and discrimination within a given societal culture become so entrenched that a common life comes to be seen as impossible, a sense of separate nationhood may develop within a subgroup of the larger society. And, over time, this subgroup may develop its own distinct ‘pervasive’ or 'societal' cultures...

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7 Kymlicka (1996) distinguishes between national minorities in multination states (indigenous peoples) and ethnic groups in polyethnic states (immigrant minorities), and the different types of rights that these minority groups demand. The main difference between these groups is their voluntary or involuntary presence in society: national minorities (who are present involuntarily) typically seek special protection and self-governing rights while immigrant minorities (who are voluntary) typically seek to integrate into the host society while maintaining some aspects of their original culture. The aims of multiculturalism therefore vary depending on the specific groups they concern: while some minority groups struggle for the rights of settlement or indigenous rights to self-governance, others seek to combat discrimination or exclusion, and still others seek ethno-religious recognition.
While the excluded group may go on to develop its own pervasive culture in response, this separate culture would not have developed were it not for the original injustice. Therefore, nationalist movements based on religion or race are evidence of an injustice, a failure to live up to liberal principles (p. 217).

Kymlicka’s characterization insufficiently describes these groups as factions or segments of a national population that had not existed as separate entities prior to an injustice of exclusion, which he believes artificially created their group boundaries. These groups most notably include African Americans and other groups across the African Diaspora that were historically regarded by Western states in the modern era as unassimilable on the basis of race. Mauritian Creoles also fall into this category, as the descendants of slaves whose ancestors were among the first to arrive to the island during its settlement.

Thus both proponents and opponents of multiculturalism do not pay adequate attention to raced individuals within the multicultural framework, whose experiences could further explicate the limitations of multiculturalism. They also overlook the implications of multiculturalism for diverse groups with multiple, overlapping states of being—such as those that can be viewed as simultaneously ethnic and racial, foreign and native. In the Western context, civic integration underscores the challenge of how cultural heterogeneity can be managed within a context that necessitates homogeneity of political culture. Yet implied in the recognition (or rebuttal) of cultural difference is a distinction between cultural boundaries and racial boundaries. With their boundaries defined solely on the basis of their racial exclusion, rather than cultural unassimilability, how do such groups fit within theories of national incorporation?
Multiculturalism and Racial Politics in the Settler Society

Much of the scholarship on racial politics within settler societies examines plural democracies with populations that typically include a mix of European settler, Afro-descendant, and indigenous groups. These scholars explain the lack of incorporation of long-standing marginalized and previously subjugated communities by analyzing the construction of racial segregation, the struggles of indigenous communities for self-governance and land rights, and the identity politics of mixed race populations.

While many European nation-states were constructed on the basis of inclusion, using a singular language or religion to combine disparate populations into a singular national identity, settler states such as the United States, Canada and Australia formed with the unique task of constructing a national boundary on the basis of racial exclusion (Sheth, 2009; Hanchard, 2006; Agamben, 1998). Throughout history, marginalized populations in these societies have been designated as “denizens,” occupying political spaces somewhere between full citizenship and foreign status. Because indigenous groups and African populations arriving as slaves occupied these territories prior to state formation, racial boundaries were explicitly used by settler states to demarcate and segregate (in the case of the United States) or to erase the boundaries between groups (in the case of Brazil). In Latin America, the construction of new settler states enforced strict cultural hegemony based on a singular language and culture (Spanish/Latin) over an increasingly mixed race “mestizo” population, which later became the dominant majority. At different times, both Afro-descended and “pure-blood” indigenous populations (at once racialized as distinct from mestizo populations) were excluded from these national models.
In North America, longstanding race-based systems of exclusion were similarly created during settlement to construct the parameters of national membership. Citizenship was restricted by means of “old” ethno-nationalist processes of exclusion, including through the creation of census categories, the restriction of citizenship on the basis of race, and the state mandate of a single language. Omi and Winant (1986) describe this as the work of the “racial state,” where the political mobilization of racial cleavages are structured by and unfold through the interaction of these social forces as laws and policies are created in the interests of the dominant racial group. King and Smith (2005) also argue that racial ideas had powerful effects on the development of formal institutions in America, while formal institutional arrangements also reciprocally strengthened ideational norms about racial hierarchies. Exclusion and political membership are two faces of one coin: as political membership is defined by public policy, equally rigid definitions of who cannot belong become necessary. In this way, dichotomous national narratives based on racial difference were central to defining the boundaries of the American nation.

Anthony Marx (1998) provides further examples of this process in his comparison of nation-state formation in the United States, South Africa, and Brazil. Marx (1998) explains how race was used to construct the nation in the New World (extending Anderson’s (1991) account of the “creole nation”) and facilitate a shared consciousness among colonial settlers. He argues that as purposeful institutions, states created policies, constructed formal “institutions of coercion,” and perpetuated racist narratives and ideologies to create a specific racial order to instill a consciousness of “white” supremacy among diverse Euro-descended groups. In these countries, “white nationalism” was also
practiced by settlers to justify the economic benefits of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.

From this perspective, the continued marginalization of certain population groups (such as Creoles in Mauritius) might be explained by the continuation of racial categorization and segregation. However, many liberal democracies have since dismantled these more explicit policies of ethno-racial distinction for “colorblind” policies that uphold the virtues of liberalism. Yet some scholars argue that racializing policies have taken a new modern form that perpetuate racial inequalities without explicitly seeking racial exclusion. For instance, Goldberg (1993, 2009) argues that there is now a simultaneous presence and absence of racial difference that increasingly exacerbate racial disparities as proxies for widening class inequality. Likewise, Bonilla-Silva (2003) posits that a new “colorblind racism” has replaced traditionally overt forms of racism, which works by eliminating the acknowledgement of race while maintaining support for racialized social hierarchies obscured by class inequality or cultural difference. Such colorblind policies ensure that disadvantaged groups in liberal democracies continue to need to engage in the “racial navigation” of “race-based social structures,” but further serves to demean those that recognize race and racial disparities as “racist” themselves (Fogg-Davis, 2003).8

Wade (2010) further refines our understanding of how race continues to “work” within contemporary democracies by arguing against the assumption that race has shifted from a product of biology and blood to one of cultural difference. He contends that this belief belies the fact that racial exclusion has always constituted a continuous interplay

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8 Balibar (2007) also calls this “neo-racism,” or “racism without race,” which is no longer based on biological racial classifications but on the “insurmountability of cultural difference” (p. 84) as an explanation for the socioeconomic disparities between racial groups today.
between biology and culture, in what he terms “changing constellations and articulations of nature-culture hybrids” (p. 48). Drawing out a distinction between race and culture is theoretically faulty, as there has never been a clear dividing line between the two, since culture is one factor in the way racial difference is understood. Most importantly, he posits that drawing this distinction limits our ability to analyze “racial thinking” and racism in a time period when neither is socially or politically recognized, but the work of race continues nonetheless through neoliberalism and other contemporary processes.

Wade’s (2010) supposition allows scholars to zero in on the way racial thinking works by focusing on the different ways that racialized bodies across the human hierarchy have traditionally and contemporarily been understood, whether explicit use of racial terms are present or not. For instance, racial thinking is usually based on a belief about the link between race and behavior. What is problematic about a “black” body, for example, is not so much its phenotype as the behaviors that are ascribed to the body, which is believed to be directly connected to—even an expression of—its phenotype. At the same time, behavior is embodied within culture as the collective practices of groups of people that are believed to be intimately connected through these bodies, being passed down in the blood and passed down through kinship relations.⁹

From this point of departure, other scholars further explore the relationship between race and ethnicity as two distinct categories that work differently for the populations in which they are ascribed (Paschel, 2013; Wade, 2010; Hattam, 2007; ⁹ The 17ᵗʰ century writings of Herder (1784) similarly link biology and culture to explain racial difference. Herder posits that culture is the link between human beings and their adaptation to their ecological environments, and that the differences between “the races” developed from the interaction of geographically isolated groups with very distinct ecological environments.
Hooker, 2005; Gunew, 1997). These scholars typically study the politics of inclusion for Afro-descended and immigrant or indigenous populations comparatively, and find that the difference between “racial” and “ethnic” group ascriptions are the result of political processes involving the negotiation of national ideologies, group interests and state institutions and policies that influence levels of incorporation for these groups differently.

Hooker (2005) compares the collective politics of indigenous populations and Afro-Latino groups in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and other parts of Latin America and finds that in the past twenty years, large gains have been made in the attainment of collective rights for minority groups (particularly land rights), but they have disproportionately benefitted indigenous peoples. These groups have been able to make specific group-based claims to obtain legal protections and rights that have not been extended to Afro-Latinos making similar claims. According to Hooker, the discrepancy in their rates of success can be explained by the ability of indigenous groups to justify specific rights on the basis of their cultural distinction and ancestral connection with the land. Conversely, claims for collective rights based on racial discrimination, inequality, or historical injustice (argued for by Afro-Latino groups) have generally not been met with similar policy changes. This has led to an increasing emphasis on cultural distinction and the downplaying of racial inequality on the part of Afro-Latino groups as a social movement strategy (Paschel, 2010; Hooker, 2005).

Moreover, Hale (2004) posits that the current preponderance of what he calls “neoliberal multiculturalism” in democratic states is a direct result of globalization, preventing the forging of black-brown alliances through the economic manipulation of
cultural groups. On the minority social movements taking place in Latin America, he states that:

Blacks are more apt to be skeptical of the ‘good ethnics’ trope, cutting through to its underlying racist premises. Indigenous people are better positioned to work the newly opened spaces of cultural rights, putting assumptions about Indians as inherently pre-modern to good use. By placing both experiences under the same analytic lens, we see more clearly how neoliberal multiculturalism constructs bounded, discontinuous cultural groups, each with distinct rights, that are discouraged from mutual interaction (Hale, 2004, p. 20).

Hattam (2007) argues that in the United States, the focus on race began to shift to a focus on culture and ethnicity beginning in the mid-20th century. Increases in immigration during this period begin to flex the boundaries of the nation through a wave of minority rights movements, beginning with African American activism and continuing with the activism of indigenous and immigrant minorities. While overt racial exclusion in this policy context was no longer possible, ethnic inclusion began to be viewed as another way to manage minority groups as a precursor to multiculturalism.

Hattam’s (2007) research shows that, spearheaded by Jewish-American writers and activists fighting against their own racial exclusion, the creation of “ethnic difference” allowed for a freedom of movement across boundaries on the basis of the perceived ability for groups to culturally assimilate. This culminated in an explicit movement in which ethnicity was created as a category juxtaposed with the racial “Other.” Further, this movement was not based so much on supporting ethnic diversity as it was on tearing down racial barriers and opening the boundaries of citizenship for recent immigrant groups that had previously been racially marginalized.
Following this, the newly-created diversity policies of the 1960s and 1970s enabled the nation to accommodate multiple cultures and ethnicities in solidarity with a civic ideal of colorblindism and the rejection of racial difference. In this way, cultural attachments no longer needed to be left at the door of the national boundary so long as groups could assimilate across cultural boundaries, but racial distinctions continued to mark an inability to assimilate or incorporate. Groups began to construct themselves as culturally (rather than racially) distinct to justify their inclusion in multicultural policies. Hattam (2007) explains that this represents an ideological shift from the biological determinism of race as linked to culture (believing that race influenced behavioral characteristics and thus that culture was inherited) to the view that culture was something that could be learned, shared and diffused only between racially-homogenous individuals. She writes that “immigrants were increasingly referred to as foreigners and aliens and, as such, began to be marked out as a distinct group requiring separate analysis from the races” (Hattam, 2007, p. 40).

This ideology did not eliminate the idea of race, but instead strengthened it, as “raced” individuals are placed within a “state of exception” (Agamben, 1998) while “ethnicized” groups are afforded the opportunity of national incorporation. Thus groups designated as racially distinct (African Americans in particular) are heavily problematized in society and considered by many as incapable of cultural or behavioral shifting, unlike Jewish, Asian or other “model minorities.” National boundaries are no longer just about the distinction between natives and immigrants, but about the distinction between racial “Others” and ethnic co-nationals. Hattam (2007) further posits that the boundaries of ethnicity are insecure without the boundaries of race. The author states that “immigrants
do not simply distance themselves from race; the relation between the two terms is a constitutive one in which American immigrants unfixed ethnicity by fixing race” (15). Brubaker (2009) aptly summarizes this contemporary distinction between race and ethnicity (which is also frequently distinguished in current social science literature):

Race is said to be involuntary, ethnicity voluntary; race to be a matter of external categorization, ethnicity of internal self-identification; race to be based on differences of phenotype or nature, ethnicity on differences of culture; race to be rigid, ethnicity flexible; race to involve super- and subordinate, ethnicity coordinate groups; race to arise from processes of exclusion, ethnicity from processes of inclusion; race to have grown out of the European colonial encounter with the non-European world, ethnicity out of the history of nation-state formation (p. 25-26).

By analyzing the liberal-democratic processes of inclusion comparatively for both raced and ethnicized groups, this literature illuminates how the exclusion of some groups continues under contexts of liberalism, civic nationalism and multiculturalism. Even so, what are the exact mechanisms by which groups are designated “racial” rather than “ethnic”? Are they based on phenotypical difference or cultural difference? Can racialized groups vary across contexts, or is this a designation specific to “black” or Afro-descended populations? Are these configurations specific to local settings or do they represent wider global patterns of group designation, such as the worldwide endurance of white supremacy?

**Ethnic Politics and Nation-Building in the Postcolonial Society**

The study of ethnic politics provides additional insights into the above questions by focusing on the incorporation of relatively equally-bounded ethnic groups in plural, postcolonial societies. Rather than understanding immigrants and national minorities as pursuing assimilation into “white” nations, the postcolonial society provides a context in
which “black-brown” politics are central. These countries typically constitute nascent nations that were open for formation and construction after post-WWII decolonization, and they illustrate how national boundaries are negotiated in the post-modern period. By extension, the ethnic politics literature also shifts the conversation from national incorporation as a goal, to nation-building. Although the virtues of multiculturalism remain a contentious political debate in the West, many liberal postcolonial democracies have sought to use multiculturalism to forge political communities that equalize disparate groups while maintaining their cultural boundaries and instilling a sense of national belonging.

Colonized societies differed from settler societies in that colonized populations were much larger in number, more likely to be indigenous to the territory, and colonizers were unable to enforce a singular cultural standard over these populations. Complete dominion over their territorial expanses was not practical, thus colonizers preferred to “divide and rule” through their colonized populations. Not only was citizenship exclusive, but the smaller settler communities that made up the citizenry were highly segregated from the general society. In his explanation of colonial rule in sub-Saharan Africa, Mamdani (1996) explains that the colonial state was a “bifurcated” state created around the boundaries of citizenship that designated white colonists as “citizens” and black Africans and Asian-descended groups as “subjects” of the state, a system he calls “decentralized despotism.” Through this framework, the colonial state also created and used “ethnicity” as a way of socially stratifying African populations and made use of ethnic subsets to police other groups. This is very different from settler societies in which European majorities were
artificially bolstered through European immigration. In the colonial society, many colonized populations were able to maintain their distinct indigenous languages, religions and cultural traditions.

Today, however, national identity and national belonging has become a vital aspect of the postcolonial nation-state in its transition to civic nationalism, and a means to ensuring democratic stability and peace. Grofman and Stockwell (2001) highlight two major roots of ethnic conflicts that these societies face: 1) disputes over who is “the nation” and therefore who should control the state, and 2) disputes over the control of political, economic, or social resources (such as government control, economic power, or cultural pre-eminence). Especially because of their lack of an original nation-state, these two principle struggles structure postcolonial politics. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), for liberal democracies to flourish, a merging of the nation and the state are important for successful democratic transition and maintenance, as the nation defines the citizenry (while facilitating their allegiance to democratic processes) and the state defines the polis or sovereign power over said citizenry. The authors thus characterize many failures of democratization in non-Western countries as problems of “stateness,” where there is a disjuncture between the state and the nation in multinational or multicultural contexts where peoples with different degrees of national belonging and state allegiance are in competition. They argue that attempts at constructing traditional “nation-states” have created a situation in which national incorporation and democratic consolidation become inherently at odds because it exalts the sociopolitical value of one group (designated the “nation”) above all others.
What Linz and Stepan (1996) call contemporary “state-nations,” however, are liberal-democratic states that have instead successfully consolidated democracy by instituting “state policies that grant inclusive and equal citizenship and that give all citizens a common ‘roof’ of state mandated and enforced individual rights” (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 33). These “common” rights provide security for non-dominant groups by incorporating policies promoting such concessions as multilingualism, multicultural school history curriculums, and “consociational” representation, and as a result, help suppress the salience of ethnic identities or allegiances to a particular nation and instead endow a supra-national allegiance to the state. Similarly, Kymlicka (1996) points out that multi-nation states outside of the West that are characterized by ethnic diversity and pluralism during state formation usually engage in a “deep diversity” that stabilizes the polity on their path to democratization. In this manner, multiculturalism is a key means of incorporation into the “nation,” but also a distinct configuration of the nation itself that aims to facilitate the expansion and inclusiveness of the national boundary.

Nation-building was an integral part of the construction of multiculturalism in Australia after the eradication of the country’s “White Australia” policy and increases in immigration in the mid-20th century. According to Moran (2011), Australia and similar countries “require some degree of (mainly civic) common national culture, supporting a sense of ‘we-ness,’ that provides the context through which co-nationals can debate—and are willing to debate together—the complexities of identity, diversity and contested national traditions” (p. 2154). These “new nations”— including “creole nations” such as Canada or postcolonial states such as Trinidad and Tobago—are built with the consensual
understanding that national boundaries should be continuously and actively sustained through contemporary multicultural processes that are actively and overtly engaged (Moran, 2011; Eriksen, 1992).

Likewise, Chaves and Zambrano (2006) characterize the widespread ideology of *mestizaje* in many Latin American countries as a form of nation-building emphasizing the elimination of racial and ethnic boundaries to construct national boundaries that are instead characterized by cultural hybridity and mixed race. But even through discourses of *metissage*, population groups were differentially conceptualized throughout history as a part of the overall racial and cultural mixture of the *mestizaje* nation. For instance, the biological incorporation of Afro-descended and indigenous peoples in Latin America have been valued differently, as national narratives of native American unions with white settlers are romanticized and have come to represent the descendants of the dominant population, while unions between Afro-descended groups and white settlers have been downplayed in contemporary discourses of ancestral history.

Thus from the perspectives of comparative racial and ethnic politics, there is a dimensional relationship between racial, ethnic and national boundaries, each of which are formed through negotiative processes that come to differ depending on the national context. The marginalization and lack of inclusion of Creoles in Mauritius can therefore also be understood as a possible signal for ethnic conflict in the future. Multiculturalism is quite common within plural, postcolonial societies, yet its embracement does not necessarily lead to the full national inclusion of all groups. This was typical of countries such as Mauritius, Fiji and Indonesia, where previously subjugated populations
experienced different relationships to the political and economic development of their colonies. Tarling (2008) states that in the transition from colonial rule to independence, the creation of newly-formed states was not just a simple transfer of power from one hand to the next; it was also the transfer of a specific political arrangement that had hierarchically ordered colonized groups. With no actual state-building enterprise, states created at independence were only transitional states, which created a specific problem for post-colonial societies: Which group would become the “nation” or dominant group and which groups would become mere “ethnic” minorities?

Mauritius is an excellent case study for further expanding the previously outlined theories on national inclusion because of its unique history as both a post-colonial society and a “nationless” one with no indigenous groups by which to structure claims to the nation. It instead operates as a “state-nation” embracing multiculturalism and civic plurality. However, the continued marginalization of Creoles remains a puzzle that illustrates the limitations of multiculturalism. With this context, I posit that nativity exists as a politically contentious concept that creates a tension within processes of national inclusion and nation-building and should be further explored. In this way, while the previous literatures focus on the domestic processes at work in the management of ethnic, racial and national boundaries, the literature on the politics of diaspora provides additional tools in which to analyze processes of inclusion from a view of how transnational processes interact in the construction of multiculturalism.
Transnationalism, Diaspora, and National Boundaries

Critical engagement with transnationalism and diaspora as analytical frameworks can help refine our understanding of the relationship between race, ethnicity and nation in three major ways. First, although an ethnic group is typically understood as a sub-state entity existing within a state (Eriksen, 1992), the concept of diaspora can be regarded as the extension of ethnic boundaries at the transnational level (Ben-Rafael, 2013; Laguerre, 2006; Anthias, 1998). A diaspora is a transnational community originating within a territory, but extending across multiple countries while maintaining connections to its territory of origin. The boundaries of diasporic communities remain fixed across time and space, and they can be culturally, racially or nationally defined. Butler (2001) and Kenny (2003) outline what makes diasporas unique from ethnic and migrant groups and include three common traits: 1) dispersal to two or more places, 2) a collective myth about a homeland, and 3) alienation in the hostland based on a conscious self-identity with the homeland. Brubaker (2005) additionally notes that diasporas are defined by the “boundary-maintenance” of their distinct identity against that of a host society across time.

As an example, the African Diaspora can be understood as being constituted by a distinct racial boundary in which “black” populations who inhabit countries outside of Africa multiple generations in the future are perpetually identified as “Afro-descended” (Falola, 2013). The inability for blacks to fully assimilate in varying national contexts (even after centuries of generational reproduction, such as in the case of African Americans or

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10 Kenny (2003) also includes the presence of a catastrophe or collective trauma that causes banishment of the group from their homeland, although other theorists highlight the phenomenon of diasporas formed by voluntary migration.
Afro-Latinos) mark the presence of this transnational, permanent racial marker of difference that is both culturally and geospatially bound to the African continent.

Secondly, in studying diaspora as a politics, Laguerre (2006) states that “the linkages between diaspora and hostland politics, between the diaspora and homeland politics, and between diasporic communities in various sites” (p. 3) can be established beyond the domestic and international arenas. In this way, the literature on diasporic politics illustrates that diasporic politics and national politics interact and influence each other. Further, as Laguerre (2006) argues, diasporas are a form of political organization itself—a transnational political system constituted by the interacting infrastructures of homeland and hostland countries. This system is also constantly in a state of transition, as people within diasporas shift between their engagement with sending and receiving countries depending on their specific goals.

Diasporic politics highlight the presence of non-state actors and the transnational political systems in which they are involved in contrast to domestic and international politics which are only legitimized through their connections with states (ibid). In this way, diasporas are highly influential in domestic and international politics, while states also influence the construction and maintenance of diasporas. According to Gamlen (2008), sending states and diasporas have had supportive relations with each other—employing what the author calls, “diaspora mechanisms” as policies of diaspora engagement within, between and across states. Gamlen explains that “through these mechanisms, origin states make emigrants their own by treating them as members of the home society, with associated membership rights and obligations” (p. 842).
For example, Gamlen (2008) outlines the rise of the “emigration state,” which accommodates and even cultivates diasporic communities beyond their boundaries through a range of institutions and practices. The author lists a variety of ways that sending states engage in diaspora building and diaspora integration from abroad, such as by convening diaspora conferences, collecting statistics on diasporas, permitting dual citizenship and external voting rights, granting research fellowships, and taxing expatriates. India, Mexico, and the Philippines engage in these “diasporic mechanisms” most extensively in comparison to other countries (ibid). Like Gamlen (2008), Laguerre (2006) also argues that homeland states are very much involved in diasporic politics by engaging with their diasporas, extracting resources indirectly from host countries, but also negotiating politics within their own countries with diasporic communities that have considerable influence from abroad.

However, host states also engage in the accommodation of diaspora groups seeking to maintain their ethnic boundaries. This is demonstrated by the work of Meer et al. (2015) and Kastoryano (2002), who show that nation-states have adapted to the transnational flows of globalization by creating institutional spaces for the articulations and practices of ethnic boundary maintenance. Meer et al. (2015) find that countries such as Germany and Denmark (who had consistently rejected multiculturalism in the past) have taken on new adaptive forms of multicultural policies to accommodate (rather than work against) immigrants groups. In addition, Kastoryano (2002) finds that France and Germany—two states that have steadily rejected multiculturalism—now focus on civic integration as a way for states to remain relevant in the face of their decreasing ability to
prevent the transnational forces of migratory labor. As such, the author uncovers an “ethnic market” within these liberal democracies in which immigrant groups engage in “negotiating the ways and means” of their national incorporation while upholding their ethnic boundaries. In this “market,” ethnic communities compete with the national community, and states are the arbiters who allow or deny access to the public sphere, define the parameters by which group boundaries can be constructed, and further institutionalize group meanings (ibid).

Third, diasporic politics show how the construction of states and nations themselves are influenced by transnational processes, in addition to local ethnic and racial politics. Kenny (2003) and McDowell’s (2009) studies of Irish and Eastern European migrants show that immigrants previously differentiated by their ethno-national origins were able to assimilate into America and Western Europe by utilizing “whiteness” to their advantage, showing how diasporas can be dynamically constructed and re-constructed at the national level. Likewise, some diasporic groups also do not typically challenge nation-state boundaries, but navigate institutional spaces within states to their own benefit. This includes the Chinese diaspora in several host societies (Cohen, 1997; Mitchell, 1997). Arguing against the fetishization of diaspora and hybridity in the social sciences, Mitchell (1997) analyzes the politics of the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada to demonstrate that the maintenance of diasporic boundaries have equally been used in the goal of “capital accumulation” for Chinese immigrants who have been able to exploit multiculturalism.

In this way, diasporic politics can be understood as unfolding across ethnic, racial and national boundaries, and influencing how these boundaries are configured. How does
the way that diasporas function within states influence “native,” non-dominant groups who also engage in the politics of inclusion? As there are both transnational and national effects on the construction of boundaries, exploring how the mechanisms of national inclusion and multiculturalism work from this frame highlights new ways of understanding the role of the contemporary “nation-state” (many of which now strive to exist as a “state-nation”). The Mauritian case demonstrates that ethnicity has the ability of taking on different configurations in different contexts, enabling the tactical restructuring of group boundaries across several dimensions, including at the ethnic, national and transnational levels. However, along with a focus on how diasporic processes influence Creole marginalization, this dissertation seeks to explicate how notions of nativity are similarly utilized in processes of exclusion.

In Mauritius, cultural groups whose ancestors immigrated to the island more than a century prior to independence have re-created their cultural boundaries by actively engaging in the construction of diaspora through their multicultural practices. In this case study, an analysis of the language politics that these groups engage in (as well as the politics of cultural recognition more generally) helps to illustrate what role the concepts of diaspora and nativity play in ethnic and racial politics at the national level. This is because language comes to represent ethnic or diasporic boundaries more durably, as it acts both pragmatically and symbolically in erecting concrete social divisions between groups. The next section will close this chapter with a brief discussion of the politics of language and the role of language policy in the construction of multiculturalism as a process that not
only delineates national belonging, but distributes political power through articulations of diasporic ancestry.

**Language Policy and Power in Mauritius**

Even in multilingual territories, modern national languages have a quasi-sacred status that invokes national identities linked to a specific state. From the perspective of the state, language policy is one of the key modes by which the “nation” can be constructed. Through the state-sanctioned institutionalization of languages, language policy defines the rightful inhabitants that make-up the national fabric by signifying which language speakers comprise the “nation,” and through this, language policy supplements national narratives that outline the heritage and role of the nation and aids in the construction of a coherent citizenry with a shared, singular national culture. Eisenlohr (2001) has argued that language in Gellner’s (1983) and Anderson’s (1991) accounts did not only function as instrumental mediums for the spread of nationalism, but were deployed intentionally in the creation of social hierarchies. His study of language identification among Hindus in Mauritius shows that while Hindi language speakers are nearly non-existent in Mauritian society, identification with the language is actively deployed in maintaining diasporic allegiances to India and an ethnic sense of belonging in Mauritian multiculturalism as “Indo-Mauritian” (Eisenlohr, 2001). Thus “language ideologies” are constructed to “systematically link language with social and political difference” as a means in which power relations between groups are constructed and re-constructed (ibid).

Language policy and the politics surrounding the state officialization of languages remain central to the construction of political community in our contemporary period.
(Millar, 2005). However, due to greater levels of pluralism created by broader economic changes in the international arena, many states have progressively begun to support multilingual rather than unilingual policies. In particular, this marks a shift in the role of language from its use in the protection of ethnonationalist boundaries to the forging of disparately bounded groups into one political community. Highlighting the transition from the assimilationist model for nation-construction and the integrationist model for nation-building, Millar (2005) makes a distinction between old nationalism and modern “nationism” in the state’s efforts to standardize their populations.

Moreover, Stewart (1970) suggests two main reasons for which language policy is undertaken by governments, pointing to either “the eventual elimination, by education or decree, of all but one language, which is to remain the national language; or the recognition and preservation of important languages within the national territory, supplemented by the adoption of one or more languages to serve for official purposes and for communication across language boundaries within the nation” (p. 2). The construction of language policy is also a dynamic historical process that changes across time, as the utility and meaning of language is linked to changes to wider processes and institutions, such as changes in the political economy (Jacob & Beer, 1985). In addition, the state’s stance on language policy in previous decades structure the terrain in which language struggles take place and also triggers language conflict in the future—thus language policy is rarely a solution for language conflict but language policies are adaptive policies geared towards management (ibid).
In Laitin’s (1992) comparative study of language planning in Africa, he finds that there is commonly a “3 ± 1” model for language policy that entails state support of multilingualism in order to bridge various language groups, rather than the earlier linguistic homogenization projects typical of successful “language rationalization” states like France, Japan and Spain. He finds that individuals in countries such as Kenya, India, or Nigeria must be fluent in 2-4 languages depending on their circumstances, including an administrative, ethnically “neutral” colonial language, a dominant national language (usually designated the lingua franca, or language of contact between groups) and a localized ethnic language. But for Laitin (1992), these processes are still mainly motivated by state-building with the goal of state consolidation (or “the institutionalized domination over society by a ruling cadre” (p. 9)) and not by nation-building, although constructions of national identity through the creation of national symbols, narratives, and a lingua franca are important in securing the interests of the state. This is demonstrated in the tendency of postcolonial African states to designate foreign, colonial languages for their national languages as a project of state rationalization that is mainly administrative rather than ideological or nationalist.

State policy is also highly influential in the choices individuals make, since state control of the linguistic “repertoires” made available to ethnic group members frame their possibilities for identity and are an important source of power for ethnic leaders and elites.

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11 Borrowing from Weber’s (1968) concept of rationalization, Laitin (1992) defines “language rationalization” as “the territorial specification of a common language for purposes of efficient administration and rule” (p. 9), which he states is embedded in historic processes of state rationalization.

12 Laitin (2007) also argues that because the homogenizing goals of unilingual policies are cost-prohibitive, multilingualism is an ideal way in which states can more expediently facilitate national consolidation through language policy.
From the group-level perspective, there are two ways in which language policy planning influences the dynamics of ethnic politics. First, the establishment of a shared, common language among speakers is one way that ethnic boundaries have historically been able to create shared collective identities within groups, especially when languages are endowed with socio-historical meaning (Billig, 1995). Anderson’s (1991) work on the socially binding effects of print capitalism in the creation of “imagined communities” illustrates that while languages are not primordial or essential attributes of groups, they can be used to manufacture solidarity and a shared identity among disparate individuals. However, Anderson’s (1991) characterization of language in the spread of nationalism as incidental belies the politicized process of language standardization and state rationalization, as well as the group power relations that were at play for a variety of linguistic groups existing prior to the formation of print capitalism. Therefore, the outcomes of language policy politics are also relevant for group boundary-making and the (re-)construction of group identities.

Language is particularly important because although it is not bound in the body (in racial terms), the ability or inability to communicate serves as a concrete barrier in social life that for most cannot easily be “removed” or switched the way religion or cultural practices can. Additionally, the belief that language structures human thought—proposed by many cultural progressives in support of multilingualism—conveys that language can also highlight differences in worldviews, thought patterns and behaviors between individual speakers that connect them with members of their linguistic group.

Second, language is highly political, and can be effectively deployed in struggles for power within the context of ethnic pluralism. Language policy is a means by which
economically or politically dominant groups can use the state to construct barriers that exercise power, control and social closure against low status groups. Because languages are intimately connected to “peoples” or “groups,” they are endowed with the same hierarchical relationships and elements of power of ethnic groups, as linguistic boundaries tend to signify social strata. This hierarchy of power exists at different levels—between ethnic groups at the national level and between countries at the international level—and what may be perceived of as merely linguistic difference in the ways that people speak is attributed with power and meaning.

In his explanation of the “civic tongue,” Weinstein (1983) describes language planning as “the relationship between language and the pursuit of power within and between communities” (p. 7)—a phenomenon that differs from the study of rhetoric, manipulation and other “political” uses of language and instead highlights the politics of language policy itself as a means in the struggle for power. At the same time, language policy can enable non-dominant actors to create avenues for empowerment, fluidity or assimilation. Language use also allows the speaker to play different roles, rather than simply to convey information, as in the prevalence of “code-switching” in multilingual societies (Laitin, 1992).

For these reasons, language can exist as more than just a communication barrier or status marker; the lack of knowledge of a dominant language (or even an inability to communicate in one’s ascribed “ethnic” language) can be a great barrier to livelihood in the political realm and the economic market (May, 2005; Varennes, 1996). In Mauritius, a society in which the economy is heavily dependent on tourism and international trade,
knowledge of English (and to some extent French) is important in the most lucrative of workplaces, whether due to interaction with Western foreigners or the need to access bodies of knowledge at Western universities. Whether a language is officially sanctioned and promoted by the government is not just a question of whose identity is recognized, but whether it can allow access to the state apparatus and other institutions of power within society. This in turn reinforces status hierarchies by creating congruence between social and symbolic boundaries.\(^\text{13}\) For instance, the current barring of the use of Kreol in Parliament and on official government correspondence is a cause for concern for those who have never mastered English. This includes more than 60 percent of the Mauritian population—mainly those from the lower class—and a majority of those in the Creole community.\(^\text{14}\) Linguistic boundaries in a political sense thus do a specific type of “work” that can—in addition to that done by other symbolic boundary markers such as religion or phenotype—actively perpetuate social divisions and maintain the salience of ethnic identities, exclusions and stigmas. With linguistic difference, the boundaries of who is and who is not can be more cogently solidified.

In addition to state prerogatives, language advocates are also important in the formation of linguistic boundaries, as they make language salient in their struggles for power. Language as a marker of identity facilitates collective mobilization within a context where imbalances of power are constituted by both nationalist and multicultural state

\(^{13}\) Lamont & Molnar’s (2002) overview of research on the concept of boundaries in the social sciences underscore the distinction between symbolic boundaries (boundaries based on symbolic social meanings) and social boundaries (the concrete, realized class-based boundaries between groups). Concerning their relationship, they posit that symbolic boundaries are used to enforce and justify the presence of social boundaries created through political or economic market relations, and that reciprocally, symbolic boundaries can create social boundaries once embedded in formal institutions that structure socioeconomic outcomes. Such boundaries thus both stem from and contribute to social inequalities.

\(^{14}\) Mauritius Housing and Population Census, 2011.
policies. However, language policy in Mauritius is constructed in a way that creates communities of belonging that necessitate linguistic identification instead of linguistic fluency or practice (Eisenlohr, 2001). In essence, Mauritians do not need to know a given language so long as they identify with the language. Such struggles of language recognition and revival began in Mauritius during the build up to independence, and during a time in which a broader global movement of minority language rights had also been taking place.\footnote{Critiques of this movement question why language ought to be linked to ethnic identity, why language advocates assume the continuation of languages are inevitable rather than recognize the death of languages as natural, and why language use should focus on minority languages that are less useful in the practical affairs of people’s day-to-day lives (May, 2005). In addition minority language rights claims are also said to demarcate difference where the focus on difference should be eradicated. May (2005) refers to these critiques as a “presentist” approach that problematically ignores past injustices in the configuration of the statuses of languages today. While referring to the processual changing of language status as a natural process (often tied to the labor market and the phenomenon of market globalization in developing countries), critics of minority language rights ignore the fact that dominant languages were \emph{made} dominant in the recent past through political institutions and processes that sought to demarcate and empower a dominant group.}

But this view from the ground up, while valid, overlooks the power relations between the various non-dominant groups within societies and the problems that can arise when the possibilities for language recognition and representation become limited, as there are very real constraints (financially and in terms of societal transaction costs) to the official inclusion of all languages. Jacob and Beer (1985) further explain how language is used in struggles for power:

\begin{quote}
It is the presence of a perceived inequality of social status, and unequal access to economic rewards or political power due to language use which is crucial for the politicization of language use and its degeneration into conflict... In a climate of economic and social transformation brought on by urbanization and industrialization, aspiring ethnic elites, finding their avenues of social mobility blocked, will turn to non-dominant languages for symbols of protest. One then witnesses the politicization of the linguistic cleavage as language becomes an emotionally charged vehicle for perceptions of alienation, discrimination and prejudice (p. 3-4).
\end{quote}
Policies that facilitate multilingualism strive to establish the equal, official recognition of multiple languages, support diverse language speakers through the multilingual publication and production of civic literature, and provide multilingual education in public schools, among other benefits. Mutual recognition, then, is a key aspect of multiculturalism in language policy that serves to provide disparate groups with state legitimacy, designating which groups “belong” in the newly-conceptualized “state-nation,” but also by extension, which groups do not belong. Because language policy reflects existing societal values and molds these values (Jacob & Beer, 1985), it therefore signifies whose identity is paramount, whose identity is supported, and whose is stigmatized, as well as the political, social and economic values assigned to each language group. The institutionalization of a language on the part of the state is a strong endorsement for the language’s role in the construction of the national boundary, and by extension, the status of the language’s corresponding ethnic group. This role may be historical (in the case of the saliency of certain indigenous languages over others) or practical (in the case of so-called “neutral” languages, such as English, in many postcolonial countries).

The processes by which groups are included and excluded in frameworks of nation-building, such as multiculturalism, have yet to be adequately investigated. This is particularly important in an international political climate in which both liberal universalism and multiculturalism are negotiated on different grounds, and many multicultural countries have created policies that balance liberal “difference-blindness” with the recognition of cultural difference in precarious ways. As such, plural countries
such as Canada, Indonesia and Mauritius are all cases that have instituted different forms of linguistic multiculturalism, but in which specific groups have remained excluded even within the context of equal recognition. In this way, plural, postcolonial democracies such as Mauritius are fruitful laboratories in which to study the processes by which groups become recognized and under which justifications. With this, the following chapters will tease out the parameters of the Mauritian national boundary and the relational dimensions of ethnic, diasporic and racial boundaries at the group level to explain the contentious politics surrounding the incorporation of the Kreol language (as a proxy for the Creole ethnic boundary) in Mauritian multiculturalism.
Chapter 3 – Creole Boundary Formation in the Colonial Period

Malcolm de Chazal, a famous Mauritian author, once wrote: “Mauritius grows two things: sugar and prejudice.” Although the postcolonial country is renowned for its forty years of peaceful government and high economic growth as the “Indian Ocean Tiger,” Mauritius is also a highly plural society with high economic inequality that reveal large socioeconomic disparities. Similar to other post-colonial countries, there exists a multitude of groups descended from Africa, Asia, and Europe that share contentious histories marked by slavery, colonialism, and decolonization. However, there has been little resistance or political mobilization on the part of its impoverished and disenfranchised Afro-Mauritian, or Creole, population, and by extension, Mauritius has experienced very low conflict when compared to countries with similar colonial histories, such as Guyana and Fiji.

To fully capture the contours of Mauritian ethnic politics, an appraisal of its rich colonial history is imperative. This chapter gives an overview of the historical development of the Creole ethnic boundary in contrast to the Indo-Mauritian and Franco-Mauritian communities throughout the colonial period, and chronicles how these boundaries have been affected over time by the changing political and socioeconomic context of the country. Through a delineation of changes in the economic system and a white supremacist colonial state, I illustrate the groundwork for the group boundaries that we see today: specifically, a Creole community that has been conceptualized as residual—
characterized by high levels of racial intermixture—and defined by Francophonie, but also strongly linked to the “black” African origins of its slave ancestors. In contrast, Asian-descended groups have been perpetually tied to a foreign status conceptualized as outside of the boundaries of a colonial Francophone nation. I also explicate the relationship between the Creole community and the Kreol language, which similarly operates as both an “African” language and a trans-ethnic, national language that lacks formal recognition and has popularly been denied cultural value.

Creoles, Coolies, and Sequential Colonialism

From the beginning of French settlement in 1715 to Mauritius’ independence from British rule in 1968, the Creole ethnic boundary underwent three distinct phases: a period of expansion and minimization of its salience during French enslavement (1715-1810), a period of contraction and internal stratification after emancipation and during the upsurge of Indian indenture (1840-1910), and a period of increasing external demarcation and salience in the decades leading up to independence (1920s-1970s). Distinct from most postcolonial countries, the island has experienced what Miles (1999b) terms “sequential colonialism,” in which the country has been colonized by the Dutch, the French, and the British, with lasting impacts for its society and culture. While Dutch colonization was relatively short-lived and un-impactful to the island’s future, Mauritius’ lasting sociocultural influences stem from their adoption of French culture during France’s nearly century-long colonization between 1715 and 1810. Different from the British colonial system of strict racial segregation in all areas of social life, French colonizers sought to actively “purify”

16 Francophonie is the promotion and maintenance of French culture as a unifying force nationally and internationally.
their African and Malagasy slaves\(^{17}\) and subjects through racial intermixing, leading to a Creole population of mixed heritage, split between lighter-skinned *gens de couleur* or “Coloureds” (free, mixed race descendants of mainly white fathers and black mothers who fully assimilated with their paternal families) and darker-skinned “*ti-kreols*” (conceptualized as full-blooded Africans) (Boswell, 2006). During the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, the French lost Isle de France as a colony to the British in 1810. Britain renamed the island Mauritius, but ruled jointly in cooperation with its French settlers. According to Miles (1999b):

The terms of the Treaty of Capitulation in 1810 guaranteed that the French colonists could preserve their customs, property, and religion; the British, for their part, preferred to administer Mauritius rather than settle it. As a result, parliament, schools, and the judiciary (although it retains the French civil-law system) follow British models, whereas the media and local elites are decidedly Francophone in language and orientation. (Miles, 1999b, p. 95).

The slave trade was declared illegal within the British empire in 1807, three years prior to the 1810 conquest of Mauritius by Britain (France did not abolish its slave trade in the Indian Ocean until 1817) but slavery itself continued in Mauritius, as it did elsewhere in the British empire. While some attempts were made to curb the importation of new slaves after the 1810 conquest, illicit import of slaves continued. The slave trade was in the vested interest of both local British authorities and French plantation owners despite the abolitionist movement gaining force in England at the time, and both were, in fact, involved in its continuation under the radar. In this relationship, the British gave protection and an open market for sugar cane to the French in exchange for cheap, mass

\(^{17}\) While the majority of Mauritian slaves were imported from Madagascar, Mozambique, the East African Swahili Coast, and West Africa, slaves also included those from India and parts of Southeast Asia (Allen, 2008).
produced sugar cane and management of the island by mostly French (and some British) plantation owners. While the British had taken over the colony, they shared political power with the French settlers, but held sole control over the colonial economy. The number of British settlers remained low as the British preferred to rule from afar, allowing the French inhabitants to continue their social control over the island (through the Catholic Church and local/regional governing bodies) while decisions about international trade and national governance were made by the Commonwealth.

As the abolitionist movement spread to concerns for slave populations in the colonies, it was not until the Commission of Eastern Inquiry between 1826 and 1829 that an end to the import of slaves to Mauritius was enforced (Napal, 1984). This commission—lobbied for by the British Anti-Slavery Society—was sent to Mauritius, the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to evaluate the condition of slaves in these colonies with a view to ameliorate their condition but not to abolish slavery. In Napal’s (1984) reading of the Commission of Eastern Inquiry: “the number of slaves in 1828 was as high as 64,700 of which as many as 50,000 were alleged to have been smuggled after the proclamation of the Abolition Act” (p. 39).

Slavery was officially abolished on February 1, 1835. This was followed by a period of obligatory “apprenticeship” instituted by the British, a system alike serfdom in which ex-slaves were required to work the land under contract for their previous masters for six out of seven days a week in order to learn the “habits of industry” and instill an ethic of hard work (under the belief that such values were not acquired during enslavement) (Valentine, 2001). This system was essentially an extension of slavery, in that apprentices were not
given wages (only food rations) and were only allowed to purchase freedom from their contracts through money earned during their free time. In fact, laws concerning marronage had remained in force even after the abolition of slavery because of the widespread problem of runaway apprentices, of which 7.7 percent of the population of apprentices were captured by colonial police for desertion each year (Allen, 1999). Apprenticeship was prematurely terminated in 1839 due to increased resistance from ex-slaves and a fear of revolt. Ex-apprentices consequently deserted the sugar plantations, as they did in the Caribbean during the same period. Many Creoles refused to work for their masters-turned-employers under conditions similar to slavery, while plantation owners refused to pay adequate wages to those they had previously regarded as their property. In addition, trust (even that provided through contract law) had broken down between ex-apprentices and their masters during the severely oppressive conditions of slavery and the lack of legal protections for blacks. Ex-apprentices moved away from the agricultural industry en masse to the coasts and towns to take up independent trades, becoming fishermen, artisans, carpenters, craftsmen, domestic servants, and laborers (Miles, 1999). Because these small-scale industries were largely temporary contracts limited to local markets, Creoles mainly engaged in subsistence agriculture and work that was unsustainable over long periods, leading to severe penury, malnutrition, and the overall marginalization of their coastal communities. Coupled with multiple outbreaks of smallpox, cholera, and other diseases

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18 Beaton (1859) quotes an ex-slave, who explains his refusal for agricultural labor for plantation owners: “You ask me,” said a negro, whose father and mother had been slaves, “why I will not work in that field—I will tell you: In that field my father worked as a slave, and was lashed as a slave, and do you think that I would work upon a spot that I cannot think of without pain?” If a planter had had the misfortune to be hanged, his son would scarcely select as the site for a new house the place where the scaffold was erected. We should be just to the negro, and remember that he is a man with the same feelings as other men” (p. 86).
from their encounters with new labor populations, the Creole death rate far surpassed their birth rate shortly after their final emancipation.

However, sugar production was also greatly expanding during this period, and plantation owners required a steady continuation of cheap labor to continue their profits. The year prior to the apprenticeship system’s termination, the first indentured servants began to be imported from India, Malaysia, and China to displace the ex-slave and apprentice population. Just as Creoles began to be excluded from the economic stability of the largest and most prosperous employer on the island—the sugar plantations—these immigrant groups supplied labor to the plantations until the post-independence period (Allen, 1999). However the British, having learned from the failure of the apprenticeship system, paid Asian laborers wages for their work, although the pay was typically meager. Many Indian laborers regularly returned to their country of origin after short work contracts, which enabled the accumulation of wealth among the white sugar plantation owners and the growing exclusion of Creole ex-slaves, who had developed their own localized systems of trade parallel to the sugar economy.

Relations between Creoles and Indians were largely peaceful in this early period, as most immigrants were expected to return to their homelands. But with the introduction of indentured servitude, the colonists created a new group by which to buffer against Creoles. The colony’s economic system became ethnically divided and Indian and Creole subjects were most often pitted against one another in these arrangements rather than the British against the French, who worked together to maintain the colonial system. This also exacerbated the rift between Creoles and Franco-Mauritians, as the importation of
indentured Indians undercut the gains that could be made within the Creole community by introducing a new competitor in the labor market (Miles, 1999).

In addition, this overlapping of ethnic and class cleavages also encouraged the frequent shifting of coalitions typical of pre-independence politics, and a uniquely-blended “Mauritian culture.” This is made apparent in the widespread use of the “Kreol” language during the colonial period (whereby the vast majority of the population spoke it as the primary contact language), which is a blending of several languages, including French and African languages as well as Indian and Mandarin. Furthermore, the social hierarchies created by metissage under French rule and the ethnic segmentation emphasized by the British would also structure future politics in a way that consistently shifted the balance of power between fragile ethnic identities (Hookoomsing, 2009).

Between 1870 and 1910, Indians were imported by the British in much larger numbers and rapidly became over two-thirds of the island’s population. By the turn of the century, a majority of indentured servants had begun to permanently relocate to the island. A significant fraction of them were also able to become landowners, merchants, professionals, and politicians, making up a growing middle class alongside the gens de couleur. According to Allen (1999), this difference in the ability to own some plots of land for business use was one of the major distinctions between the Indian and Creole communities in terms of later economic advantages of the former over the latter. Although

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19 The term “Kreol” was originally spelled “Creole” throughout Mauritian history, in the same fashion as the moniker used for ex-slaves of African descent. It was not until the 1960s that newfound advocates of the language—seeking to elevate its status in government and society—changed the spelling to signal its phonetic spelling within the language and distinguish it from the Creole community. Although it lends to some historical anachronism, I will use the spelling “Kreol” when referring to the language throughout this historical period to prevent confusion with the term “Creole” used to refer to the community, and to provide consistency across the chapters.
Indian merchants and landowners were a minority in their community, the cultural and social insulation of each ethnic group enabled middle class and wealthy Indians to supply economic benefits within their communities as merchants, community leaders and employers.

The Creole community, in contrast, was divided among stark racial lines that prevented collective cooperation between the middle class gens de couleur (who occupied the urban centers as professionals and colonial civil servants) and the underclass Creoles.20 Their lack of solidarity was further exacerbated by their political categorization within the “population générale,” which also included Franco-Mauritians (Dinan, 2006; Boswell, 2008).21 Although Indians also imported the caste system, it became less important in the Mauritian context where caste separation was nearly impossible to replicate on the sugar plantations. A large percentage of immigrants were also from the same caste and caste assignments were able to be hidden or discarded with new identities on the island. Thus by the turn of the century, the economy was ethnically stratified in ways that rigidly structured the future trajectory of each community (although intermarriage and métissage continued between groups). Eriksen (1998) describes these separate economic roles that existed well into the mid-20th century. He states that:

Hindus are associated with agriculture (as labourers and small planters) and increasingly with the public service; Creoles are fisherman, dockers, or factory artisans or belong to various other categories of manual, skilled or semi-skilled work; the Coloureds or gens de couleur are lawyers, journalists, or teachers or belong

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20 However, increasing Indian unity at the turn of the century also served to unite Creoles and Franco-Mauritians in politics; this alliance was strengthened throughout the mid-20th century as the Indian population increased.
21 This categorization of Creoles and Franco-Mauritians within the same category was preserved by the first post-independence government, while Asian communities were categorized as distinct groups on the basis of religion and diasporic ancestry.
to similar liberal professions; Sino-Mauritians are involved in business; Muslims are either merchants or labourers; Tamils are to be found everywhere; Franco-Mauritians are ‘sugar-barons’ or high executives (p. 13).

This arrangement left Creoles among the bottom rungs of society. According to Miles (1999), “the ‘natural’ heirs to Franco-Mauritian hegemony were supplanted by a mass immigration originally designed to literally undercut, through lower wage scales, Creole empowerment” (p. 216).

One contributing factor to the present-day inequality between Indo-Mauritians and Creoles was also the grand morcellement that took place between the 1870s and the 1920s. The grand morcellement was the subdivision of sugar estates for the purchasing of land by Indian sugar cane workers. Because vagrancy and the desertion of plantations had become a major problem for plantation owners, which were forms of resistance from indentured laborers facing mistreatment, this was an attempt by sugar plantation owners to tie their indentured servants directly to the land by discouraging disaffection from the land while still providing a profit for plantation owners (Dinan, Nababsing & Mathur, 1999). By the end of the grand morcellement, nearly 45 percent of land would be cultivated by Indians (Allen, 1999). From this, many Indians were able to acquire land ownership for commercial use, giving rise to the creation of an Indian small planter class that would give many Indo-Mauritians distinct economic advantages in the future. By the end of this period, Indians owned roughly 35 percent of sugar estate land, with the remainder owned by colonial sugar barons (ibid). In contrast, most Creoles were not afforded similar opportunities for land ownership.
Indians also became the future politicians that the *gens de couleur* would have to compete with. Through their relative insulation from French social culture, Indians were able to maintain their customs, cultures, and religions to facilitate strong ethnic solidarity and associational life. Asian immigrants were also made politically distinct from Franco-Mauritians and Creoles regardless of their level of economic incorporation by virtue of their status as “immigrants.” While many Indians permanently settled on the island, their ethnic boundary was further demarcated by their different treatment in citizenship law, as they continued to be classified by their country of origin in the census. During this time, census categories developed a dividing line between natives (whites and Creoles) and immigrants (Indian, Chinese, Arabs, and others). This cleavage was notable in the shift of group classifications from “Free” and “Slaves” in 1807 (which included some slaves of Asian descent, who colonial elites referred to as “blacks” or “noires” in the same way as those of African descent), to “General Population,” “Ex-Apprentices” and “Indians” in 1851 (Dinan, 2006). This period also gave rise to a new class of political elites in the Indian community, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and the independence movement in India, and from the rising power of a segment of “Coloured” Creoles.

With this history, Mauritians have experienced a blending of two different colonial styles that has influenced politics and culture. Adopting French culture and lifestyle together with British government and administrative procedures worked to compartmentalize groups in corresponding areas of society. Nearly a century later, Creoles and Franco-Mauritians shared spaces nearly exclusively in some areas (the Catholic

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22 The Chinese population were originally included in the “General Population” because of their large-scale conversion to Christianity, but later singled out as a third census category beginning in around 1931 (Dinan, 2002).
Church, mainstream media, and the banking and tourism sectors) while Indians and the Chinese shared spaces in others (government and the civil service). This has paved the way for a less contentious colonial relationship between colonizers and their subjects in an elaborate system of ethnic “checks and balances,” as Creoles and Franco-Mauritians largely banded together against British imposition and Indo-Mauritians sought partnership with the British to counteract domination from the island’s older Francophone inhabitants (Miles, 1999b). The future relationship between Creoles and Indians would be structured by the different ways that white colonizers used these populations for the colonial economy. According to Allen (1999), although there were many similarities between slavery and indentured servitude, the two systems ultimately led to different outcomes for the communities they exploited:

If Mauritian slaves and indentured ‘servants’ shared certain experiences in common, the relationship between indentured laborers and their employers nevertheless differed from that between slaves and their masters in several important respects. While it is abundantly clear that many Indian immigrants fell victim to the same kind of abuses to which slaves had been subjected, they were never chattel. In the eyes of the law indentured laborers were free persons capable of exercising certain rights: to enter into contracts and to negotiate the length and conditions of those contracts, to leave an estate upon completion of their contractual obligations and pursue other livelihoods, and to seek legal redress of their grievances (p. 74-75).

These colonial relationships set the background for why ethnic group relations exist the way it does now in Mauritius—structured by a cleavage between the “French” native subject and the “British” immigrant subject.
Francophonie and the Catholic Church

In conjunction with the external economic structures in which Creoles found themselves, internal tension within the population also greatly stymied the congealing of a distinct Creole identity during the colonial period. In fact, during the colonial period, the “Creole community” itself was something of a misnomer. Not only did most Creoles at the time not identify as “Creole” prior to the 1980s, but many were likely to have a disposition towards identifying with the cultural aspirations of the Franco-Mauritians, both groups being Catholic and aspiring of Francophonie. While there was an awareness of their racial distinction from the Franco-Mauritians and Indo-Mauritians as the descendants of enslaved Africans, there was little pride in this connection. Many instead identified first and foremost as Catholics. Creoles have also traditionally lacked any identity with a common origin or specific culture due to the forced eradication of many of their cultural practices during enslavement and their construction as a group of racial mixture, which has additionally led to social distinctions between lighter-skinned Creoles and those with darker-skin and more ascriptively “African” features. In his observations of societal life in Mauritius, Beaton (1859) characterized the Creole population (comprising the bulk of the island’s population at the time) as a hodge podge of mixed racial, cultural and linguistic elements that have rendered its inhabitants and their cultural practices indistinguishable. He writes:

Other stray waifs of humanity complete the picture, the effect of which is still more heightened by the mixture of Creoles, composing the coloured population, with more or less of African blood in their veins—a distinct class, forming a sort of imperium in imperio, equally removed from the pure black and white population, with whom they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Such is the picture presented to the eye by the mixed and motley population of Mauritius—a picture
unique in itself, such as no other country in the world can supply. There is a great problem being gradually solved by the intermixture of these races, differing so widely in every respect, and what language or man shall emerge from the seething mass, it is difficult to say. We are certain, that the future language of Mauritius will puzzle the philologists of coming ages... In after ages it may afford an argument in proof of all languages having been derived from one stamm-sprache, or mother-tongue, inasmuch as it will be found to have taxed almost all languages in its own composition. But who the ‘coming man’ of Mauritius may be, we cannot tell; we only hope that from elements so diverse, there may not come forth a Frankenstein (Beaton, 1859, p. 15-16).

The rise in ascendancy of the gens de couleur to the middle class in colonial society aided in this acceptance of a trans-racial identity seeking the attainment of French “high culture,” as the Coloured elite (being for the most part educated by their white paternal ancestors) identified with the Franco-Mauritians as a requirement for social mobility. This large class of free gens de couleur was indicative of the fact of widespread intermixture between white males and female slaves (many of which became manumitted from slavery under the “Code Noir”) throughout most of the French colonial period (Salverda, 2015; Vaughan, 2005). This also led to variation in skin color among Creoles, where a “one-drop” rule dictated the boundaries of the community and created varied economic and racial divisions within (Salverda, 2015). Benoît (1985) states that the “mixed race” status of Creoles has not only divorced them from their ancestral roots, but destroyed these roots in the process:

Among these Creoles... the number of people who can claim to be of pure African parentage now represent a small size of the population of Mauritius... As regard the Creolo-Mauritians, he is a half blood and an ambiguous figure who serves to symbolize many of the conflicting cultural values with which the pluralistic Mauritian society has now to wrestle. While it is very easy for the White Franco-Mauritians, the Islamo-Mauritians, the Tamilo-Mauritians, the Indo-Mauritians and the Sino-Mauritians to trace back their genealogy, it is a fact that the Afro-Mauritians cannot replant proudly and legitimately the family tree of their past which more than one hundred years of slavery (1720-1835) had felled down (p. 18).
Vaughan (2005) argues that in the early years of French enslavement, understandings of slave versus free, and landed versus peasant were not racially or ethnically understood, partly because of the existence of multiple groups of people cutting across various economic positions, including the presence of Wolof-speaking free blacks from mainland Africa. However, the basis for exploitation through slavery took a more starkly racial tone leading up to the French Revolution, when public discourse in France began making attempts to define populations of previous economic positions as politically equal under the frame of the nation-state (ibid). Racial boundaries became more rigid and demarcated, with later attempts to crack down on interracial unions by illegalizing interracial marriage and segregating based on race. The treatment of the gens de couleur throughout the 18th century is telling of these struggling attempts to racially manage the colony, as their status became more tenuous and ever-changing (particularly because their population numbers increased considerably). For both the colony and France, the sugar economy in Mauritius became integral for the entire country’s well-being, and so dependent was the island on free slave labor that there was considerable backlash from French settlers that delayed the abolition of slavery in France and stimulated the increasingly racialized oppression of black Africans in Mauritius (Vaughan, 2005).

Chan Low (2002) further clarifies the precarious racialized position of Creoles that have traditionally made them distinct from other groups. The author quotes Raymond Philogène (1928) on his observations of ethnic difference in Mauritius:

Nobody in Mauritius would in popular conversation refer to the white colonial as creole... only coloured natives, blacks or near blacks of inferior social status are called creoles and were it not for the fact that in Mauritius, so far as the general
population is concerned, social inferiority still coincides most frequently with the abundance of negro blood, the term would have thus been made to have only a social meaning. So true is this, that to speak of a creole-indian or a creole-chinese, as the custom allows in the case of mongrels of this type, usually fixes their standing. (Chan Low, 2002, quoted from Philogène (1928), p. 46-47).

In this way, although other non-whites, including Indians, were commonly referred to by colonizers as “black” during this period, “negro” or African blood was specifically conceptualized as the most inferior in a racially-hierarchical society. This lends to the disproportionate number of manumitted slaves during the slave period that were of Indian (as well as mixed race Coloured) descent, while slaves of African descent were less likely to receive manumission (Allen, 2008). Chan Low (2002) also argues that this was a direct consequence of the experience of enslavement and the subsequent marginalization of Creoles as a group from land and business ownership, stifling the creation of an Afro-Mauritian bourgeoisie that could possibly counteract these negative characterizations. As follows, associations with blackness or Africanity were also shunned within the Creole community. Tinker (1977) summarizes how by the 1970s, the “Afro-Creole” internalized the negative identity that non-Creoles created against the community, and how this identity translated into behavioral limitations that also explain their socioeconomic status:

How do the Afro-Creoles see themselves and their island? Very few feel even the vaguest affinity with Africa. To them, Africa is barbarous; and this aversion extends to the Malagasy people with whom they have the closest contacts... Insofar as there is a recognized Creole cultural identity it is embodied in the Sega. In other respects, the Afro-Creole is regarded as outside the boundaries of social esteem. Too dark to be able to construct a fictitious past for himself as the descendant of a Norman seigneur (as the lightskinned Creole may do) he is conscious that he speaks a language which is a poor relation of French and he is aware that his religion only marginally brings him into the brotherhood of the (Western) Catholic faith. He lacks the strong ties of family and kinship which give strength to the Indians in adversity. He lacks the strong urge to save and plan and try to elevate his children which animates many poor Indians. The Afro-Creole is indeed the forgotten man
of Mauritius; remembered only when his vote is wanted at election-time (p. 335-336).

The main pursuit of *gens de couleur* especially was the advancement of French language and culture, or *Francophonie*, as the epitome of “high” culture and the culture that would represent the true “Mauritian nation.” Not only was French fluency necessary for upward socioeconomic mobility, but the value of French within the Creole community was also facilitated by the supremacy of the Francophone Catholic Church. Because it was led exclusively by Franco-Mauritians in a hierarchical arrangement for most of its history, the Church led masses and other church services, and provided biblical translations solely in French, even though most Creoles, who were lower class, were not fluent in French. The *gens de couleur* in particular had a fractured identity that overlapped across both class and race, with one foot in the Creole community and one foot among the Franco-Mauritians, and this was facilitated by the Church as the pillar of both communities.\textsuperscript{23} Further exacerbating the fracture of identity among Creoles was that the racially hierarchical colonial arrangements of Church services had remained well into the 1970s, as whites continued to take the front of the pews while Creoles were relegated to sit in the back during mass. Although the majority of the Church’s predominately Afro-Creole population spoke Kreol (most lower class Creole were not fluent in French, unlike the Franco-Mauritians who required French education for their children), church services and the readings of the Bible during mass were also only provided in French. In addition, the Franco-Mauritian Church leadership (with some British/English involvement) had full control and decision-making power over the Church’s agenda, and this stirred Catholic

\textsuperscript{23} A substantial segment of Sino-Mauritians, who are predominately Christian, also illustrate a complicated relationship with the Catholic Church.
advocacy to invest in interest-based rather than identity-based measures for social improvement.

Additionally, the voices of Creoles within the public sphere were also silenced by the domination of Franco-Mauritians who, together with the gens de couleur, dictated public discourse within the national mainstream media, including in newspapers such as Le Cemeen, L'express and Le Mauricien. Unlike Hindus, Muslims and the Chinese, however, Creoles were not able to develop newspapers that were distinct to the interests of their ethnic group or public outlets separate from the interests of Franco-Mauritian and Coloured Creoles. Because the state also lumped together both groups within one general population, the “Best Losers” seats allocated in the legislature were also subject to domination by Franco-Mauritian political elites, who were believed to adequately represent Creole constituents on a religious basis as fellow Christians. As a result, the “Best Losers” system later created at independence did not benefit Creoles the way it has other minority groups because as an unrecognized group, they must share their slots with Christians of other ethnic backgrounds. Best Losers seats for the “population generale” also tended to be won by Franco-Mauritian and gens de couleur politicians disproportionately.

For much of the country’s history, Creoles and Franco-Mauritians have had the closest relationship under slavery, also sharing the same religion and cultural practices since Creoles were forced to assimilate into French culture during enslavement. However,

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24 The Best Losers system was instituted in 1968 as a quasi-consociational parliamentary model that guarantees legislative seats set aside for non-Hindu ethnic minorities (Srebrnik, 2000). This structure ensures representation of all officially designated ethnic or religious groups, but also provides incentives for broad-based coalitions and ideological positions that are politically moderate. This consociational institutional arrangement has been pointed out by several scholars as a way in which groups are mediated to ensure the survival of democracy in plural societies (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Lijphart, 2004; Horowitz, 1985).
through slavery they are also seen as two of the most antagonistic groups towards each other, with a stark contrast based on both color and economic class. This “love-hate” relationship continues to exist today. However, they have banded together in some instances against Indians and the Chinese, who also ally themselves as the country’s “immigrants” with strong diasporic connections to their homelands. Creole identity was therefore not culturally distinct from the identity of white Christians or South Asians until at least the mid-nineteenth century, and even incorporated the values and aspirations of Franco-Mauritians as a social necessity.

A strong allegiance to Francophonie on the part of Franco-Mauritians and the gens de couleur sought to maintain an identity that was uniquely French to specifically distinguish themselves from the British (Ramharai, 1998). Although the relationship between the European colonizers and settlers were generally mutually supportive, there was also tension between the two groups. Franco-Mauritians in particular actively resisted a British cultural imperialism and with the gens de couleur adopted a French patriotism in much their late 19th century writings (ibid). The French settlers were also subjects of the British crown, and this French nationalism was a way to reclaim their “lost’ identity” as the superior group, based on white supremacy that was also imposed on the Creoles. According to Ramharai (1998), Franco-Mauritians “found themselves on the same footing in terms of citizenship, with former slaves, and sought to differentiate themselves from the latter by claiming a form of superiority through cultural activities and literature” (p. 102). The use of language was also split along ethnic lines. Ramharai (1998) explains that “Whites and Coloureds (in the second half of the 19th century) chose the French language to defend their rights and their
cultural heritage, the Indians used English, first to make themselves heard by the authorities at the beginning of the 20th century, and later to establish a certain identity in their writings” (Ramharai, 1998, p. 99). After independence, each group carried on these linguistic identities to express themselves after even decolonization.

In sum, Creole identity has been historically characterized by two separate identities that exist in conjunction: an understanding of Creole as constituting “blackness” and at the same time constituting “hybridity.” Creoles were recognized as the descendants of African slaves, but also recognized as having high levels of racial intermixture due to the widespread practice of metissage during French colonialism. This is, in part, because although darker skinned Creoles and the gens de couleur can be viewed as distinct communities on the basis of class, they are also regarded as part of the same community. Not only because of their cultural affinities, but because intermarriage between Creoles and gens de couleur has continued to create wide diversity of skin tone within the community at-large.25 For much of the community’s history, this dual identity was simple in its applicability to Creole social life. While their hybridity was embraced, particularly by the gens de couleur seeking greater assimilation into the white upper classes, blackness was devalued as something backwards and inferior. Contributing to this dual identity, many gens de couleur were straddled in a category that was excluded from whites yet necessitated

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25 This racial characterization of post-slavery populations of African descent represents two distinct ways that these populations are typically characterized in other countries. For instance, South Africa distinguishes a “Coloured” population of mixed race distinct from “black Africans.” But the United States has historically characterized “African Americans” as one population group based on the “one drop rule” (meaning that regardless of the percentage of African ancestry, both mixed race and “pure” African individuals were considered “Black”). This has lend to wide phenotypical variation among “Blacks” that identify as a coherent group in America. In reality, given true biological “race” is a falsehood, the actual “mixed race” percentage of these population groups is semantic and based in local politics, rather than biological. See Marx (1998) for a comparative political history behind why these categorizations manifested the way that they did in the United States, South Africa and Brazil.
distinction from their “pure-blood” counterparts in order to achieve socioeconomic mobility. In the British colonial period, the devaluation of blackness was extended by their comparison to recent Asian arrivals, who were thought of by the British as superior to the Afro-descended (though still viewed as inferior to whites) (Beaton, 1859; Allen, 1999).

In the general public, Creoles were thought of in a contradictory way, characterized by substantial racial mixture on the one hand, but of which necessarily included Afro-Malagasy ancestry on the other. Thus Creoles have been painted in racist terms as primitive and immoral because of their racial heritage as the descendants of black Africans, while others have simultaneously pointed to their hybridity and lack of cultural grounding as the source of their devaluation (Boswell, 2005). Because of these stereotypes, they faced racial discrimination from other members of society and an ambiguous racial identity based in shame and a denial of a cultural birthplace. This is a situation that has continued today. In an interview with a young Creole-Madras man whose mother was Creole and whose father was Indian, he recalls being teased for having African blood by his half-siblings of mixed Indian and Chinese descent, and asks: “How am I expected to be proud of my African origins when it was used against me as a child? How can I think that Africa is a place to be proud of, or a place that I would want to go when I am told that Africans smell?” (Baptiste, 2002, p. 146).

Likewise, because culture is an important component in the Mauritian understanding of ethnic difference, the inability for Creoles to claim a specific cultural diaspora makes them a residual group in a landscape in which diasporic connection is central to political identity. Rather than Creoles, they were essentially regarded as non-
Hindus or non-whites, and this lack of culture was also associated with blackness or Africanity as something naturally culturally devoid. Eriksen (1990) describes the open group boundaries of the Creole community:

In Mauritius, ‘Creole’ conventionally refers to Christians who do not claim European or Asian ancestry; this includes Blacks (of largely African ancestry), Coloreds (of mixed origins), ‘Chinese-Creoles’ and Christians of Tamil descent whose families converted and changed their names several generations ago... 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 (p. 109-110).

While many have explained this pattern as a product of the backwardness or lack of development of Creole culture, the demobilization of Creoles is not a matter of choice, but a matter of consequence. Thus it is important to note that because race is a social construct, the framing of Creole identity did not have to manifest in these particular ways, but these variations show the fluid nature of ethnic and racial constructions that are linked to wider sociopolitical and economic processes. They also indicate the use of group ascription or “naming” as a political strategy: in this case, non-Creoles across various groups have been complicit in the use of these characterizations for different reasons. As such, Creoles were racialized by their environment and adopted these identities in order to navigate within their societies. In other words, while “creole chinois” (mixed Afro- and Sino-Mauritian ancestry) may hold a distinct label in Mauritius, in another time or space, persons within this category could alternatively be ascribed as “Creole,” “Sino-Mauritian,” or simply “Mauritian.” Although most racial constructs adhere to some variation on the

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26 In this aspect, Creoles differ from politically disengaged groups in other societies, such as Indians in Fiji or Japanese Americans, who may be politically demobilized but typically maintain group benefits instead through economic or social means by choice.
rules of mixture (“one-drop” rule vs. categories based purely on phenotype, for instance), exactly how racial ascriptions are decided are a sociopolitical product.

These problems have also translated into political and economic disadvantages that are used to further validate the negative characterizations of Creoles. In the years leading up to independence, many of the gens de couleur (along with some Franco-Mauritians and wealthier Indo-Mauritians) also fled the country to Australia, Britain, and Canada, stimulated by the ethnic tensions that were inflamed by party politics at the time and a fear of the “Hindu peril.” By this period, Hindus became a substantial majority of the Mauritian population, and with their granting of citizenship after independence, many gens de couleur feared the loss of their political power. The “Coloured Exodus” was also a considerable blow to Creole leadership capacity, leaving a void in the leadership where many leaders within the community were among the class of gens de couleur. In addition, the demographics of the community had now shifted to being comprised of mainly darker-skinned ti-Kreols of a lower class background, which further complicated how Creoles would be perceived and perceive themselves in later decades.

As a result of these factors, Creole organizations throughout history have tended to be weakly organized, lacked the capacity for the dense civic networks typical of other groups, and many Creoles have been reputably disengaged from civil society in comparison to other groups (Miles, 1999a). Most importantly, they lacked the capacity for organizing around interests specific to the Creole community. Thus these factors led to a lack of a solid community identity and political consciousness, which has also politically

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27 At this time, Creoles, Muslims and Franco-Mauritians formed a political alliance against independence, preferring British rule over the possibility of Hindu domination (Carroll, 1994).
demobilized Creoles. Creoles also lacked political representation, as the presence of Afro-Creoles in Parliament or the executive branch continued to be sparse. Prior to the “Coloured Exodus,” the gens de couleur dominated religious and non-religious associations in civil society and the public sphere that purportedly represented the “population generale.” The Catholic Church was the center of civic participation for many Creoles, who typically formed part of a passive membership rather than leadership positions and had little agency through religious organization. With secular organizing (which garnered much lower rates of participation in comparison to that of the Church), civically active Creoles typically participated in interest-based organizations characterized by multiethnic coalitions that had broader, class-based focuses on poverty alleviation. This is in stark contrast to Hindu, Muslim and Franco-Mauritian leaders who were indirectly funded through Hindu, Islamic, and Catholic institutions, respectively, as well as the multiple parastatal bodies created and the sociocultural organizations they employed in the preservation of Asian language and culture. Likewise, up until the Hindu takeover of the state, the Catholic Church had received the overwhelming bulk of funding from the colonial state for its purposes. In this way, religious state-funding was an indirect form of empowerment for groups that were able to be ethnically-associated with religious bodies, providing meeting spaces for civic organizing and government funding for the preservation of culture.

By the 1970s, the void in Creole leadership would produce a situation in which a new Creole leadership more representative of the interests of lower class Creoles could emerge. But the fractured identities among Creoles and gens de couleur as a broader
community (marking a fractured conceptualization of what it meant to be Creole) would prove to be a large sociopolitical barrier for years to come. Concerning new organizations that were created by Creoles during the post-independence period, L’Action Creole, Les Fraternites des Creoles, Cercle Pere Laval, and L’Union de Population Generale de l’Ile Maurice, Benoît (1985) states that each were an attempt at organizing socio-politically that were not likely to last due to the continued shaming of blackness within the community. The author explains that this is because:

The Creolo-Mauritians and Afro-Mauritians are so ‘franco-mauritianized’ in their outlook towards language, education, mannerisms and religion that they cannot maintain these cultural and social clubs as the organizational nuclei for social, political and educational movement as the Islamo- and Indo-Mauritians use their Madressahs and Baitkahs. As their membership is made up of the dark-skinned Creolo-Mauritians, these organisations suffer from a cultural dilemma which is detrimental in discouraging any sign of revival of interest in the reassertion of African culture... This inevitable dichotomy is not conducive to making the Afro-Mauritians more conscious of their true racial identity but is keeping them aloof from their teleological vision of the process of Africanisation (p. 94).

After the eradication of the ancestral identities of ex-slaves by a harsh system of enslavement, the practice of metissage and the adoption of French culture have created colorism and economic division within the community that has fractured Creole identity, both ethnically and politically. The role of blackness and the role of hybridity in the community would become re-defined in the 1980s, however, when economic turmoil placed greater obstacles on Creoles as a collective, the subject of Chapter 5.

**Kreol and the Creole Community**

Although Mauritius’ colonial history showcases great ethnic and racial diversity, the vast majority of the population came to speak one language throughout the colonial
period—the Kreol language—as a lingua franca between groups and classes. Kreol originated chiefly as a language spoken between Mauritian slaves and their masters under French colonialism, and has since developed into a lingua franca between the multiple ethnic groups on the island. It is also the country’s only universally-spoken language. Overall, Kreol is an amalgamation of different languages and cultures, first developing between the interaction of the various African languages of the slaves and Francophone settlers during the slave period, and later incorporating some Bhojpuri and other Asian languages. The languages that have interacted to develop Kreol included French as the “superstrate” language and the various ancestral languages of slaves (including Malagasy, Fon, Bambara, Dravidian, and Wolof) as the “substrate” languages (Bissoonauth, 1998). At a basic level, the language acts similarly to other “creoles” worldwide, developed at the intersections of distinct linguistic communities and thus Kreol was historically considered a “pigeon” rather than a true language.\(^{28}\)

The 1960s and 1970s brought newfound academic study of the language, including its syntax, orthography and historical development (Baker, 1972). This research has shown that historically, Kreol developed not as a degenerative version of French, but as a new contact language that has incorporated various different languages over time in a pattern similar to that of other major world languages, most notably English. Kreol’s development is also related to its early French colonial environment: as a transient island that served as

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\(^{28}\) Creoles have been historically viewed as “pigeons” (partial communication systems with a reduced lexicon) and inferior versions of a “parent” language (typically operating within contexts of diglossia) (Bissoonauth, 1998). Pigeons are also thought of as purely contact languages existing within environments of cultural contact, such as in national trade, and do not exist as a mother tongue. However, linguists today argue that creoles are full languages with their own vocabularies, syntax and orthographies. Unlike pigeons, creoles also have native speakers (ibid).
an international trading hub, constant contact between various international groups made a contact language important for economic relations between these groups (Vaughan, 2005). Unlike the strict racial segregation characteristic of British colonialism and its subsequent emphasis on the separation or abolition of languages other than English, the French settler colony’s social arrangements supported integration among French settlers and African slaves (ibid). This led to the preservation of parts of the languages of slaves through adaptation and combination with the French language. African and Malagasy slaves and Franco-Mauritian settlers spoke not through French, but through the Kreol language. This interaction was important because it facilitated the adoption of Kreol by French settlers, who instead of enforcing strict policies of French unilingualism, learned and communicated with slaves through Kreol while also contributing to the language’s development. At the same time, they reserved the French language as a separate medium for whites and gens de couleur of a higher status. In this way, Kreol was more than a dialect or pigeon of the French language. Although a large number of Franco-Mauritians and gens de couleur aspired to speak French in formal life, Kreol became the first language of Franco-Mauritians and Creoles of subsequent generations in their social interactions regardless of their social status. The arrival of Indians nearly a century later brought Bhojpuri as one of the predominant languages from India, and Kreol has also since adopted some Bhojpuri words and phrases into the language. The language thus developed through an amalgamation of various linguistic elements from Europe, Africa and Asia, incorporated in different ways and at different times.
Much recent linguistic research has come to acknowledge Kreol as a full language in its own right (Baker, 1972), but Kreol has been greatly devalued in Mauritian society in comparison with the island’s other languages due to its contentious history. Unlike the other languages in Mauritius hailing from other cultures abroad, colonial elites instead viewed Kreol as a broken, degenerated version of the colonial French language that was culturally deprived, although it was widely accepted as the national lingua franca. The French language retained cultural domination on the island defining what was both “Mauritian” and what constituted as high culture, and Kreol was connected to French in a relationship of diglossia that gave it low value but also made it functionally useful as a contact language between the unequally regarded settlers and their subjects. Connotations associated with Kreol place it opposite the characteristics of French, as Kreol is associated with impotence, blackness, vulgarity, carelessness and ignorance while French is associated with power, whiteness, refinement, responsibility and education (Eriksen, 1990).

Colonial education policy was a joint agreement between Franco-Mauritian settlers and the Catholic Church on the one hand, and the local British administration and Protestant missionary churches on the other, who institutionalized French and English as the two standardizing languages of their school systems and ignored Kreol as a language worthy of institutional support. By virtue of their distinct colonial ideologies, the French were against the education of the Indian and Creole masses, preferring that they focus on the unskilled work necessary for the sugar plantation industry. In contrast, the British encouraged primary-level schooling that went hand-in-hand in the project to “civilize” their subjects (Eisenlohr, 2001). The French proposed instructing Indians in the French
language, in the same way that Creoles were instructed as non-white Franco-Mauritians. Yet their attempt to force French upon both Creole and Indian subjects was also an attempt to counteract what they saw as the “Anglicization” of the colony since the British takeover (ibid). In this context, the push for the preservation of Asian languages and traditions was the result of the pressure on the part of colonizers to assimilate (read, “civilize”) them into European culture, and into a country in which they were perpetually perceived as immigrants and contrasted with the Francophile white and Creole natives. In this way, the main fight throughout the course of language planning has been between European and Asian languages. The teaching of Kreol, however, was not considered with the advent of public schooling, as the gens de couleur mostly aspiring towards Francophonie had not advocated for Kreol in language policy.

In addition, Kreol was denigrated for two reasons that uniquely define the language. On the one hand, it was associated with African and Malagasy slaves who were viewed as biologically and culturally inferior, who were originally the predominate speakers of the language within their households (in contrast to Franco-Mauritians and Asian immigrants, who originally retained French and many Asian languages within their households in addition to Kreol). But on the other hand, Kreol was also viewed as a hybrid, a hodgepodge of linguistic elements from multiple linguistic groups representative of the widespread metissage that had taken place on the island. As such, throughout most of its history Kreol was not a language distinct to any particular community. These characteristics have made Kreol the most disregarded and devalued of all the languages in
Mauritius, but in spite of its low social status, Kreol has garnered greater informal power as the only language native to the island.

The relationship between Kreol and the Creole community has also been a very capricious one. For much of the language’s history, Creoles themselves, alike other Mauritians, did not view Kreol as a language of value, inheriting much of the disdain associated with Africa and “blackness” that had become a social fact throughout Mauritius’ colonial period. Like other cultural artifacts linked to African culture, Kreol was thought of as artifacts of backwardness and shame. Even the widely popular *sega*—an African-derived performance art practiced in the Creole community and the most lucrative aspect of the country’s cultural tourism—was not viewed as a valuable aspect of Mauritian or Creole culture until the development of the tourism sector in the 1980s. Prior to this, many Creoles typically practiced traditional *sega* (called *sega tipik*) and other African cultural mediums in private spaces while professing *Francophonie* and western etiquette in their public intercultural interactions. In addition to Kreol being viewed as a boundless language not attached to a specific ethnic group, it was rooted in a community which was also viewed as boundless. It is not surprising then that the complicated nature of Creole ethnic identity also plagued the community’s identity with the Kreol language. Kreol being simultaneously characterized as ethnically boundless and Afro-descended led to its identification with the Creole community, but this also led to its rejection within the Creole community as culturally shameful.

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29 Traditional *sega* created by African and Malagasy slaves in Mauritius. It is expressed through the use of performative dance and the *ravine* (a traditional drum).
By the 1960s, Kreol’s history had left complicated conceptions of the language in society and politics. In today’s popular imagination, it is seen as an artifact of African culture originally created and spoken among the island’s community of slaves. The language was therefore viewed in the general public (including among many Creoles) as a backwards language connected to the Creole community as the descendants of low status slaves and juxtaposed with French as the language of prestige, “whiteness” and power (Eriksen, 1990). This understanding of the colonial linguistic hierarchy was also adopted by later arrivals from Asia, who themselves learned the language and whose children spoke it as their mother tongue, in spite of its low status. Yet at the same time, there has been a strong awareness of Kreol’s power as the lingua franca throughout Mauritian history, and an actively “living” language, where generations from all ethnic groups have come to adopt Kreol as their primary language and mother tongue. Concurrently, the mother tongues of Asian immigrants to Mauritius have decreased in usage and have been threatened by their own “death” without active state promotion during the colonial period.³⁰ Kreol’s power has therefore served as a threat to identities with the other languages, in particular the Asian languages (the subject of the next chapter). Yet, at the same time that Kreol has been singled out as a threat to linguistic competition on the island and a backwards “pigeon,” its status is further complicated by the fact that multiple ethnic groups could come to claim a stake in the language historically, from its African, French and Bhojpuri influences.

In this fashion, Kreol is simultaneously and rather contradictorily understood as at once ethnic and national, and as both marginal to society and significant to its functioning.

³⁰ Such state promotion was heavily directed to the preservation of French and the Catholic Church during the colonial period, and later redirected to English and the Asian languages with Mauritius’ new independent state post-1968.
as the mother tongue of the vast majority of Mauritians today. Although all languages continually undergo periods of adaptation and change, Kreol (like other creole languages) is marked by a relatively recent hybridization of various languages that have adapted in contact, making it a more dynamic, living language in comparison to the other languages in Mauritius that have concomitantly decreased in usage. Although Kreol was the main language of the island and increasingly gained strength with each passing decade, colonial elites characterized it as a debased, backwards language with little cultural or historical value, partly as a way of maintaining the cultural debasement and marginalization of the Creole ex-slaves. This negativity came from it being viewed as a hybrid of various languages, but also its association with Africanity and blackness as the opposite of French whiteness. Due to this tension, no ethnic group was interested in claiming a stake to the language prior to independence, including the Creole leadership. Only beginning in the 1960s does advocacy for Kreol begin to take shape in language politics.

**Between Race and Culture**

The complicated historical status of both the Creole ethnic group and the Kreol language—which involves a tension between hybridity and blackness, and origins that are simultaneously trans-ethnic and African—sets the backdrop in which the post-independence politics of language and ethnic identity take shape. For Creoles, their blackness and their hybridity are characterizations that mark the group’s “cultural and biological impurity,” which is the main source of their categorical exclusion in a multicultural society (Boswell, 2005). The Kreol language is widely regarded as a language of low social status for similar reasons. The same ambiguous identity of Creoles characterizes the Kreol language as a
degenerated “hodge podge” of French and African languages rather than a language itself. Throughout the colonial period and up until today, Kreol has been viewed as a language that does not fit into the post-independence government’s multicultural framework in that it has no diasporic connection to external cultures or civilizations of perceived value (unlike Hindi, English, Arabic, Mandarin or French).

Interestingly, the connection between Kreol and the Creole community also highlights the ways that cultural links are used in Mauritius (principally through language) to raise or lower the value of groups. In this case, Kreol has been used to debase the status of Creoles by reinforcing their hybrid, rootless nature through their association to the language, even though Kreol was equally important in the everyday lives of all Mauritians. Likewise, Kreol has been lowered in its status because of its association with Creoles as the descendants of black Africans who lacked the culture and refinement of other groups. As Chan Low (2004) explains, the experience of metissage was an integral part of Creole culture as the interaction between the culture of slaves and the culture of their masters, yet this same experience also represents the cultural heritage of all Mauritians, which are, in fact, take part in an historical experience that was largely culturally and racially “hybrid.” The linking of Kreol exclusively with the Creole community, and the assumption that Kreol began as a slave language has also prevented any identity with the language on the part of non-Creoles (Eriksen, 1990).

In this way, Creoles and Creole culture has been placed in a position in society between race and culture, where they have been denied cultural or ethnic distinction and are thus culturally invisible, but were also heavily racialized by their blackness and their
hybridity. Creoles have been historically viewed as cultureless because of their co-optation by French culture, which denies the development of their own native “Mauritian” culture. Thus in the minds of many non-Creoles, Creoles are “French” not African, and their ancestral or diasporic heritage has been severed. But in many ways, this interpretation of history eludes the fact that Creoles still possessed a distinct culture, developing native to the island, based on their experience of exclusion and marginalization, and a “Creole way of life.” Working from this point of cultural invisibility in society, Creoles have attempted to assert their existence as a group not because of their mixed ancestry, but because of the political constructions created around them that have been justified by their mixed ancestry.

By comparison, Afro-Colombians have also been characterized by a weak and fragmented group identity that has stifled their collective mobilization, sociopolitical organization, and levels of empowerment (Paschel, 2010). This is because ideologies of hybridity have similarly framed their community as residual in a context in which racial mixture defines the majority of the population; being absorbed into the Brazilian population, they are legally and politically invisible. Yet Afro-Colombian activists have argued that they experience racial discrimination on the basis of colorism (discrimination based on the notion that lighter skin is more refined and darker skin more primitive). They have also experienced in general greater levels of poverty, socioeconomic marginalization, and political engagement in comparison to Colombians in general society.

According to Wade (2010), the slippage between race and culture has always characterized the way race works in society, proving that the assumption that cultural
difference has overtaken racial difference in modern politics is a faulty one. He argues that there was never a shift in group relations from biological race to cultural difference, but just changing “constellations” of hybrids of both race and culture. Quoting Goldberg (2009), Wade (2010) states that:

‘Race has to do—it has always had to do—more complexly with the set of views, dispositions, and predilections concerning culture, or more accurately of culture tied to colour, of being to body, of ‘blood’ to behavior’ (175). This linking of biology to behaviour, or more generally of nature to culture, seems to me crucial. It highlights that the whole apparatus of race (racial categorizations, racial concepts, racisms) has always been as much about culture as it has about nature, that race has always been about shifting between these two domains... Racial thinking... purifies in various ways. It may assign some categories of people to the realm of nature and others to the realm of culture. It may carve out a clear conceptual space for ‘human nature’ in the person, which has specific relations to cultural attributes: human nature may dominate culture for some less ‘civilized’ people, while culture can control nature for the more ‘civilized’... But translation or hybridization is a constant presence too. The people steeped in nature or those less civilized are, in fact, vital to the possibility of existence of those who bask in culture: vital in both material and symbolic senses, as providing labour and also constituting the very meaning of culture as separate from nature (p. 45-46).

This constellation between race and culture has allowed race to exist as simultaneously visible and invisible in Mauritius.

Such conceptualizations are political and strategic, and they form the basis of a type of denial of cultural distinction that has translated into the disempowerment of Creoles. The contradictions in the way Kreol has been publically conceptualized especially—where the language was formally suppressed even while its informal value increased—show the political maneuvering on the part of colonial elites and those outside of the community used to suppress Creole mobilization, while the boundaries of other groups were strengthened over this same period. It has also translated into practical disadvantages for the group by preventing their ability to mobilize and organize collectively. This lack of
organization and mobilization has also meant that Creoles were historically unable to strengthen, demarcate or connect their group boundary with the Kreol language, nor imbibe the language with cultural meaning in the same way that Hindi, Arabic or French was used as a source of cultural power. This is especially the case because the gens de couleur with more access to economic and political resources were in many ways disassociated from lower-class Creoles for much of the early 20th century. Although Kreol was conceptually linked with Creoles, it has generally remained a relatively loose linkage frozen in the historical past. This process of identity divergence also works cyclically: as Creole political actors were unable to demarcate their boundaries through state recognition and civic organizing, they were also unable to build solid internal identities within their group boundary, and as they lacked group identity, mobilization towards boundary-solidifying policies have suffered.

Franco-Mauritians in particular have thrived historically on the de-mobilization of Creoles. While the denial of their racial distinction neutralizes their political claims for positive justice, but when necessary, the denial of their culture also demarcates Creoles as racially distinct. The development of Creole identity and associational life was barred by the lack of development of a political consciousness separate from the general Catholic community. However, with the mass emigration of a large percentage of gens de couleur in the years prior to independence, lower class Creoles remained with different experiences and repertoires from which to construct their identities going into the 1970s and 1980s.

Overall, this historical account provides the context for which post-independence politics takes shape and the Creole community’s tumultuous status with the Mauritian
nation-state can be better understood. It sets the stage for understanding future institutional constraints on the politics of boundary-making after independence (the subject of the next chapter), and how these processes interacted to create a nascent nation-state primed for incorporating “diasporic multiculturalism” as a framework of governance that rendered invisible the most racially visible minority group. The changing context of the post-independence period includes increasing economic disparities between Creoles and Indians, a shift in the composition of the Creole community after the “Coloured exodus,” and the rise of Hindu political domination and official multiculturalism, which pressures Creole leaders to search for cultural forces from which to mobilize and organize in a new sociopolitical environment. This period gave strength to the formation of an Indo-Mauritian ethnic boundary defined by cultural “purity” (Eisenlohr, 2006) against the construction of a Creole ethnic boundary as a culturally impure force.\footnote{Although much archaeological, historical and anthropological research has demonstrated high levels of racial and ethnic intermixture among and between all communities in Mauritius (research conducted by Vijaya Teelock and Meghan Vaughan, in particular), Indo-Mauritian elites have sought to heavily demarcate and refine their ethnic and racial boundaries since the Indian Nationalist movements of the early 1900s. Their boundary-making politics does not allow for dual identities and diasporic allegiances, thus this national narrative of “mixed race” has been consistently rejected in mainstream society and politics although it is currently popular in academia. Many Nationalists such as Vinesh Hookoomsing and Jocelyn Chan Low have also argued in their research that all Mauritians are of mixed backgrounds. This includes many Franco-Mauritians (Salverda, 2015).} As a proxy for ethnic group power, language becomes more important in deciphering the multiple sociopolitical and economic changes taking place in the post-independence period, where Kreol is further linked to blackness, hybridity and the Creole community by those advocating against its possible ascension in language policy. The proliferation of cultural parastatal bodies through which to preserve and promote the various ethnic languages in Mauritius—and the indirect economic and social empowerment they provide to Indo-
Mauritian civil society organizations—further exacerbates the political and socioeconomic inequalities between Creoles and Indians and stimulates a greater desire for the new Creole leadership to engage in the construction of an Afro-Creole identity beginning in the 1980s.
Chapter 4 – The “Native” and the “Foreigner” in Post-Independence Language Policy Discourse

The Mauritian independence period brought both optimism and uncertainty to the country’s colonized population, marked by the opportunity to redefine the boundaries of national belonging. Ethnic status among the colonized population, which had incrementally declined in salience throughout colonial history, had become a major component of the political party landscape in the decades leading up to independence. Because the independence period was fraught with political and economic instability, the country’s first post-independence government—led by the Mauritian Labour Party (MLP)—became principally focused on the need to balance and manage the interests of the plurality of ethnic groups in the goal of nation-building, rather than national formation.

Two main characteristics of this period shape the policy climate in which multiculturalism later took root as official government policy.

First, sequential colonialism and the party politics of the late colonial period produced not only ethnic hostilities between groups, but also the formation of two distinct sociopolitical cleavages that began to structure Mauritian politics—that of the native and the foreigner. On one side, the Franco-Mauritians and Coloured Creoles (or gens de couleur) formed a coalition that united under the banner of Francophone culture and as the advocates for measured political progress and minority rights. As a justification for their continued political power and protection, they articulated themselves as the nation’s
original natives. This coalition joined forces under the Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate (PMSD), the main opposition party to the largely Indian-led MLP. Franco-Mauritians and Coloured Creoles had also continued to be grouped together under the category “general population” under Mauritius’ new Constitution, which strengthened their ascription as a major sociopolitical cleavage in society.

On the other side of the divide, Hindus, Muslims, Tamils, and other Asian-descended groups were redefined as Indo-Mauritians—the “immigrants” of the island, loyal to the British and the champions of independence and democratic reform. This new coalition, dominated principally by a Hindu-elite, would advocate a governmental focus on cultural differentiation and preservation as a political imperative and the role of the Mauritian state as central to its protection. While ethnic differentiation had previously structured politics prior to independence, it is this cleavage between native and foreigner that marked the strategies in which nation-building could conceivably take place after 1968. Because Indo-Mauritians (Hindus in particular) gained exclusive political power, the state’s strategies for nation-building included an over-reliance on diasporic lineage as a safer and more valid alternative to territorial claims of indigeneity, and a powerful commitment to multiculturalism as a means to the creation of a national ethnic “mosaic.”

A second characteristic of independence politics was that the new nation now constituted a “tabula rasa” from which national ideologies could be built. The 1968

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32 For the most part, Afro-Creoles of the lower classes were rarely included as political participants or had voices in these political debates as voters, and were marginal to the central interests of Franco-Mauritian, Coloured elites and the PMSD in the independence period.

33 However, the fusion of these two communities into one population group with the post-independence Constitution has caused considerable strife between Creoles and Franco-Mauritians, who are two groups with widely separate interests that must compete for representation under the “general population” category.
elections marked a moment at which ethnic groups and the coalitional cleavages in which they coalesced began to engage in a scramble to define the nation. As a colonial country with no national narratives of indigeneity, the Mauritian people had little connection to the state or its territory after independence from Britain. Although the Mauritian population continued to share a national culture in their everyday practice, they did not share a national identity, and instead, held allegiances to their respective ethnic groups and the political parties who represented them (Carroll & Carroll, 2000). For the MLP government, these ethnic attachments caused considerable social, political and economic damage in the preceding years that could conceivably fracture the country's newfound democratic polity before it could have a chance to develop.34

This newfound fervor was noticeable in the public news media during and directly after independence, as various ethnic-oriented interest groups began to push for changes in the policy realm to reflect whom newly independent Mauritius now represented. Stemming from the legacies of Bissoondoyal and other Hindu leaders in the late colonial period who spurred the strengthening of baitkas in the teaching of Hindu culture, the central manifestations of these ethnic connections for Indo-Mauritians were their connections to their languages. How the MLP government dealt with the burgeoning of language teaching programs among Indo-Mauritian civil society organizations became extremely important in state-society efforts to define the nation. The post-independence period brought the beginnings of policy debates and discourses concerning the role of the state in managing

34 During the quest for independence, major riots took place between Creoles and Hindus in 1965 and between Creoles and Muslims in 1968 (Dinan, Nababsing & Mathur, 1999; Carroll & Carroll, 2000).
ethnic group status through the management of languages. As such, governmental elites targeted the realm of language policy in their project to reconfigure the national boundary.

This chapter outlines the comparative development of the Asian, French and Kreol languages in language education policy between 1968 and 1984. Using discourse analysis of several ethnic and mainstream newspapers, as well as government reports and policy conferences during this period, I explicate the development of language policy and the constraints to policy-making produced by the development of language policy discourse in “the public sphere.” By examining the voices of ethnic political leaders within the contexts of both public and in-group communication, I discern how they negotiate their ethnic status and how they redefine and adapt to this status through articulations of their respective ethnic languages in policy discourse. With this analysis, I illuminate the ways in which language policy was negotiated in post-independence politics, how this developed a distinct form of Mauritian multiculturalism that structured future policy, and what this means for future opportunities for belonging and nationhood for the Creole community.

The chapter proceeds in three phases that each represents a distinct discursive period in Mauritian public discourse concerning the language issue. After first outlining the hierarchical configuration of languages in Mauritius from the colonial period, I discuss the competition between French and the Asian languages in language policy. In this section, I outline policy debates on the role of the languages on the Certificate for Primary Education (CPE) exams that spurred increased efforts towards the institutionalization of the Asian languages and a hyper-sensitivity to the status of French as a competitor. The next section chronicles the development of multiculturalism and the upsurge in the
institutionalization of the Asian languages through the creation of nearly 70 cultural parastatal bodies as a means of solidifying the principles of multiculturalism with state prerogatives. In the third section, I outline the emergence of the Kreol language in language policy discourse and its sudden yet brief entrance into policy in 1982 and 1983, where Kreol language advocates working within the rival Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) party attempted to provide state support for Kreol as a non-ethnic language of national unity and sparked subsequent political backlash. This is the first of two distinct phases of policy activism regarding the Kreol language in Mauritius (the second of which is the subject of Chapter 7).

I conclude this chapter with an analysis of two policy discourses that developed from these debates, shaping a final phase of linguistic competition between Kreol and the Asian languages in the early 1980s. In the end, this analysis reveals two important findings. First, it shows that ethnic groups in Mauritius vie for national belonging within a political context that has become constrained by multiculturalism as an ideational and institutional framework, and second, that this multicultural framework is uniquely defined based on diasporic cultural value that privileges the “foreign” and the “ethnic” over the “native” and the “national.” Combined, these realities encourage ethnic political actors to view their relationships with each other and the multicultural nation as mutually exclusive. As a newly-formed “state-nation,” the boundaries of the Mauritian nation—conceived as liberal and multicultural—has limited which languages could fit within language policy and therefore which ethnic configurations could conceivably fit within Mauritian multiculturalism. In addition, the Kreol language has been more than simply locked out of
multicultural policy—it has been conceptualized in political discourse as the antithesis to cultural pluralism and the basis of non-ethnicity by which other groups are evaluated. This tension between “native” and “foreign” language and culture, and the political connections established between the Kreol language and the Creole community (the focus of the previous chapter), place constraints on future Creole civic organizing that impact the future development of multicultural policy in contemporary politics after 1993.

The Hierarchy of Languages

The escalating salience of language policy as a political issue in the period leading up to independence signifies the deep connection between the linguistic dimension of ethnicity and the status of ethnic groups in Mauritius. This has stemmed mainly from a colonial history characterized by sequential colonialism and the segregation between Francophone (Franco-Mauritian and Creole) and Asian-descended inhabitants on the island. The independence period represented a break from past colonial policy that was relatively “hands off” and indirect in its ruling over its colonial subjects. With greater increases in the colonial population (and a rapidly shrinking settler population), these demographic shifts spurred a desire of the British colonial state to embark on educating the masses, requiring a newfound focus on language policy planning.

Prior to this period, however, language policy was relatively straightforward. It represented a static hierarchical arrangement between the roles of the languages in Mauritius based on each ethnic group’s relationship to the colonial state. Within this pecking order, colonial language policy explicitly reinforced and expanded the written and
spoken languages of the colonizers, while suppressing or marginalizing the languages of subjugated groups in the formal realm.

At the top of the hierarchy, French and English stood as the two languages of prestige and status. English was the official language used in government communications and international business, and French was the language most commonly spoken by educated Franco-Mauritian and Coloured elites. While English was declared the sole official language of Mauritius, French continued to be unofficially supported in nearly all formal areas of government and society after the changeover from French to British colonization, with Franco-Mauritians continuing to occupy governmental posts. Parliamentary members were required to use English or French during deliberations, and official correspondence, policy, and other documents were to be written in English. The news media was also dominated by the Francophone Le Mauricien, Le Cerneen and L'Express newspapers, and books and other literary media were published mainly in French. State-run public schools taught and gave instruction in English and French, although most schooling at the time took place in private institutions that were predominately Catholic and Francophone (in addition to English-teaching schools setup by a fractional minority of British settlers). In this way, French was the predominate language used in media, the public sphere, and in business and finance. English dominated in government and official communication.

Conversely, the Asian languages were taught privately in religious temples and baitkas, an arrangement that was common within the Indo-Mauritian community, who had been largely ignored by the colonial government as non-citizen laborers and continued
their own private socioreligious institutions independently. The Asian languages—which varied among Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, Hakka, and many other Asian-derived languages—were spoken in the households of the large Indo-Mauritian population, mainly among elders and new immigrants to the island. Beginning in 1935, these languages were offered in government schools as optional elective courses (Dinan, Nababsing & Mathur, 1999), but were not commonly studied subjects even with the Indo- and Sino-Mauritian communities. Originally, Asian language instruction mainly served the religious elite who sought to acquire these languages for the translation of religious texts. Some Indo-Mauritians continued to speak and pass down the languages, but the majority of the Indo-Mauritian population did not. Indo-Mauritian elites had been able to continue the teaching of these languages through their religious institutions in the private sphere, but were acutely aware of their diminished usage and increased inapplicability beyond religious instruction. This gave rise to a new Indian nationalist movement in the early 1900s, started by the Arya Samaj and carried on by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (a Hindu activist and politician that would later become the country’s first Prime Minister post-independence) that began to centralize the promotion of Asian languages as a cultural right in pre-independence politics.

Finally, while the various ethnic groups maintained their own respective languages internally, including French, Hindi, Mandarin, and other Asian languages, Kreol was the contact language that quickly came to become the mother tongue of all inhabitants—even later immigrants—over the course of a century. It has also been historically considered a “pigeon” rather than a language. As French retained cultural domination on the island,
defining what was both “Mauritian” and what constituted high culture, Kreol was connected to French in a relationship of diglossia that gave it low value but also made it functionally important between unequally regarded groups.

Stein (1982) highlights that there are four cases of diglossia among the main languages in Mauritius. In addition to the relationship between French and Kreol, there is also a situation of diglossia between Hindi and Bhojpuri, with Bhojpuri having an inferior and informal status in comparison to Hindi, although the languages both derive from the same historical source. Stein points out that there is a third situation of diglossia between Bhojpuri and Kreol, with Kreol having a status higher than Bhojpuri. This is possibly because of its association with French rather than Hindi. Finally, English is viewed as having a relationship of diglossia with French and the other languages, as, although it is not historically related to the other languages, it has the highest status in many formal social contexts.

As Kreol had become the most common language spoken informally among all Mauritians regardless of their ethnic background, its usage facilitated a steady decline in the other languages spoken on the island by the 20th century, especially among the Asian languages, which had not been maintained through government support as English and French had as colonial languages. In addition, Kreol was denigrated as a language because, on the one hand, it was associated with African slaves who were viewed as biologically and culturally inferior, and on the other hand, Kreol was viewed as a hybrid, hodgepodge of elements from multiple linguistic groups. As such, Kreol was not considered a language worthy of being claimed in the eyes of any particular community, and its use was
prohibited in government, schools, business, and other formal domains mandating the use of French or English. This status has made it the most disregarded and devalued of all the languages in Mauritius, but in spite of its low social status in society, Kreol has garnered greater informal power among the languages as the only one universally-spoken on the island.

**French Domination and the Asian Languages**

The “language issue” in relation to both the practical and political problems of ethnic differentiation on the island had been a major problem since the Asian languages were first introduced officially in some government schools in 1935. Colonial language policy stemmed mostly from negotiations between the competing and overlapping interests of two colonizing forces, where the role of education in the lives of their subjects became critical to the economic interests of their employers. In 1959, J. E. Meade—a British economist enlisted by the Colonial government to research the economic and social conditions of Mauritius—cited the inconsistency in language instruction and the “multiplicity of languages in use” in the education system as the “greatest handicap” to education and socioeconomic advancement in Mauritius. In his government report, he argued that the current attempts at teaching and acquiring fluency in English, French, and the Asian languages, while both students and teachers spoke Kreol as their mother tongue, had led to an education system in which most children learned none of the languages well enough for matriculation. According to Meade (1968), “children leave the primary schools in large numbers without having acquired anything worth calling literacy in any one
While Meade’s Commission believed that French should be the official language of the island, it acknowledged that many within the Indian population consistently rallied against the imposition of French, and to prevent conflict, suggested that English remain the official language as a neutral language. However, given the overwhelming lack of English fluency among Mauritians, Meade’s Commission recommended that English become the sole language of instruction and learning, and for Kreol to be used in the early years prior to the teaching of English, and as the language of instruction for English courses in later years. It further pointed to French as a possible language of instruction within schools because of its closeness to Kreol and the ease at which Kreol speakers could learn French.

However, beyond the practical use of languages for educational attainment, Meade justified the teaching of French and the Asian languages by emphasizing the importance of ethnic identity and an identity to national culture. Meade states that:

Mauritius has had a background of French culture—it is therefore claimed that the French language should continue to be taught to all Mauritian children in order that they may not be cut off from their cultural heritage. Most children in Mauritius today are of Indian extraction—it therefore seems reasonable that they should be taught an Asian language, be it Hindi, Urdu or any other, because only by learning the language will they be able to retain the cultural background of their people (Meade, 1968, p. 209).

This suggests a view of both French and the Asian languages as important to the national curriculum for different reasons. While the Commission understood French to be the cultural background of the island and a language of instructional practicality to Kreol,
they deemed the teaching of the Asian languages necessary to preserve the ethnic identities of the island’s Asian inhabitants. But by supporting the importance of both languages, the report reinforced a rivalry between French and the Asian languages that more greatly represented the cleavage between the colonial past and the rebirth of the colonized, highlighting a transition from the “old” to the “new.” At the same time, the Commission described Kreol for the first time with national value based on its widespread use and nativity to the island.

The Meade report was an important source of authority and legitimacy for the Indian nationalist movement advocating the Asian languages during this period, but the language issue remained a quagmire for political debate that led to inertia in language education policy. After independence, the same arrangements of language instruction remained in the government school system as it had in the past. In the public sphere also, support for this arrangement had continued, creating a dichotomy between practicality and preservation that ethnicized Asian languages while neutralizing English, French and Kreol. For Hindu political leaders at the time, this hierarchical arrangement of the languages was a central obstacle to Indo-Mauritian national belonging. Moreover, they believed the long-standing state support of the French language in the formal and public sphere meant the continued exaltation of the Francophone elite above all other groups, and as such, the promotion of the Asian languages became a necessity.

Citing the Ward report, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, then Liaison Officer for Education, stated in a parliamentary motion against the Department of Education in 1954
the inherent problems associated with continued French language learning that put both

the Asian languages and English at a disadvantage:

Before Mr. Ward came here, Oriental languages were taught without any method
and we are in debt to him that Oriental languages are now to be taught more
methodically. The teaching of Hindi and the other oriental languages was
systematized and the teachers were given a better salary... Oriental languages should
be made a subject for examination... [English and French] cannot suffer by any
oriental languages becoming a subject for examination. Nobody should fear such a
thing. To the contrary more attention should be given to English in all secondary
schools. The teaching of French is exaggerated at the expense of English. A large
number of people fail in that subject... We should teach English more than we are
doing today because it is the language of the Commonwealth and because it is the
language which is becoming more and more universal. The medium of instruction
should be English. A pupil should be able to make use of a language which he is
taught later in his life... The English and French learnt in standard six is soon
forgotten. The majority of the people grow up without being able to speak one

Though English was the only official language, “la Francophonie” had come to represent the

national boundary of Mauritius to such an extent that mandatory instruction in French

and its widespread usage in the public sphere facilitated its use beyond that of English.35

Indo-Mauritian elites thus perceived Franco-Mauritians as economically, politically and

ethnically strengthened through the wedding of the French language with the prerogatives

of the colonial state.

Seeking to push beyond the institutionalization of the Asian languages and

breakdown the established hierarchy of languages, Ramgoolam reassessed this colonial

rivalry between French and the Asian languages as Prime Minister in 1979. The new MLP

35 Many articles in the Mauritius Times have advocated the promotion of English over French, and English is

frequently characterized as a noble underdog that must also be protected against French domination. There is

a widespread belief that the government’s promotion of the French language has directly contributed to the

lack of English proficiency in the country. This is partly because English is viewed as practically important for

admission to university and other opportunities for economic advancement abroad, but also in part related to

the more cooperative relationship between Indo-Mauritians and the British (as opposed to the French

settlers) throughout Mauritius’ colonial history.
government attempted to reposition the Asian languages to an equal status with French by proposing that these languages be included on the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exams, an extension of the previous policy in which these languages were offered only as optional elective courses. This proposal sought a reconfiguration of language policy that would remedy the historical inequities of the past, but also decrease the ethnic tensions among Mauritians of Asian descent that had been inflamed by the presence of a new predominately-Hindu electoral majority. Ramgoolam’s government then, for the first time, made the decision to include the choice of an optional Asian language on the CPE exam, in addition to English and French. With the additional creation of new cultural centers such as the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the establishment of Asian language instruction programs at the University of Mauritius just a few years prior, this new policy sought more than to increase the visibility and access to the study of these languages. It also attempted to increase the benefits of language learning beyond cultural identity and preservation by providing Indo-Mauritian students a comparative advantage in a highly competitive government school system. While the government did not make the Asian languages a requirement, making them available as an optional test subject encouraged students to choose an Asian language as a practical way to supplement their overall exam scores.

This provision received widespread opposition however, from Franco-Mauritians and Creoles in particular, who believed that the policy would create “unfair advantages” for those of Asian descent, and the government withdrew the proposal the following year. The Hindu elite, along with many Asian language teachers and sociocultural organizations, saw

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36 The CPE exams are major exams administered at the end of primary schooling in order for all students to matriculate to the secondary level.
this backlash as a devaluation of Eastern culture, and proof that the country had continued to exalt French culture. B. Ramallah, editor-in-chief of the Hindu-run Mauritius Times and then President of the Mauritius Sewa Samiti, calls the withdrawal of the CPE proposal “the great betrayal,” and writes that:

French continues to be imposed, even after independence. In this blessed land where English is the ONLY official language, and where two thirds of the population are not French-speaking, their children are still compelled to compete in a language which is neither their mother tongue nor the official language. The shelving of the CPE sanctions the discrimination against the children of the Indo-Mauritian ethnic whose mother-tongue is not French, and it perpetuates an injustice inherent in an educational system designed specifically to alienate the Indo-Mauritians. 37

In this passage, the author views language as more than just a form of communication. Language is also viewed as a vehicle for culture and heritage, and a direct means of connecting with one’s ancestral roots. Interestingly, the debates surrounding French entailed an ambiguity in terms of its cultural boundedness. Although French was the ancestral language of colonial settlers, by independence it had become generally constructed as a de-ethnicized language that was associated more strongly with the upper class than as a symbol of whiteness or its origins in France. This view of the language was further signified by the presence of a significant educated, upper-class aspiring Francophone community of Coloured Creoles. The Indo-Mauritian elite in support of the Asian languages (who I will refer to as “Orientalists”) found it increasingly important to re-ethnicize the French language by linking it to the Franco-Mauritians exclusively as a means of lowering its status. In turn, ethnicizing the French language would also reposition the

Franco-Mauritians as simply another “ethnic group” in parity with other groups and create cultural equality among the French and the Asian cultures.

Anand Mulloo, Secretary General of the Mauritius Association of Writers, argues that non-Indians in Mauritius should also study the Asian languages as a sign of “mutual respect,” since Indians were previously forced to study the European languages in the colonial period. Here, equality between the languages is the foremost goal. He states that:

The Oriental Languages are the real languages of the people of Asiatic origin, those who have suffered and sacrificed for independence. They give the Mauritian a sense of identity with themselves and their true selves. They give their users a certain strength and individuality. The voice retains its authenticity. These people, the struggling people, rooted in their past history, standing on the firm ground of their culture, are exposed to the ideas and influences from the whole world and retaining their stability, the original colour of their personality when they preserve and develop their ancestral languages. Otherwise they become ‘decultured,’ ‘alienated,’ by the imposition of foreign values through foreign languages. To deny the Oriental Languages the right to coexist with European languages in our country, is anti-democratic. It is a denial of Human Rights, of democratic rights, a negation of independence and its necessary corollary, cultural independence (Ammigan, 1981, p. 51).

Here, A. Mulloo justifies the need for the preservation of the Asian languages by their linkage to the strength and authenticity of Indo-Mauritians as a people. Without the use of Indo-Mauritian “ancestral” languages, the “Indian” ceases to exist or be recognized as a contributing force to the development of the Mauritian nation. In addition, the terminology used to refer to the Oriental or Asian languages as “ancestral” languages denotes a shift in which Indo-Mauritian elites began to fix the Asian languages to a
diasporic cultural connection in time and space.\textsuperscript{38} Interestingly, they are the only languages in Mauritius to have been designated as such.

After a massive lobbying campaign of Indo-Mauritian sociocultural organizations, led by the broad-based Mouvement for the Defense of Oriental Languages (an ad-hoc federation of twelve Indo-Mauritian sociocultural associations)\textsuperscript{39}, the MLP government considered a subsequent proposal that instead sought to undermine the colonial imposition of French by removing it as a category altogether from the CPE exams. This proposal made French an “optional” language akin to the Asian languages, rather than a mandatory one. English then would remain the sole mandatory language of instruction to be tested on the CPE. Nevertheless, this proposal was later renounced after strong opposition from the PMSD and other Franco-Mauritian leaders. It was rejected because of concerns over the practicality of its implementation—namely, the French language was still firmly entrenched in Mauritian society, used on the majority of road signs, buildings, businesses, newspapers, publications, and other public spaces, and considered essential in the national and international marketplace. Though some politicians and activists sought to do away with all state support of French language learning and usage, the use of French in the public sphere was widespread, and Franco-Mauritians continued to dominate the supply-side of the economy. This made knowledge of French an everyday requirement that rendered doing away with government support of the language impractical.

\textsuperscript{38} However, some Indo-Mauritians, such as V. Mulloo (1982), have argued that the phrase “ancestral languages” also derogatorily portray these languages as “dead,” archaic languages, which denies the struggle of the “immigrant forefathers” of these languages to ensure that they remain dynamically living languages today.

\textsuperscript{39} Participating organizations included the Arya Sabha, Hindu Maha Sabha, Urdu & Arabic Institute, Ramakrishna Mission, Marathi Federation, Brahmin Maha Sabha, Tamil Federation, Andra Maha Sabha, and the Sava Shivir, among others.
Because one of the strongest tensions that existed during and after independence entailed the animosity between French colonial culture and that of the “masses,” the failure of this succeeding plan was important. It not only justified feelings among Indo-Mauritian political actors of subordination to those of French descent, but this failure spurred the creation of a new configuration of governance and policy that would privilege the recognition of culture and shape the barometer of national belonging in future ethnic politics. Hindu elites would continue to rectify the subordination of their languages in the executive branch, circumventing, rather than confronting, French support through increased governmental support of the Asian languages with the creation of cultural parastatal bodies.

The Birth of Multiculturalism and the Proliferation of Cultural Parastatal Bodies

The ubiquitous struggle over language education policy that began within years of independence led to two central discourses that dominated among Hindu political leaders. The first was a focus on the construction of multiculturalism as a medium for national belonging. As the first democratically-elected leaders of Mauritius, many Hindu political leaders believed Hindus held a legitimate claim to the Mauritian nation as the new electoral majority, but recalling the shifting coalitions among Creoles and Muslims as critical minority groups prior to independence, they were also aware of the capricious nature in which their status stood.⁴⁰ Although the country formed as a democracy modeled

⁴⁰ At different political moments, Muslims have banded with Creoles against the Hindus, making Muslims a traditionally unstable ally for Hindus (Lau Thi Keng, 1991). This was especially true just prior to independence, when Muslims allied with Creoles and Franco-Mauritians against independence before they were able to form bargain with Hindus for concessions such as the “Best Losers” system (Simmons, 1982). However, deadly race riots between Creoles and Muslims also took place later in 1968.
after the principles of liberal neutrality and equality, political leaders at the time eschewed
the idea of a melting pot or a singular nationhood and instead embraced the idea of a
cultural mosaic. This would allow for the continuation of Hindu nationalism while
maintaining peace between Hindus, Muslims, Tamils and other Asian-descended groups
under a more general “Indo-Mauritian” consciousness. The colonial cleavage between
French and British subjects as natives versus immigrants led many Hindu leaders to use the
languages of Mauritius to both define the boundaries of their ethnic group and expand
those boundaries into a multicultural Indo-Mauritian or Asian identity that would solidify
an immigrant coalition. The construction of an Indo-Mauritian identity was also important
for its ability to legitimize the Indo-Mauritian population as a political force and a political
unit, as well as to supply an identity that would politically mobilize an increasingly larger
slice of the population. Mauritius’ new “state-nation” was therefore conceptualized as one
based in diasporic allegiance that could enable the continuation of cultures non-native to
the island.

Multiculturalism as a policy framework was instituted by Indo-Mauritian leaders to
create a conceptualization of the Mauritian nation as a kaleidoscope of foreign cultures
that professed a renewed start from the vestiges of the country’s past based on colonization,
white supremacy, and racism. This multicultural framework was promoted as the
barometer of national belonging through the creation of cultural parastatal bodies that
fused the ethno-linguistic project with the prerogatives of the state. Policies of
multiculturalism were sought to not only secure the position of Hindus as a
demographically dominant group acquiring legitimate power, but also as a subaltern group
in need of protection. Particularly because French and English remained the formal languages of Mauritius (and because Franco-Mauritians as the descendants of white settlers still held considerable economic power in the country), the adoption of multiculturalism was understood as a way for previously subjugated ethnic groups to carve a space in the new Mauritian nation without losing their group identities to a liberal neutrality they saw as tantamount to Western assimilation. In addition, the promotion of Asiatic cultures sought to ensure the recognition of each ethnic group in order to equalize the cultural advantages of Franco-Mauritian citizens and British expats with Asian cultural groups and minimize conflict.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ramgoolam and the Mauritian Labour Party (MLP), the creation of cultural parastatal bodies was an extension of the Hindu nationalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s that sought to revive and preserve Indo-Mauritian ethnic and linguistic identity. As a group that had dealt with a fractured and suspended sense of belonging in the colonial period as perpetual “immigrants,” this project was seen as necessary during the transition period leading up to independence in which Indo-Mauritians were denizens of the state but actively fighting for the extension of political and civil rights beyond universal suffrage. Once political power was secured, standardization of the languages was viewed as integral to a cultural revival that could stand the test of time. The process of standardization had highly politicized meanings, which Eisenlohr (2001) labels as an “elaborate ideological and institutional process” (p. 14). For MLP leaders and their supporters, this ideological process was linked to the rise of Hindu
nationalism in India and abroad and part of a wider process of cultural pre-eminence in the global Indian diaspora (ibid).

The *baitkas* that facilitated the project of Asian language preservation in colonial times remained vital resources for the MLP government. Beginning in the early 1900s, Indo-Mauritians were dependent on these organizations abroad for funding and community-building, a relationship that has continued until today. Many of these organizations began after a visit from Mohandas Gandhi to Mauritius in 1901, and then with Indian political leader Manilal Doctor who founded the Arya Samaj and created *The Hindustani* newspaper in 1909—both events marked the political mobilization of Indo-Mauritians in order to instill a political consciousness with nationalist movements taking place in India at the turn of the century (Mannick, 1989). That transnational civil society plays a large role in the development of the Indian diaspora abroad is important. The tight kinship networks established during the pre-independence period had continued, consisting of horizontally narrow but vertically extensive social networks in which Hindus became the most populous benefactors of cultural policies in civil society and dominate all levels of the state apparatus (Eisenlohr, 2001).41 These *baitkas*—now prominent religious temples and community organizations—were given increased funding by the state, and worked in conjunction with parastatal bodies to carry out language teaching and cultural preservation.

Unique to a few ethnically plural countries in Africa, parastatal bodies exist as entities that directly link civil society with the state in the implementation of government

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41 Transnational networks are also present in other policy areas, such as in Mauritius’ selective immigration laws that give preference to Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants or migrant laborers over others, such as non-Indian applicants from mainland Africa.
policy. While this is similar to the way religious organizations, charities and other non-profits receive governmental funding in many Western countries, Western non-profits remain independent from the government in their objectives and scope, relying on governmental approval of their projects. Parastatal bodies, on the other hand, are different in that they are designed to operate under government directives, although they are allowed some latitude over the means by which these objectives are met. In addition, governmental ministers politically appoint the heads of parastatal bodies, while lower level staff are employees of the civil service.

Cultural parastatals are fully funded by the government, and they typically collaborate with organizations, associations and enterprises in civil society and the private sector that jointly design and finance cultural projects and events. Members of these allied organizations and enterprises are commonly part of each parastatal’s Board of Directors. Cultural centers in particular engage in research and put on promotional events that showcase the cultural artifacts, performances, and histories of specific communities. Along with the cultural events they host for the public, these institutions serve as community spaces for local sociocultural associations, providing meeting spaces and working closely with these associations in conducting research and development related to their specific interests. They also aid in the development and maintenance of civil society organizations by funding proposed projects and events during national holidays and cultural celebrations.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture (MAC)—previously the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture—was one of the first government institutions to be created after
independence as part of the executive cabinet, illustrating the importance of culture for government officials at the time. MAC was created for the purpose of protecting Asian cultures that were suppressed during colonialism and now facing the threat of rapid modernization and globalization in the 1970s. Designed to promote and bolster the country’s arts and culture sectors, MAC has since had a profound influence on civil society. The Ministry’s mission articulates a strong cultural policy framework in which multiculturalism and inter-cultural contact is its basis, as well as continuing its social democratic objective of state-society synergy by bolstering civil society through the promotion and preservation of what the government calls “the diversity of ancestral cultural heritage.” In the government’s official parlance, MAC’s objectives are:

To promote cultural interaction among different cultural components within the country and abroad for mutual understanding and enrichment; To upgrade, strengthen and extend the existing cultural infrastructure and to construct new structures; To provide support to associations of artists and to individuals involved in artistic and cultural activities; To organise cultural activities for the public at large...  

The goal has been to ensure a balanced representation of all ethnic (or culturally-defined) groups in Mauritius, rather than to promote a singular Mauritian culture. Through MAC, various institutions have been created that establish a profound connection between the sociocultural aspects of civil society and the state. The Mauritian government credits cultural parastatal bodies for maintaining peaceful relations between groups that, in another context, would not have been able to practice civic liberalism and forge a unified political community under a nascent nation-state.

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In realizing these goals, MAC works closely with a consortium of ancillary parastatal bodies in planning cultural events, festivals, and holiday celebrations, creating school curriculums, and in the teaching of language and culture. These parastatal bodies include research institutes, cultural centers, speaking unions and trust funds that each work to preserve the culture of various ethnic groups. The renowned Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) was the first of these parastatal bodies created in 1974 under the aegis of the Mauritian Ministry of Arts and Culture (MAC). MGI is a research and education based cultural center whose mission is to promote and educate the Mauritian population on Indian culture, heritage, and traditions in the arts, music, and literature. The Institute is primarily a cultural research institution but now functions under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources (MEHR), working closely with the Ministry of Education and the University of Mauritius in the development of secondary and tertiary education curriculums in the instruction of Asian languages (at the time including Hindi, Arabic, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, and Mandarin). MGI itself offers courses and certifications in Indian Studies, fine arts, and the Asian ancestral languages and directs seven secondary schools and five colleges (including the School of Indian Studies, Indological Studies (specializing in Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, Hindu theology), School of Mauritian and Area Studies, School of Fine Arts, and School of Performing Arts). MGI was followed by the creation of a plethora of parastatal bodies focused on the establishment, instruction, and institutionalization of Asian language and culture, including the Rabindranath Tagore Institute, Islamic Cultural Centre, Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture, the Institute of Asian Studies, and the Hindi Speaking Union.
Following a corporatist model of development, these parastatal bodies (especially those geared towards socioeconomic development) helped increase the government’s efficiency throughout the post-independence period and were important vehicles of the country’s economic growth. As follows, they are a hallmark feature of the Mauritian state’s “embeddedness” that has spurred both economic development and the development of a robust civic political culture. Carroll & Carroll (2000) explain Mauritius’ democratic stability by its creation of a “civic network” after independence spanning civil society and the state, which helped to consolidate democracy in a country in which its colonial history should have dictated otherwise. Parastatal bodies have helped to facilitate and expand this civic network with the merging of civil society and the state.

Nonetheless, while parastatal bodies increased government transparency as a means of strengthening civil society’s “check” on the state, they have also served as a streamlined mode of institutionalizing ethnic boundaries through the perpetuation of symbolic categories that maintain ethnic identities by empowering cultural “bonding” (rather than “bridging”) civil society organizations. Mauritius’ “civic network” has also helped to amalgamate deep ethnic connections between society and state that has enabled clientelism and ethnic networks that have been very difficult for out-groups (mainly non-Hindus) to enter.\(^{43}\) This has become problematic within a national political culture that is defined by a multicultural framework that facilitates bonding associational life within groups, rather than the promotion of a unifying national identity emphasizing bridging associational life between groups. In effect, both multiculturalism and national identity—each of which are not necessarily mutually exclusive—have developed at odds through cultural parastatal

\(^{43}\) This explains terms such as “Little India,” which is used to describe Mauritius in popular parlance.
bodies that have privileged the preservation of Asian languages as extensions of an Asian diaspora.

One of the largest and most powerful civil society associations in Mauritius, the Mauritius Sanatan Dharma Temples Federation (MSDTF) is a representative federation of Hindu sociocultural organizations and temples that have connections across civil society, political society and the state. MSDTF provides a wide variety of services, including counseling services, courses in music, yoga and religion, and youth leadership seminars. According to MSDTF’s website, the goals of the organization are “to promote the religious, social and cultural advancement of the Hindi Speaking Sanatanists; to help and encourage the building of places of worship and to undertake the management and assist in the maintenance of such places; [and] to distribute grants received from the central Government to its affiliates on a monthly basis.”

MSDTF works in conjunction with parastatal organizations such as the Mauritius Council of Social Services (MACOSS) and the Hindi Speaking Union. In addition, MSDTF have worked with the Arya Sabha, Arya Ravivad Pracharini Sahba, and the Hindu Maha Sabha in the running of evening courses in Sanskrit.

Organizations and parastatals exclusively concerned with social welfare and economic development have also had strong connections with the Hindu community, leading to ethnic differences in socioeconomic as well as political empowerment in society. For instance, the leadership of MACOSS includes executive members of prominent Hindu organizations, including Somduth Dulthumun of MSDTF, Daneshar Babooa of the Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha, and Devpal Cowreea of the Arya Sabha. Created in 1970,

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MACOSS has since evolved to serve as an umbrella organization of non-profit
organizations (including an array of Catholic charities and non-ethnic associations, in
addition to Hindu organizations) in the goal of socioeconomic development that includes
support for social and cultural activities in meeting this goal.\(^45\)

Cultural parastatal bodies also work directly with various transnational
organizations that establish connections with Hindu organizations in India. According to
Eisenlohr (2006), organizations such as the Arya Samaj, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sagh
(RSS), and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) are part of a transnational network joining
their memberships across India, Mauritius, and other parts of the Indian diaspora, such as
the United States, Trinidad, and Great Britain. More fundamentalist organizations such as
the Voice of Hindu (VOH), RSS, and VHP have also established a Hindutva nationalist
presence in Mauritius that promotes and supports the fundamentalist cause in India
through local organizations such as the Hindu House and the Hindu Council, two civil
society organizations that have extensive political influence in Mauritius (ibid). They also
organize and host events that publicly espouse the Hindutva nationalist agenda of Hindu
purity through religious celebration while also creating a forum in which local Mauritian
politicians and visiting Indian leaders can come together (ibid).

Eisenlohr (2006) further explains that the objectives of these networks indicate an
obsession with “cultural defense” that seeks to demarcate an ethnic group boundary rather
than make exclusive claims to the nation:

Certainly such Hindu activists do not aim to turn multi-ethnic Mauritius into a
Hindu nation, a goal their counterparts hope to accomplish in India... Instead, the
principal goal of Mauritian actors and organizations connected to the transnational

Hindu nationalist network is the maintenance and strengthening of a separate Hindu community and group identity—cementing its political dominance in Mauritius and supporting its leaders in their efforts to promote a sense of Mauritianness favorable to Hindu interests. In this, they stress that the cultivation of strong transnational ties in the context of religious identity politics is not at all opposed to the discourse of the nation. On the contrary, in a politics of ‘Little India,’ such ties support Hindus in gaining and maintaining a central place in the nation... A sense of Mauritian identity in which Hindu traditions play a central role legitimizes the dominant position of Hindus of north Indian background in the state apparatus (p. 44).

It is important to note that cultural parastatals were not only created with the goal of preserving culture, but are also responsible for establishing cultural identity where such identities had begun to wane. It is for this reason that language instruction moved beyond the school curriculum and into the objectives of Hindu sociocultural associations more broadly. Cultural parastatals and sociocultural associations were then tasked by the Orientalists to teach Asian languages and religious texts to adults whose first language had been predominately Kreol in order to develop a stronger Indian identity.46

Prime Minister Ramgoolam’s inaugural address of the 2nd World Hindi Convention in 1976, hosted at MGI, illustrates the strong connections invoked between India and the Indo-Mauritian population during this period, and how state promotion of the Asian languages were central to these linkages:

Many of us have already met each other at the first World Hindi Convention held at Nagpur. That convention gave us a fair view of the vast Hindi family. We realised that the language we speak is in fact the third largest spoken language of the world. The sense of pride created has given us a powerful inspiration. The story of the development of Hindi in Mauritius is indeed a living document of the evolution of our society. Our ancestors came in difficult circumstances. They had no weapon with which to fight for their rights... They toiled in the fields like beasts of burden. They let their bodies languish but kept their heads high. They preserved their

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46 At the start of the creation of cultural parastatals, most centers were focused on the teaching and preservation of Hindi and Sanskrit, and only marginally concerned with the other Asian ancestral languages, which were incrementally integrated into the ethno-linguistic project over time.
religion and culture with all their might. They would save their souls because they had a language to give them solace and strength. They spoke Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi. These languages are the repositories of a rich heritage of wisdom and literature. Through their languages our great forefathers retained an unbroken link with their culture and religion... We decided to work for the advancement of these languages soon after independence because it was our faith that one can understand one's culture and religion best in one's own language... It is our belief that if all the languages of Mauritius are preserved it will help preserve the essential cultural values of our different communities. Through the synthesis of these various cultures alone will be created a united culture of Mauritius in which all can cooperate... [Hindi] has always given the message of freedom and has opposed cultural slavery. Hindi made a valuable contribution to the independence of both India and Mauritius (Hazareesingh, 1979, p. 75).

In the promotion of state multilingualism as a social right, language was also linked to behavior and social experience. Thus language has been a powerful medium by which Orientalists were able to construct boundaries that fortify the endurance of ethnic boundaries.

In its 2013 policy document entitled “Creative Mauritius Vision 2025,” MAC defines culture as the “set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (p. 26). It also emphasizes a dynamic and reproductive essence of culture, further articulating a living definition of culture as “making sense together.” In this vision, culture is not something to be passively consumed, but to be actively created and reproduced across generations. A notable awareness of the issue of globalization and market forces working against the continuation of Asian languages is also articulated in this policy document. As such, the task of cultural para-statals is to counteract what are seen as natural forces (the spread and

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increased use of Kreol in Mauritian society, and English in business, education and the
global marketplace) to prevent the death of the Asian languages as a conduit for Indo-
Mauritian ethnic identity.

Overall, while parastatal bodies have facilitated remarkable state-society synergy in
Mauritius, they have also facilitated a degree of clientelism that has been corrosive to
national inclusion for groups unsubscribed to an Indo-Mauritian ethnic identity. These
ethnically-exclusive connections between the leadership of Hindu sociocultural
organizations, elected officials, and state ministerial and parastatal bodies is the fuel of
much unrest against the government and an encroaching fear of “Hindu domination”
among the leadership of other groups. Cultural parastats have also come under scrutiny
because they have helped to solidify the concrete aspects of cultural categories that
perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities between ethnic groups. Once a cultural center, trust
fund, or speaking union is recognized, groups in society (through representative
sociocultural associations) are supplied with resources that endogenously help to maintain
their boundaries by directing the benefits exclusively to members of a particular culture. In
addition to this indirect funding through parastatal projects and initiatives, sociocultural
associations that are religious in nature are also funded directly by the government—a
policy that has been in place since 1958 (Mannick, 1989). This means that those ethnic
markers that are religiously defined (as an aspect of ethnicity and culture) receive benefits
from the state that also strengthen their capacities for community-building within their
boundaries. Hindu and Muslim temples receive funding on this basis, as well as the
Catholic Church, which has received funding from the government since the colonial period.

The Emergence of Kreol

Another arousal of the language issue began in the late 1970s, as considerations of the value and role of the Kreol language began to emerge in public discourse. In contrast to the Asian languages, Kreol was not included as one of the ancestral languages, nor was it considered in language policy planning. Kreol’s exclusion was in part a product of the common conceptualization of the language as simply a vernacular, pigeon or dialect that had long been relegated to informal, household usage. However, these assumptions began to change in 1967, when Dev Virahsawmy (a new member of Parliament and one of the co-founders of the MMM) published a series of articles in *Le Mauricien* arguing that Kreol was not only a language of strong cultural value, but also a trans-ethnic language native to a single, national Mauritian culture.

Virahsawmy argued that Kreol was the one specifically Mauritian cultural attribute in which people across all ethnic groups shared, and was thus symbolic of a unifying national culture. As such, he promoted Kreol as the language of “unity in diversity.” He further argued for the name of the language to be changed to “Morisié” rather than “Creole” so as to distinguish it from its ethnic association with Creoles. Led by Virahsawmy, Bérenger, and other former militant leaders in opposition to the MLP’s rise to power during independence, the MMM party began a national campaign for the promotion of Kreol as the official language of Mauritius.

48 Later Nationalist advocates further opted to change the spelling of “Creole” to “Kreol” to distinguish it from the ethnic group.
The Kreol language was conceptualized as a hybrid language incorporating various cultural elements, but at the same time it was viewed by some as distinctly linked to blackness. This dual characterization labeled the language as a backwards “pigeon” limited in its applicability outside of informal spaces, especially in higher-level fields of education, philosophy and the sciences. This dual status, however, has led to considerable debate on Kreol’s roots in the modern era after its emergence in politics in the 1960s and 1970s, as some advocates of the language argued that it is was representative of island hybridity and thus a source to unify ethnic groups in Mauritius under a newly independent state, while others argued for its promotion as a long-lost cultural connection to Africa.

On both fronts, the struggle for the recognition of Kreol began with the struggle for its valuation. For this reason, Kreol and Orientalist advocates had different goals for the inclusion of their respective languages. Orientalists sought first and foremost to secure national belonging for the Asian languages. This was intended to equalize the languages with colonial languages, but also to raise their status as the languages and cultures of the “majority community.” Since the Kreol language was already viewed as having a national status, Kreol advocates have instead sought to de-problematize this national status by increasing its cultural value. Kreol’s comparatively weaker level of advocacy and influence in language policy during the post-independence period can be explained by the fracturing of this goal by indecision about what exactly should comprise articulations of the language’s value. That is, post-independence Kreol advocates were a large and diverse group with two competing notions of what the language symbolized. For some, its value lay in it being born of Mauritian soil, a distinct representation of the cultural hybridity of the
Mauritian past and future, and the nation’s prima facie native language. But for others, Kreol’s value lay in its representation as an artifact of the African ancestors of Creoles. In both groups, Kreol language advocates included leaders of civil society organizations, politicians, activists and academics (mainly linguists), each seeking to facilitate changes to the ways in which Kreol was conceptualized in the public imaginary. This division in the understandings of Kreol’s beginnings has led to a split in advocacy around the language that has both hindered and uniquely facilitated Kreol’s later officialization in the nearly 50 years later.

First, the earliest advocates for the Kreol language were the Nationalists of the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), a leftist political party created in the late 1960s and comprised mainly of radical youths spanning different ethnic communities under an umbrella of class consciousness. Beginning in the 1970s, Nationalists argued for Kreol’s inclusion on the basis of its ability to promote a unifying national identity in one sense and a class-based means to creating socioeconomic equality in another. This group included a multi-ethnic coalition of mainly linguists and activist members of the MMM, but also included major class-based, left wing organizations such as Lalit and Ledikasyon Pu Travayer (LPT). Many of the researchers and linguists who have studied the historical development of the language have also been advocates of the Kreol language in public policy and supported the Nationalist cause of Mauricianisme, including most prominently Dev Virahsawmy, Philip Baker, and Vinesh Hookoomsing, in the earliest years. Nationalist attempts to affect language policy constituted the officialization of Kreol as a single
national language that could absolve the ethnic identities and boundaries that many Nationalists believed plagued independence-era politics.

Dev Virahsawmy (a young member of Parliament and one of the co-founders of the MMM, alongside Paul Bérenger) is commonly cited as the main pioneer for Kreol from this perspective, and through a series of articles in 1967 opened the public discussion on Kreol as a national language. Writing in two major mainstream newspapers—*L’Express* and *Le Mauricien*—Virahsawmy articulated a vision of Kreol as a medium for national unity and one of the only true markers of national identity that all Mauritians shared. He also argued that Kreol was not a patois or broken version of French, but a language with a distinct system of grammar that had yet to be standardized through a written orthography, and wrote the first proposal to do so in his “Grafi Sirkonflex” (Hookoomsing, 2004).

According to Virahsawmy, there existed a single Mauritian culture that represented a cultural hybridity of shared postcolonial, island experiences, and that this trans-ethnic connection superceded the ethnic and racial divisions of Mauritius’ ancestors. Kreol was just one element of this national culture that was the amalgamation of a variety of cultural influences from Africa, Asia and Europe, but also from native-grown experiences on the island itself.

Though there has consistently been widespread awareness of the problems arising from “communal” politics from all sections of the Mauritian public, the general consensus still showed a preference towards the preservation of ethnic boundaries, if not for the sake of cultural diversity in its own right, then because Mauritius’ polity had already been set into a semi-patrimonial system of ethnic-based patronage. As a quasi-consociational
democracy, there was a general understanding that the fate of a particular ethnic group was based on its representation in political society, its influence in civil society, and the relationship between both in distributing political goods from the state. Thus Nationalist advocacy for the Kreol language in the 1970s was viewed as a threat to those, such as advocates of the Asian languages, who viewed ethnic identity and, more importantly, the state recognition of ethnic identities, as a sociopolitical necessity to group survival.

Although they faced considerable backlash, particularly during the MMM’s brief ruling period in 1982 and 1983, Nationalist advocates were able to pave the way for Kreol’s standardization in a variety of ways within civil society, rather than through the policy realm. After his brief leadership in parliament as a founding member of the MMM, Virahsawmy went on to publish a series of plays, poems and other literature and public media in Kreol, in collaboration with LPT, being among one of the first Mauritians to do so. Virahsawmy would also spark the earliest attempts at promoting the language by making the first translations of Shakespearean plays into Kreol (Mooneram, 2009).

Emboldened by the MMM’s promotion of the language, a variety of political actors also contributed to the informal standardization of the language, including Philip Baker’s (1972) development of the first orthographical sketch of Kreol as a language (rather than a “pigeon”) and René Noyau’s (1971) first literary publication in Kreol entitled Tention Caïman, which was a collection of short stories expressed in the Creole narrative tradition (Hookoomsing, 2004). LPT, created in 1977, popularized the language as a literary medium by translating plays, poems, novels and other literary works into Kreol, as well as showcasing texts in the language by local Mauritian authors (ibid). Throughout the 1980s
and early 1990s, a multitude of artworks, songs and other expressions showcased by literary and creative associations in civil society also increasingly featured the use of Kreol in place of the commonly used French language, as well as themes and narratives that were expressly “Mauritian” (rather than ethnic-based). These literary and artistic works—many of which were not recognized by mainstream publishers or the government press at the time—incrementally developed a standard, albeit informal, orthography for which the language could later be standardized through official means. These actions also facilitated widespread changes in the public media, where increasingly, advertisements and translations in newspapers and television programs began to be shown in Kreol (Bissoonauth, 1998).

Additionally, Lalit is another organization that has been pushing for the incorporation of Kreol in public schools as a medium of instruction as a means to improve the education levels and chances for advancement for Mauritian school children whose first language is overwhelmingly Kreol. From a Marxist perspective, Lalit argues that Kreol’s suppression in the school system was a direct assault from the dominant classes (working first with the colonial state) who sought to keep the lower classes dependent on unskilled, agricultural labor or service work, and thus actively facilitated the high school failure rate.49 They have advocated for Kreol’s inclusion in schools since the 1980s in the belief that teaching in the mother tongue would raise the statuses of children both intellectually and psychologically in the lower classes. However, Nationalists were against the “communalist” framing of the Kreol (and Asian) languages and conceptualized Kreol language learning and speaking as a human right for all Mauritian children. Nationalist activists also sought

to rename the language “Morisyen” instead of “Creole” or “Kreol” to disassociate the language from the Creole ethnic group.

In contrast, advocacy within the Creole community for the Kreol language took a much slower pace, and Creoles as a collective were less involved in Kreol language advocacy in the 1960s and 70s. Many of the Nationalist advocates for the inclusion of Kreol were also Creoles themselves (most notably René Noyau). But most of those involved in early Kreol language advocacy were of Indo-Mauritian descent, although of various ethnic backgrounds. This was caused in part by the fragmentation of identity and interests present among Creole political actors, and in part by the negative associations of Kreol with both hybridity and blackness that facilitated more internalized feelings of shame towards the language within the general community. Creoles generally continued to view themselves first and foremost as Christians, while those identifying as Coloureds saw their interests chiefly as part of the Francophone “general population.” As the Church was the sole aspect of organizational capacity within civil society for the Creole community, the domination of French in this associational space delayed any sociopolitical awareness towards Kreol language and culture among Creole leaders.

To be clear, the community did not reject advocacy for the language either. Those Creoles working within the Nationalist camp tended to advocate for the language on a class basis rather than an identity basis, viewing its advocacy as a pragmatic approach to socioeconomic advancement for poor Creoles. Those involved mainly participated in interest-based organizations that sought to address socioeconomic issues within the community through the advocacy of broad-scale social policies that cut across party lines.
Working class Creoles especially continued to be largely involved in labor union organizing (a tradition dating back from the 1930s rise of Guy Rozemont and Emmanuel Anquetil as Creole political leaders), and many also worked with national and international NGOs and other interest-based organizations within and outside of the Catholic Church. Leaders that had begun to embrace the language were, therefore, doing so from the Nationalist view, embracing the language as a practical means of elevating the lower class masses trans-ethnically.

It was not until the 1980s that leaders within the Creole community would begin to advocate the Kreol language as a major policy issue on grounds distinct from those within the Nationalist camp, and this change corresponded with changes to Creole group identity that began to take root during this decade. Creole ethnic advocates then began to more heavily promote the language, and they did so by defining Kreol as a cultural artifact linked to its origins in narratives of slavery and Africanity. From this departure, the Kreol language becomes a key feature of the Afro-Creole movement because it is one of the few cultural artifacts from which to ground the community within an ancestral time and space and define the boundaries of the community mono-culturally. In this way, the value of the language shifted from being based on its trans-ethnic nature to being based in its African roots, and in turn, Kreol’s predominance in society lent greater cultural legitimation to the Creole ethnic identity. However, the competition to lay claim to the language split advocacy for the language and gave it a doubly negative association for the general public that neither wanted to identify as African nor as culturally hybrid to embrace the language. The following sections delineate the mechanisms and the consequences of this process.
Still, there was a distinct divergence between the overall goals of Nationalists and Creole ethnic activists, and the reasons behind the split had less to do with Creole connections to the ethnic myths and legends of an ancestral past (which until this period lay dormant within the community) and more to do with their increasingly distinctive socioeconomic and political experience in Mauritius. Firstly, there was a marked class difference between many of the Nationalists, who were educated, predominately middle to upper class Indo-Mauritians and gens de couleur (and some Franco-Mauritians), and the average “ti-Kreol” that now comprised a majority of the Creole community. In this way, class and race had converged as those Creoles making up the lower rungs of society began to view their socioeconomic marginalization as a status inextricably connected to their race and ethnic status. This class difference made the experiences of Creoles different from those advocating for the Kreol language purely on the basis of class consciousness, and further motivated a more protectionist view of the language among Creole ethnic activists.

The emergence of Kreol in language policy discourse was an additional source of political tension in the negotiation of language policy. This proved especially contentious after the 1982 general elections, which ushered in the MMM as the new party in power with a more nationalist political agenda. Notably a Marxist-oriented political party that focused more on the predicament of class inequality than ethnic or racial divisions, the main goal of the new MMM government was national unification and the empowerment of the predominately Indo-Mauritian and Creole working classes.

As a first order of business, newly-elected Minister of Education and MMM member Ramduth Jaddoo organized a national conference at the University of Mauritius.
entitled “National Seminar on the Language Issue in Mauritius,” in which a range of proposals on the status of the various languages were submitted and discussed. The conference included the participation of academics, linguists, government ministers, parliamentary members, activists and leaders of sociocultural organizations. Under this platform, the languages were evaluated from a nationalist perspective for the first time, and thus the role of Kreol became central to the discussion. The proceedings were deliberative and encompassed four areas of focus: 1) language and national consciousness, 2) language in education, 3) the role, function and contribution of specific languages in Mauritius, and 4) suggestions for a coherent language policy.\textsuperscript{50}

Three main themes emerged from the conference highlighting the ethnic and national roles of the different languages. First was the evaluation of the languages within a spectrum of their local versus transnational location. In one respect, they were conceptualized as either ethnic or international languages based on their relevance to the international job market, a major concern for an island nation whose economy was dependent on foreign markets. English (and to a lesser extent, French) was perceived as an international, practical language that had become de-ethnicized in the global order, and whose knowledge was required for international membership. Kreol and the Asian languages were instead perceived as local, ethnic languages representing identity and culture with little practical international value.

In another respect, the local, ethnic languages were conceptualized as either native or diasporic languages. As such, Kreol was highlighted as a native language, while the Asian

languages were thought to represent diasporic groups of ancestral civilizations. Both the preservation of ethnic identities and the facilitation of a unified, national consciousness was articulated as equally important, and many believed that this was a careful balance that could only be realized through government interference. However, Kreol was characterized by many participants as a “neutral” language that made it purely a practical language. As an example, Bissoonauth (1982) explains that “the function which [Creole] performs most efficiently is that it is the only instrument for Mauritians to communicate with each other... it is becoming an effective instrument for information, exposes, debates and forums of national importance” (p. 270). In addition, Stephen (1982) describes Kreol as having a unifying, practical value across ethnic groups in everyday life:

The Kreol language is the almost universal means of communication in Mauritius... In buses, queues, at almost all work-sites... in schools at break-time and between friends, in statements to the police, in witnesses words, in plays and the theatre, at political meetings, and forums organized by young people, in religious services, in sports audiences, in women’s organisations, at FET KILTIREL, Kreol is spoken (p. 569).

Others characterize Kreol solely by its use as a verbal and written medium for literature, media, education and administration, rather than as a language with cultural elements. In contrast, V. Mulloo (1982) speaks of the Asian languages in terms of diasporic and ancestral cultural pride:

Many Mauritians of Asiatic descent take pride in the historical fact that their languages, cultures, civilizations which add a touch of variety and colour to Mauritian culture, go back to 5000 years of history. These constitute a rich deposit of cultural wealth which cannot be computed in crude economic terms. Every day, we sing, pray, perform countless acts, rites, rituals and ceremonies which our remote ancestors in Harappan and in Vedic India used to perform. Our wedding, our funeral, our birth, our morning and evening prayers, the Gaytri Mantra, the Vedic and Upanishadic prayers in our bhajans, kirtans and ceremonies are the echoes of our pre-Vedic and Vedic past. How can we throw away all these long
traditions on the mere pretext of unifying and standardising our culture through one single medium? Our history and civilization are too firmly rooted into the past to be thrown into the dustbin of ideology (p. 317).

Secondly, a strong anticolonial discourse surfaced that contrasted the ethnic languages (Kreol and the Asian languages) with the international languages (English and French) as the languages of the oppressed masses and the colonizers, respectively. Many participants emphasized the importance of raising the status of the ethnic languages to rebalance a history of colonialism marked by the systematic suppression, devaluation and elimination of non-Western cultures. For example, Nowbuth (1982) describes Creole and Bhojpuri in a way that emphasizes their historical denigration in society, but also valorizes them because of this denigration. About Creole and Bhojpuri, he states that:

They are like prophets in their own lands who do not always receive the respect due to them... Creole and Bhojpuri are the languages of the slaves, the coolies, the down-trodden and they have been subject to linguistic imperialism. Given these circumstances there is no reason why they should not be codified and standardized and given a national status. It is in the name of social justice that they should be given their rightful status, and this can be achieved by respecting them (Nowbuth, 1982, p. 35).

The restoration of dignity was thus a central justification for the promotion of Kreol and the Asian languages over English and French. This anticolonial discourse constructed narratives of “slaves and masters” in discussing the languages, as well as narratives of “slaves and coolies” as a collective versus the illegitimate occupiers and outsiders (Franco-Mauritians) who had previously imposed the Western languages. In these narratives, the subjugated masses could only rise up against the colonizers through a cultural revival and a revitalization of the ethnic languages. In fact, many posited that the forced suppression and domination of these languages was the main reason they had
become impractical in contemporary times—specifically the prevention of use of the Asian languages and the absence of linguistic standardization in the case of Kreol. The previous re-positioning of French and the Franco-Mauritian community as part of the local, ethnic landscape (a goal of the Orientalists) had no place in this dialogue. As a native language that has been the most formally suppressed, but with a strong societal foothold that facilitated its predomination over English and French, Kreol’s positioning in this discourse was ambiguous.

The third theme of the conference was that of universalism and national consciousness as a goal of the state. Because nationalistic projects were facilitated through symbols such as a national language and the construction of a shared history, Kreol was viewed as the only commonly shared language native to the country and its sociopolitical landscape that could be enlisted by the government. Many also viewed Kreol’s institutionalization as a pragmatic approach to solving the problem of high school failure rates in the public education system and liberalizing access to government information and services among the lower classes. Shortly after independence and during a time when nation-building was critical to democratic consolidation, this discourse became increasingly important. Its popularity also stemmed from the increasing pressures of globalization at the time, which exacerbated class inequalities and ethnic group tensions in Mauritius.

However, others insisted that Kreol was a profound threat to the Asian languages, and therefore argued against its promotion as a national medium. V. Mulloo (1982) writes:

Our ancestors were armed with that deep spiritual strength descending through the ages to face the aggression against their personality, their dignity, their languages and cultures... They instinctively knew that it was absurd to discard the accumulated wealth of past cultures under the false ideology of a Creole hysteria.
While we accept Creole as a useful national language, like any other Oriental language, we are not prepared to sacrifice any of the Oriental languages for its sake... We are perfectly aware of the danger that a blind, hasty and uncritical acceptance of the Creole ideology can cause the death of cultures... It is therefore with much misgiving, fear and regret that we see the Creole monster rising out of all proportions, in an unplanned way, ready to pounce upon and devour the less protected, oriental languages and cultures (p. 318-319).

Because of its widespread use in society, Kreol was promoted as a language of national unity that, with government support, could eradicate the ethnic tensions that characterized Mauritian politics and society. But many Kreol advocates took notice not to view its promotion as mutually exclusive to the promotion of Asian languages. This made both the standardization and promotion of Kreol and the continued teaching of the Asian “ancestral” languages an imperative.

Across these themes, participants attempted to reconcile the practical components of language usage with their imagined identity components. In the end, Kreol rose in status as a language that could best suit both needs. The language was not characterized as a part of an ethnic group and was rather constructed by most participants as a trans-ethnic, national language. Kreol’s potential was highlighted by its ability to bridge across groups and possibly minimize the salience of other linguistic boundaries as a key part of a nationalist project that could overcome the ethnic fragmentation of postcolonial politics.

Kreol was constructed by conference participants as a way to promote nation-building, equalize opportunities in education across the classes, and as a pragmatic approach to instruction and delivery in all school subjects (current educational research had supported a child’s mother tongue as the best medium for active learning), as well as a means of cultivating literacy for those citizens who had little formal schooling. In particular,
submissions by Cuttaree (1982), Mahadeo (1982), and Pudaruth and Virahsawmy (1982) proposed that in order to enhance the educational attainment of Mauritian schoolchildren, Kreol and Bhojpuri as “mother tongues” should be taught in the early years of primary schooling while introductions to French and the Asian languages should be “staggered” in the later school years. These policy prescriptions were focused more on providing a “boost” for the lower classes, which included a large number of Indo-Mauritians in addition to Creoles.

Although its historical connection to the Creole community was mentioned by a few throughout the conference, Kreol’s perceived origination among African slaves was steadily downplayed for a view of the language as an incremental linguistic amalgamation of cultures that had since developed beyond its African origins. It was therefore viewed as a boundless language that had undergone considerable growth and adaptation—a “living” language. However, many participants also spoke of the need to embrace and promote Kreol without “shame,” and some made arguments attempting to prove that Kreol was a genuine language that should be viewed in the same way as the other languages.

These proceedings thus formed the basis for a newfound government promotion of Kreol. The MMM government first sought to standardize Kreol by supporting the creation of an orthography and phonology for the language—a project that many linguists from the University of Mauritius were already working on. The next proposed step was instituting Kreol as the medium of instruction in government schools (rather than either an “ancestral language” or a mandatory language to be tested on the CPE).
Following the conference, in 1983, the MMM government declared Kreol as the official national language in Mauritius and released the first executive press communique in Kreol. In addition, the government-run Mauritian Broadcasting Company began running a nightly news broadcast in Kreol, in addition to the French and English evening broadcasts. Before its start, however, this campaign was met with overwhelming backlash from the public, led by Indo-Mauritian activists and politicians within the MLP. In the public media, proponents of the Asian languages characterized Kreol and the “ancestral languages” as mutually exclusive: the former being a language that represented culturelessness and “uprootedness,” the latter representing the continuation of centuries long civilizations and cultures of universal value. This discourse labeled the new proposals as a nationalist project that sought to suppress the revival and strengthening of Asian languages and cultures by instead promoting a language that was inherently in conflict.

As a result of the strong backlash against Kreol’s officialization from multiple groups, Kreol’s national declaration was reversed and the Kreol news broadcasts were pulled. The MMM then suffered a massive loss in the next general elections that continued into subsequent elections (Rammendans, 2009). The party’s very brief stint in government (beginning in 1982 and ending promptly with the 1983 national elections) was due largely in part to the national language seminar and its subsequent promotion of Kreol in state policy. This relatively short-lived reign led to a split within the party that same year, followed by the creation of the new Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) party, an off-

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51 This would be the only time the MMM held executive control without the formation of party alliances, a defining characteristic of post-1986 politics.
shoot of the MMM led by Anerood Jugnauth (who became the next Prime Minister), with more socially and economically moderate principles.

On one level, Kreol was viewed by many as a “pigeon,” “dialect,” or “contact” mode of communication, rather than a true language. Moreover, the inferiority of Kreol was contrasted to the cultural resilience of the Asian languages. Much public discourse in the Mauritius Times, a popular Hindu-run newspaper, described the “coolie” (in a radical appropriation of the term as a term of empowerment) as being able to uniquely resist the cultural domination of the colonizers and thus cultural “death” by steadfastly maintaining a connection to his ancestry, language and culture. Cultural tenacity was also believed to be the source of “Hindu power” in the modern state. Equally important is the connection between Kreol and the Creole community. To Orientalist proponents, Kreol represented the domination over and erasure of enslaved Africans and the forced imposition of a degenerated version of the language of the “masters.” They claimed that while the “coolie” gained strength and resilience from his language and culture, the languages and cultures of the “slave” were comparatively weak and more easily destroyed by the colonizers. They argued that the status of Creoles as predominately poor, uneducated and marginalized, and their lack of collective consciousness and political power was related to the loss of their ancestral African cultures, rendering Creoles impotent, powerless and irrelevant in modern politics and society as a community. As Mooneram (2009) argues, the Kreol language was looked down upon by Hindu activists in the same way that it had been during slavery: because enslaved populations who were deemed as lesser, “uncivilized” beings typically developed creole languages, the languages they produced were not considered full
languages, but mere dialects. Orientalists surmised that because Kreol was inferior to the Asian languages and connected to a group with no “real” culture, its promotion (especially after past failures to elevate the Asian languages to the status of French) was a direct attempt to perpetuate the eradication of Asian cultures and the marginalization of Indo-Mauritians outside of the Mauritian national fabric.

Within the Creole community, Kreol also had a contentious status that underscored the complications surrounding the hybridized Creole identity. Authenticity is central to this tension, as many Creoles also viewed Kreol as a lesser language due to its specific birth within the colonial experience. In his analysis of the barriers to the standardization of creole languages, Mooneram (2009) highlights the rejection of creole patois by even famed anti-colonial activists such as Aimé Césaire. Quoted by Mooneram (2009), Césaire states: “[We] would not have been able to write in Creole. [...] I don’t even know if this is conceivable [...]. One aspect of Martinique’s cultural backwardness is the [expressive] level of its Creole language, [...] which is very low [...]. The Creole language has remained [...] in a stage of immediacy, unable to express abstract ideas” (p. 2).

Mooneram (2009) also quotes the views of Jean-Georges Prosper, a famous Afro-Mauritian poet and writer of the Mauritian national anthem, who similarly rejects the usefulness of Kreol: “As for me, I rebel against this sanctioning of patois. I can only see an attempt at a levelling down. A levelling down towards the vulgar! Since patois have no social usefulness whatsoever [...] Finally, it cannot be denied that patois gives way to crudeness and even to obscenity” (p. 2). Accordingly, Mooneram argues that in the above statements, “Creole, like the society itself, is devoid of history, a concept that he explains as
the processes of cultivation and refinement that other languages have experienced in the
course of centuries. There is a sense that nothing cultural which these Creole islands
produce, through their own complex histories, could be authentic or legitimate” (p. 2).

On another level, Kreol was also viewed as integral to the process of *le Mauricianisme*—an increasingly influential idea among Nationalists, which embraced
cosmopolitanism and a distinct Mauritian-ness that transcended ethnic boundaries. This
was interpreted by many Orientalists as an attempt at “deculturisation” of the Indo-
Mauritian community. Deculturalisation was understood as more than simply an
eradication of ethnic boundaries. It was closely connected to the idea of *creolisation* or
creolité, which gave importance to the appreciation and celebration of the mixed heritage of
Mauritians across all ethnic groups—in addition to Creoles, who were recognizing as being
of mixed African, European and Indian descent—and embraced hybridity as a core aspect
of what it meant to be a Mauritian. *Mauricianisme* also became a strong part of the
academic literature in anthropology and sociology at the time. This research increasingly
showed that a majority of Mauritians across ethnic groups had high percentages of mixed
ancestry. Opponents of *creolité* did not take hybridity as a fact, however, and instead saw it
as a process of creolization that sought to erase previously established cultural identities.

While some saw *Mauricianisme* as a project that manufactured and imposed a
specific Mauritian identity on society, most Orientalist elites indeed recognized the mixed
heritages of Indo-Mauritians. However, they saw hybridity as an ill-fated effect of colonial
domination and cultural suppression that could be reversed through the revival of their
“lost” ancestral cultures and the reconstruction of ethnic boundaries. According to
Eisenlohr (2001), this striving towards cultural purity was also attributed to the deep allegiances and transnational identifications many Indo-Mauritians held with the Indian Diaspora, which necessarily fell in tension with a national unification project founded in national cultural unification.

In an op-ed in the *Mauritius Times*, Ramlallah compares the MMM’s 1982 goal of national unity to the policy of Burnham in Guyana: “The MMM had copied Burnham’s policy of: One people-one nation, one culture-one language, etc. If Berenger pro-communist government had survived for another 10 to 15 years, Indo-Mauritians, specially Hindus would have been reduced to the status of the Indo-Guyanese population: rootless, without culture, language and power.” In this passage, the author believes that alike the situation in Guyana, such goals are paramount to the forced creolization of diverse island inhabitants and ultimately the domination of Afro-descended peoples on these islands.

In another article, Jang Vijay describes Mauritius as a “country of immigrants” whose ancestors have “maintained their identity and developed their ancestral languages and cultures in peace and harmony.” As a political collective, the writer argues that the strength of Indo-Mauritians lies in the ethnic solidarity they were able to forge through these diasporic connections. He writes: “a group of so-called champions of Mauritianism... they realized that as long as the Hindus will live as Hindus the community can meet any challenge... This is the fitness of things in a democracy.” Under this view, the motivation for “Mauritianism” is understood as an attempt to fragment the Hindu community.

Without the power afforded by ethnic boundaries structured and legitimized through

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multiculturalism, Vijay argues that Hindus cannot collectively mobilize against political challenges. The author further interprets Hinduism and *Mauricianisme* as mutually exclusive:

> The Hindu is being told that he should be mauritianised, that if he prays Shri Krishna... if he says ‘namaste’ to greet somebody... if his sister, mother or wife wears the saari, he is not a Mauritian... he is communal... *[Mauricianisme’s]* great success is the division among Mauritians of Indian origin on the basis of religion between Hindus and Muslims... they almost succeeded to break one community and separated them from their traditional party—Labour Party and their traditional ally, the Hindu community.

In this passage, the author assumes a natural and historical connection between Hindus and Muslims based on their shared Indian origin. Such an association highlights a division that goes beyond “ethnic” difference to that of “racial” and “civilizational” difference as the author characterizes the religious divide between Hindus and Muslims as an artificial one concocted by others who are identified as outsiders of the group. In addition, while Hindus are also divided by language and caste, the author writes that they are “united on the basis of culture – they all belong to the same Sanatan-aryan culture.” Throughout the article, all groups of Indian origin are described as being under common attack, and their linguistic, religious, and caste lines are backgrounded while their diasporic connections to India are brought to the fore.

**Ethnicity and Nation in Conflict: Multiculturalism versus *Mauricianisme***

After the MMMs ousting, public discourse had now shifted from an anticolonial discourse concerning the domination of Western languages over the subjugated “ancestral languages,” to a discourse focusing on “creolisation” and the possible domination of a cultureless group seeking to suppress ethnic specificity. The discussion also pivoted from a
conflict concerning the statuses of different ethnic boundaries to a conflict between ethnic and national boundaries, and how the parameters of the national boundary would be defined. In contradiction with the professed robustness of Asian civilizational culture promoted by Orientalists, the Asian ancestral languages were also portrayed as being in a naturally weaker position after their colonial suppression by the French. Both the French language and Kreol were seen as barriers to the strengthening of Asian cultural boundaries. Thus the Asian languages were also endangered languages in need of government protection.

Hindus have sought to maintain their ancestral connection with India through instruction in the Hindi language is the most important way in which Hindus, and they have done so as an assertion of purity in an environment in which there exists a constant force of “creolization” (Eisenlohr, 2001). Kreol was particularly viewed as an impure force to fight against by reasserting the cultural importance of the Hindu language, religion, and way of life. For many Orientalists, the Creole ethnic boundary also became a threat because Creoles as a group were characterized by a racial and cultural hybridity that could very well compete as a national assimilationist counter to multiculturalism. Further, the conceptualization of Creoles as mixed race and the Kreol language as a linguistic amalgamation was problematic because this hybridity represented a void in which all other ethnic boundaries could be absorbed.

This imperative was further justified by a perceived electoral mandate that Hindu elites felt entitled to as the “majority community” (Lau Thi Keng, 1991). Shifting from the calls for multicultural inclusion characteristic of previous Indo-Mauritian political
engagement efforts in the pre-independence era, Indo-Mauritian leaders began to justify
the promotion of Asian languages based on a discourse of majority legitimation that
emphasized the right to their political domination and state control. In fact, throughout
much of their public discourse, the phrase “majority community” was a common substitute
for the phrases “Hindu community” or “Indo-Mauritians.”

Through the expansion of parastatal bodies, programs and services focusing on
facilitating Asian language instruction at the exclusion of Kreol, the country’s new
democracy had become alike a patronage system justified by majority rule, further validated
by the need to rectify past injustices towards “the majority” from the colonial elite.
Although previous proposals for the testing of “ancestral languages” on the CPE had been
rejected, this policy was eventually adopted in 1998 with similar public consternation. In
addition to the compulsory French and English, primary grade students have been
encouraged to take these optional language courses, and many do so out of practical
necessity, since high scores in these courses can boost a child’s overall grades for
matriculation to the secondary level. While Asian language courses are optional and
students are free to choose which course to take regardless of their ethnic background, the
overwhelming majority choose to take courses associated with the ancestral heritage of
their parents.

In its Creative Mauritius Vision white paper, MAC states:

Except for English, French and Creole, all other languages taught in Mauritius are
considered to be markers of identity, and therefore these are meant for ‘captive
markets’. Language in this view is the heritage of an ancestral vehicle... the whole
purpose of knowing a language is to be able to use it, and that it should enable its
user to read its most beautiful literature and encounter its most powerful thinkers,
or at the very least to respond to media (film, television, radio, newspapers, internet...) in that language.\textsuperscript{54}

MAC describes the Asiatic languages as culturally defined, ethnically bounded and thus deserving of dynamic reproduction, while the \textit{Kreol} language is characterized as boundless and lacking in identity. The interconnectivity of language use is seen as necessary for ensuring fluid connections between the past, present, and future, and maintaining an enduring diasporic connection with Indian philosophy and political thought. This reproduction of language is also used to ensure political community among members of the same ethnic group and maintain an identity with India.

The 1998 policy change also solidified the very intimate and highly public relationship between the Hindu elite and the MLP government that had developed over much of the country's post-independence history. The institutionalization of the Asian languages in the school system and cultural parastatal bodies, the elevation of their status in secondary and tertiary education, and their government-supported preservation in civil society were deemed a “right” of Mauritians of Indian descent to the exclusion of other languages that could mitigate the revival of these languages. When government had failed in this regard, the MLP was perceived as a victim of “reactionary forces” from non-dominant groups, rather than an actor within a neutral state apparatus.\textsuperscript{55} It is no surprise then that many Mauritians viewed the Hindu political establishment and the Mauritian government as one and the same.


\textsuperscript{55} For instance, during the public backlash to the MMM government’s promotion of \textit{Kreol}, Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth (a Hindu) was characterized as a victim whose “hand was forced” by the problematic elements of his party—namely, Paul Bérenger (a Franco-Mauritian). In particular, government officials of Indian descent have been expected to tow these ethnic lines.
Even so, the state has been neither an impartial apparatus nor an actor whose imperatives remain fixed across time. It has instead maintained a delicate balance serving as both an actor with an obligation to national cohesion and an arena where multiple political actors have competed with two chief conceptualizations of the new “civic nation.” The Orientalist perspective sought to strengthen the boundaries between groups through multiculturalism, focusing on the equal recognition of what are considered disparately-bounded ethnic groups, each stemming from distinct ancestral roots that Orientalists believe should not be arrested, altered or amalgamated. Similar to multicultural policies in Canada, Britain, or the Netherlands, this interpretation of multiculturalism seeks for each culture and their ancestral origins to be recognized independently, facilitating hyphenated identities (Indo-Mauritian, Sino-Mauritian) rather than the blurred “Mauritian” identity promoted by supporters of Mauricianisme. However unlike Western multiculturalism, which concerns the protection of minority group boundaries in juxtaposition to a singular national culture, the Mauritian state has developed a variant of multiculturalism that emphasizes the diasporic foundations of culture across time and space that must exist in lieu of a single national culture. Multiculturalism itself is believed to supply the civic framework needed for national cohesion. In this way, the Mauritian nation comprises a patchwork of bounded ethnic groups that each fulfill a cultural requirement for membership, and it is the state’s role to maintain a separate but equal status between these bounded groups. However, Kreol (and Creole culture) could not be included in this framework. Not only was the language conceptualized as a lack of culture, it was also considered to be “possessing dominant features” that made its inclusion imperiling to
other languages. In this way, Kreol’s emergence in language policy has exacerbated the tension between the “native” and the “foreigner” in post-independence politics, and multiculturalism has defined the national boundary as one that can incorporate either one cleavage or the other.

But with competing political forces such as the MMM and the PMSD, the state has sought to balance the framework of multiculturalism with Mauricianisme, which conceptualizes the state as a promoter of cosmopolitanism and universalism in the formation of a civic “state-nation” (in what is believed to be an already decidedly “hybrid” society). This perspective comprised a cross-cultural coalition focused on interculturalism, who believed that the recognition of ethnic and racial boundaries were “smokescreens” for the work of real socioeconomic change that needed to be done in society. In addition, proponents of Mauricianisme viewed Mauritian culture as essentially an amalgamation of various cultures and a unique postcolonial island experience. They maintained that the group boundaries that did exist were actively re-created and maintained as a counter to the common culture shared by all Mauritians. For example, while most Hindus spoke Kreol within their households as their first language, only a small fragment of the Hindu population spoke Hindi (mostly elders), and the language was otherwise spoken mainly within certain religious contexts. Therefore the diasporic identities promoted by Orientalists were considered artificial identities to proponents of Mauricianisme.

Thus for the Orientalists, the nationalist promotion of Mauricianisme and creolité through the institutionalization of Kreol had become an even greater threat to the Asian languages than Francophonie. Although the inclusion of French language instruction meant
the elevation of the Franco-Mauritians, the inclusion of Kreol created a different contention that equated one ethnic group (Creoles) with a more assimilationist national boundary. In some respects, French is still popularly understood as a neutral language. But by the time the multiculturalist project gains way French has also increasingly become viewed as a cultural language attached to Franco-Mauritians, who are now viewed as one of many ethnic groups. With the shift towards Kreol as the major threat to Hindu political power, the status of French has shifted from neutral and colonially oppressive to that of a thoroughly ethnicized language that has cultural value based in its ancestral roots in France, and more broadly, as a representative of European civilization.\textsuperscript{56} The inclusion of Kreol in language policy, however, was perceived as facilitating the dominion of a language that was both politically dominant (exalted as the “national lingua franca” by the MMM) and naturally dominant (being the mother tongue of all Mauritians).

**The Hierarchy Reconfigured**

Language continues to serve as an important ethnic marker in Mauritius. This passage from Minister of Education Vasant Bunwaree describes the scope of Asian language learning in particular that is facilitated by the government today:

> In line with our policy to promote Asian and Arabic languages, we are offering both at primary and secondary levels, courses in Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Urdu/Arabic and Modern Chinese. Furthermore, my Ministry is also consolidating the spread of such languages, their literature and cultural activities associated thereto in the evening schools. These activities are organised by socio-cultural organisations on Government-owned educational premises in private schools, baitkas, temples and madrassas. As for Sanskrit, which is an ancestral language that lies at the root of numerous Indian and non-Indian languages, the Hindi

\textsuperscript{56} In much contemporary formal discourse in support of multiculturalism in Mauritius, French and France are now commonly identified as an integral part of the Mauritian multicultural “rainbow,” blending the best of Western and Eastern culture.
Pracharini Sabha, the Arya Sabha and the Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha have integrated modules on this language in Hindi. Sanskrit courses are also run by Hindu priests at various socio-cultural organisations, such as the Arya Sabha, Mauritius Sanatan Dharma Temples Federation and the Mauritius Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha. Programmes in Sanskrit are equally being conducted from level I up to Diploma/Degree levels by the MGI and the Hindu Maha Sabha. The MGI currently runs such courses in the evening of weekdays, while those of the Hindu Maha Sabha are conducted on Saturdays. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am afraid we do not have enough resources not to say competences to do much in favour of this beautiful language known as mother of languages, but my Ministry remains open to consider other and further demands for the learning of Sanskrit in our institutions or NGO run establishments.57

Mauritius is an example in which, rather than seeking to manage different language groups, the government has attempted to construct boundaries between groups that were more similar than different in terms of their linguistic diversity, with most Mauritians of all backgrounds sharing Kreol as their mother tongue and typically either English or French as a second language, if any (Bissoonauth, 1998). Bissoonauth’s analysis of the 1990 census shows that while usage of the Asian languages decreased, Kreol’s usage had increased exponentially within the same time period, in addition to smaller and more moderate increases in French and English. Although many Indo-Mauritians selected one or more of the Asian languages as the “language of [their] forefathers” (a category the government uses as a marker of ancestral ethnic identity rather than actual language usage), the majority of these same households declared Kreol as the main language usually spoken at home (ibid).

Thus the inclusion of the Asian languages in language policy has been less concerned with the practical usage and role of languages in society and more preoccupied with the status of linguistic boundaries vis-à-vis the national boundary. Indo-Mauritian activists pushing for the institutionalization of Asian languages argued for the revival

57 Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 21, 7 July 2009.
and/or preservation of these languages because they had been systematically suppressed and made “impractical” through the policies of a white supremacist colonial state. The subsequent struggles for the recognition of languages in various institutions (in the public sphere, education, and government) represents attempts at legitimizing rights to political membership and belonging, in addition to making accessible the socioeconomic benefits that recognition from the state could provide.

At the same time, nativist and nationalistic claims of cultural rootedness were particularly viewed as threatening to the Asian languages. Hookoomsing (1987) tested the sociopolitical perceptions of Kreol among respondents in the predominately Indo-Mauritian, working class community of Stanley-Trefles and found that Indo- and Sino-Mauritian respondents disagreed with the proposal to change the name of Kreol to “Morisyen” at much higher rates than other ethnic groups, while a majority of respondents in all groups looked on a proposal to introduce Kreol as the language of instruction in primary schools disfavorably. Respondents were also asked their perceptions of Kreol’s relationship with the other languages, and while Kreol was viewed as a compliment to English language learning and usage, it was viewed antagonistically towards both French and the Oriental languages as a threat to their future existence (ibid).

The debates concerning the cultural value of languages in Mauritius highlight a deeper wrestling with the moral value of languages and the groups in which they are connected. In particular, “national death” as an impending threat to the Hindu community has been invoked in much of the Hindu public sphere. In his study of ethnicity and nationalism in Israel, South Africa and Canada, Abulof (2015) argues that the
boundaries of nations are demarcated and become politically salient when the mortality of
the ethnic group (viewing itself as not simply an ethnic group among many others, but a
nation) appears imminent. At this point, cultural death is identified as an existential threat
that stimulates a conflict between national and ethnic boundaries. With the imposing
“death” of the Asian languages, the cultural and linguistic revival projects undertaken by
the government were not only attempts at promoting the use of these languages, but they
were endeavors that would more heavily demarcate the boundaries of Indo-Mauritians and
mobilize group members in the securing of self-awareness, self-determination, and political
power.

Moreover, temporality is an important aspect of how language policy discourse
structures the negotiation of national belonging. Through the state maintenance of Hindi
and other Asian languages, “Indianness” is produced and connects modern Indo-
Mauritians with India and a precocial past that is believed to have been resurrected. At
the same time, the African roots of Creoles are envisioned as severed (through the process
of enslavement) and long dead. Africanty is discussed in public discourse as an artifact of
the past, in a continent frozen in time prior to colonization, with no cultural thread with
which to connect it to contemporary Mauritius other than subliminally and colloquially
through the Kreol language. According to Prabhu (2005), colonial Coloured Creoles were
able to carve themselves a space under French colonialism through the concept of
“creolization” (in so far as they remained culturally connected to Franco-Mauritians),
because white Franco-Mauritians and their mixed offspring were both referred to as
“Creoles” interchangeably in the colonial island context. As the settler population
decreased, however, this separate discourse around “creolité” in the public sphere incrementally advanced the dissolution of racial and ethnic boundaries in their articulation of the Mauritian nation, but stopped just short of the dissolution of the Asian immigrant boundary. This has led to two competing discourses in the Mauritian public sphere—that of “Little India” and that of the “Creole Island” (Eisenlohr, 2006).

The main divisions between the languages—as ancestral, native, or international, or as competition between the colonizers and the colonized, between the East and the West, and between the local and the diasporic—represent a struggle concerning how the boundaries of the nation could be conceptualized in a postcolonial context in which a suitable management of difference structured the language policy process. This construction of difference has also needed to mesh with state prerogatives. According to Gunew (1997), it is within this clash between postcolonialism and multiculturalism that ethnic difference is both constructed by the state and re-articulated by groups within society. Throughout the following decades, the multiculturalist perspective of the Orientalists has provided a consistent ideological framework behind Mauritian public policy, while the nationalist perspective of Mauricianisme has been consistently viewed as threatening. However, this analysis of the language issue in Mauritius illustrates that ethnic groups at the local level have taken lead in the state’s management of multiculturalism. From an anticolonial point of reference, they seek to strengthen and demarcate their own ethnic boundaries by reframing the boundaries of the nation through a variant of multiculturalism that privileges diasporic connections to their ancestral roots in order to embody, and therefore naturalize, cultural difference. This process of cultural (in this case,
linguistic) embodiment renders Creoles a specifically problematic community whose cultural distinction is defined by a culturelessness (based on the hybridity of both the people and their language) that can erode the linguistic boundaries of other groups and therefore overtake the boundaries of the nation.
Chapter 5 – The Afro-Creole Identity Movement

While the boundaries of Asian-descended ethnic groups were becoming increasingly strengthened through multicultural policies, ethnic identity within the Creole community was developing concurrently in the private realm. This development grew out of the same political and economic changes that had affected the Hindu leadership during the independence period. Three sociopolitical tensions developed throughout the 1970s to reconfigure the context of civic leadership in the Creole community and spur the Afro-Creole identity movement. First, with the adoption of Export Processing Zones (EPZs), Mauritius underwent a period of modernization in the 1970s and 1980s that spurred rapid changes in the socioeconomic landscape of the country and ethnic groups became socioeconomically stratified. While most Indo-Mauritians shared the ranks of the lower classes with Creoles during the colonial period, Creole exclusion in society, politics, and the marketplace became more pronounced during this period as a predominately Asian middle class began to develop and Hindus increasingly dominated government and the civil service.

According to Dommen and Dommen (1999), the country’s economic growth also benefitted from the geographic “origins” of its inhabitants. Mauritius benefited during this period of growth from foreign aid and investments from India, China, and Arab states that held diasporic connections to Indo- and Sino-Mauritians (Bowman, 1991). Sino-Mauritians were able to create business connections with Hong Kong and the Mauritian government allowed foreign Chinese entrepreneurs special residence for their enterprises (Dommen & Dommen, 1999). India had also become the main international partner of
Mauritius, providing considerable financial aid to support cultural ties with Indo-Mauritians in government and civil society. Indian prime ministers, politicians, and leaders also publicly visited Mauritius on a regular basis to reaffirm ties with Indo-Mauritians (Bowman, 1991). Yet Mauritius’ government and economy had few ties to Africa besides economic linkages with white elites in South Africa (indicative of the historically weak connections between Creoles and mainland Africans). These diasporic connections have made a large impact on the political and social power of non-Creoles in Mauritius, who have been able to secure political and economic prosperities almost exclusive to their own groups. The ethnic stratification created by these arrangements bolstered feelings among Creoles that their disadvantages had less to do with the natural market changes of a capitalist society and more to do with ethnic and racial difference.

Secondly, the Coloured exodus of the 1960s resulted in a shift in the demographics of the Creole community, which now constituted a much higher percentage of lower class Creoles of a more “black African” phenotype identifying as “ti-Kreol.” Though initially small, a new Creole leadership began to replace the Coloured leadership, and they identified less with Francophone culture and more with a working class socioeconomic experience. Creoles also saw themselves in more stark juxtaposition to the Franco-Mauritian church leadership. The tension between hybridity and blackness still remained a central feature of Creole identity, but reconciling these two identities became an increasing

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58 Many of these connections between India and Indo-Mauritians began in the early 20th century with the birth of the Arya Samaj and visits from Mahatma Gandhi and Manilal Doctor (Mannick, 1989; Simmons, 1982).
59 While Creoles were certainly not the only group experiencing pervasive poverty and unemployment (a large percentage of Indo-Mauritians were also poor and socioeconomically marginalized, mainly isolated in rural communities rather than the urban ones populated by Creoles), the lack of class diversification within the Creole community was greater than in other communities.
concern for Creole leaders seeking to mobilize Creoles under a singular ethnic banner. These leaders recognized that in addition to the internal fragmentation caused by the dual identity of Creoles, both hybridity and blackness were denigrated in wider society, and this experience set them apart in a distinct way that required re-evaluation.

The third tension—discussed in the previous chapter—was that of the rise of Hindu political hegemony and the institutionalization of multiculturalism. The emergence of many Hindu political leaders in government, led by Prime Minister Ramgoolam (dubbed the “Father of the Nation”) coincided with the economic advances of the 1980s, and together, these occurrences more greatly linked ethnicity with the state apparatus. Many Creoles thus believed that they had suffered in the economic market more than other groups who were able to politically mobilize around solid ethnic identities—particularly state-recognized, state-promoted and state-supported identities. The institutionalization of the Asian languages and the palpable exclusion of Kreol in language policy became synonymous with the political and economic rise of Hindu hegemony, and the active suppression and disrecognition of the Afro-Creole. For the Creole leadership, the gains being made by Indo-Mauritians were a product of the Hindu domination of the state, which also facilitated the official protection of the Hindu ethnic boundary in the public realm. Creoles, then, began to see themselves as a distinct community in Mauritius on multiple fronts: they were not one of the immigrant or Asian-descended communities recognized through multiculturalism, they were marginalized from the middle class, and their interests were not adequately represented by the Francophone population générale. This
lack of belonging further exacerbated feelings of social marginalization within the Creole community.

This chapter chronicles the development of a specifically Afro-Creole identity movement among Mauritian Creoles that, spurred by these changes, has developed across five punctuations in time. I explain how this identity-building movement takes place, and why it takes shape the way that it does, between roughly 1986 and 2004. The progression of this identity movement was influenced by a series of events accelerating its adaptation in Creole popular culture, civil society and eventually, political society. The relationship between Creole identity-building and advocacy for the Kreol language developed relatively slowly in the 1970s and early 1980s and gained momentum in the 1990s and early 2000s. These events include 1) the melding of Africanity and Creole culture in the 1980s, 2) the articulation of “le malaise créole” in the Catholic Church in 1993, 3) changes to the Certificate for Primary Education (CPE) exam in 1995, 4) major ethnic rioting that took place in February 1999, and finally, 5) the rise of the Fédération Créole Mauricien (FCM) in 2004.

These events also unfold alongside a burgeoning Creole public sphere that provides a subaltern voice to mainstream national politics. By 2004, the government’s responsiveness to the Creole community changes significantly. This change is explained by how these five punctuations shape Creole identity and their organizing strategies, as well as their capacity to influence the structural policy landscape as an ethnic actor seeking inclusion in multiculturalism. While socioeconomic and political changes in the 1970s were precursors that led to an increased focus on the African origins of the Creole
community, Creole group organizing and mobilization was further influenced by ideological and institutional constraints that ultimately drove an embracement of Africanity and “Black consciousness” and a desire for official recognition in multiculturalism on this basis.

I then identify two conflicting ideologies that have competed across these punctuations but also exist complimentarily to the country’s multicultural framework—namely, Africanity and creolité. These competing ideologies show how identity is negotiated between ethnic groups, between ethnic groups and “the nation,” and within a particular group. These interacting forces shape the terms of development for the Creole ethnic boundary vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, as well as the future trajectory of Creole civil society organizing and policy advocacy after the year 2000.

Africanity and Creole Culture

Influenced by a context in which Creoles were socioeconomically marginalized and internally fragmented, the development of Creole identity took a new course in the 1980s as Creole leaders sought to demarcate the symbolic boundary of the community. This involved the adoption of Africanity as an ideological movement within the community, the creation of distinctly “Afro-Creole” socio-cultural organizations, and the establishment of formal Africa-centered institutions and initiatives. Many Creole leaders realized that the standard interest-based organizing involving the Catholic Church—focusing on social services and poverty relief—did not provide sociopolitical empowerment for the Creole community as other government-funded, religious institutions had provided for other communities. For the leadership, this lack of religion-based state support tied directly to
their inability to develop a cogent, culturally-bounded identity separate from that of fellow Franco-Mauritian Christians.

The catalysts created by the political and economic changes of the 1970s did not just change the course of Creole identity, but also changes in Creole organizing patterns. The political activism of Sylvio and Ellie Michel was notably among the first instances of Creole activism distinct from the Church, the Coloureds and the Franco-Mauritian elite. These two brothers founded the *Organisation Fraternelle* (OF), one of the first civil society organizations dedicated to the interests of “Afro-Creoles.” OF also constituted a response to the inter-ethnic violence (principally between Creoles and Muslims) that took place during independence that was distinct from the Nationalists. Beginning in 1969 as a sociocultural organization providing social aid for poor Creoles, OF offered help with job placement and legal representation, and by the 1970s the organization became registered as a political party. Most importantly, the organization publicly raised questions of identity in the community and advocated an “Afro-Creole” identity underscoring an historical, heritage-based understanding of slavery and slave descent at its center. One of the most significant initiatives of OF was the erection of the country’s first monument dedicated to the memory of slave ancestors in Jardin de la Compagnie on February 1, 1976, a date commemorating the abolition of slavery in Mauritius (Police-Michel, 2007; Chan Low, 2004).

OF’s focus was also class-based, and according to Police-Michel (2007), the goals of OF and the MMM were directly intertwined in a common focus on economic justice:

*Alors que l'objectif de l'Organisation Fraternelle était de structurer la communauté créole et de l'engager dans une lutte non-violente et constructive pour son émancipation économique et*
Although these movements had divergent visions for minority inclusion, the “Creole cause” would intersect with the socialist movement, and both OF and the MMM would support each other in a variety of ways in future social and political organizing on behalf of the poor (ibid). But with the leadership of the Michel brothers, civil society organizing shifted towards the mobilization of Creoles under the banner of their common ancestry as the descendants of slaves, and slavery itself became central to the struggle for socioeconomic justice. The discussion around hybridity and blackness prior to this point was not a concern for the Coloured leadership, but Creole leaders during the period of OF’s rise focused specifically on the plight of “ti-Kreols,” as well as the status of “blackness” from which they were associated in society.

In addition to the rise of OF, other Creole-based organizations such as the Rassemblement des Organisations Creoles (ROC), Mouvement Morisien Kreol Afrikin (MMKA), Mouvement Authentique Mauricien (MAM), L’Association Socio-Culturelle Afro-Mauricienne (LASCAM), and L’Organisation Culturelle Afro-Malagasy (LOCAM) were subsequently created in the interest of Creoles with a focus on re-instilling African culture and identity within the community. These organizations served as harbingers for the identity movement, influenced by Black consciousness, Rastafarianism, and negritude as ideologies from abroad. These ideologies existed under the umbrella of Africanity, an ideology

60 Translation: “While the aim of l’Organisation Fraternelle was to structure the creole community and engage it in a non-violent and constructive struggle for its economic and political emancipation, as well as its integration in independent Mauritius, that of the MMM inspired Marxist theories tended towards the abolition of ethnic cleavages by mobilizing the mass of the working class world in a class struggle.”
promoting a belief in the unity and affinity of Afro-descended peoples as a form of resistance against white supremacy and political domination in the colonial and postcolonial world (Maquet, 1972). Africanity provided Creole leaders of these organizations with a new philosophy from which to frame Creole identity that would address the desire for a new cultural place in Mauritian society and provide an explanation for the economic depression and political marginalization present within the Creole community. Africanity also allowed them to explain their experience by their perceived lack of ethnic distinction and identity with their African roots in the context of multiculturalism. Some Creole activists established connections with other activists of African descent facing similar circumstances in South Africa, Jamaica and the United States, and also while studying abroad in African, European and American universities. In addition, what was particularly different about these new leaders was that they publicly self-identified as “ti-Kreol” (darker-skinned Creoles of a more “African” phenotype), and embraced the monikers “Afro-Mauritian” or “Afro-Creole.”

Gaëtan Benoît’s The Afro-Mauritians: An Essay, published in 1985, was one of the first literary works to make a connection between the lack of identity of Creoles, their political disempowerment, and their socioeconomic marginalization. It not only provided a descriptive study of Creole cultural distinctions but coined a racial/ethnic appellation—“Afro-Mauritian”—to the group. A more Mauritian version of Africanity then developed as an ideology seeking to re-establish the African “roots” of Creoles and a pan-African identity similar to the diasporic consciousnesses of other ethnic groups in Mauritius. Thus rather than the embracement of their cultural hybridity, Creole ethnic activists began to focus on
a diasporic, essentialist identity that would also fit within the framework of Mauritian multiculturalism. These ideas operated largely outside of the political realm and through the popular mediums of music (notably sega, a local Mauritian genre of music derived from traditional African rhythms), art, and literature within a burgeoning Creole public sphere.

The Kreol language also became an important focus, especially in the scramble for research on African and Creole culture. For both Nationalists and Creole ethnic advocates, Kreol was the medium of grassroots protest from the margins, and as a language associated with African slaves, Kreol became instrumental to the re-establishment of Creole heritage. This is because Kreol was one of the few cultural artifacts that Creoles could rally around and embrace as “African.” As such, a number of Creole artists began writing and performing in Kreol (many of which were facilitated by LPT), such as René Noyau, who tied the language with distinctly Creole cultural elements in his famous narratives. Here, the Kreol language was used in its unstandardized form more popularly as a foundation of cultural expression that also contributed to the future development of the language’s orthography (Mooneram, 2009).

Alongside the increase in Creole associations was the creation of the Centre Culturel Africain (CCA) in 1986, the country’s first African-centered cultural parastatal body. The CCA was a product of Creole lobbying efforts that circumvented the leadership of the Catholic Church and could provid indirect funding for Creole sociocultural organizations. With the creation of the CCA, mainland Africa became an important symbol of ancestry in the community with the mission of bridging present-day Creole culture to its African

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61 The African Cultural Center was preceded by the Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Africaines, which was previously created by the government in partnership with Senegal (Le Mauricien, 25 October 1986).
past. The CCA sought to conduct research on African arts and culture, and the effects of slavery in Mauritius in particular, looking to establish historical ties between Mauritius and Africa that would also support enterprising relationships with mainland Africa on behalf of Mauritian business and government. In its first year, the CCA proposed establishing research connections with Madagascar and Mozambique, an African film festival, a seminar on the abolition of slavery, and the study and promotion of “creolophonie” (Le Mauricien, 25 October 1986). According to Jean-Georges Prosper, the CCA’s first Chairman, with the creation of the CCA “the Mauritian population, particularly Mauritians of Malagasy and African descent, will finally know better their ancestral culture as a component of the Mauritian culture” (ibid, p. 3).

The name of the CCA was later changed to the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture (NMCAC), after being christened by Nelson Mandela during his visit to Mauritius in 1998. Since then, the NMCAC has gained increased sociopolitical influence and has focused on generating research and publications on African and Creole culture, establishing links between Afro-centered local and international organizations, providing meeting spaces for local Creole organizations, and hosting discussions, debates, exhibitions and cultural shows. Each year, it provides special ceremonies for the 1st of February commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery, “Africa Day” in May, and the Festival International Kréol in October. Their events are also organized for Martin Luther King Day

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62 In 2012, the name was changed a third time to the Nelson Mandela Centre for African & Creole Culture (NMCACC). These changes demonstrate the shifting identity of Creoles and the political problems that have surfaced due to the Center’s choice of name. To date, many Creoles (particularly those in rural or coastal areas) are unfamiliar with the NMCACC and its work beyond the annual Abolition Day ceremony that the Center hosts at Le Morne Brabant.

in January and “Black History Month” (including history in the United States, Mauritius and across the African Diaspora) throughout the month of February. Currently, the NMCAC focuses much of its research efforts on slave genealogy for Mauritians of African descent, and researchers there are building a slave genealogy database from collected personal and archival sources, a project that began in 1996. Influenced by this wave of Africanity, the NMCAC and LPT also published a number of literary works and put on various cultural shows by Creole novelists, poets, playwrights and artists, including “Pages Africaines de l’île Maurice” by Marcel Didier and “Les Fantômes du Futur Luxe Nocturne” by Richard Sedley Assonne. Many of these literary works were also published in the Kreol language, including Assonne’s “Robis” in 1996.

However, while the Creole community saw a relative increase in civic organizing and institutional support, these institutions only laid the groundwork for the movement that would follow. The popularity of most Creole organizations waned and declined throughout the 1980s, with OF remaining the most visible, never quite achieving a large following beyond educated, middle class Creoles. The research and literature produced by NMCAC was largely top-down, illustrating a disjuncture between the articulations of Africanity in the literature and scholarship of Creole leaders and the actual ethnic identifications of the average Creole in everyday life—the work of NMCAC in many ways remained unfamiliar to the majority of poor, uneducated Creoles who lived marginal to the predominately middle class Creole leadership in Port Louis. In addition, NMCAC had little impact within the Creole community or influence over the government’s multicultural trajectory until the late 1990s. But its creation demonstrated a state response
to the desire within the Creole leadership for a cultural location within multiculturalism.  

Only within the next decade does the NMCAC begin to be recognized in the community and at large as a force of institutional capacity.

Africanity—as the promotion of Black pride and an Afro-Creole consciousness—meant for the Creole community an embracing of that which was previously denigrated and rejected by society. Following this was a desire for re-instilling a sense of pride in precisely that which was shamed: African heritage and culture. Furthermore, Africanity not only promoted Africa as the ancestral roots of the Creole people, but it also culturally situated the Mauritian island itself as part of the African continent, and increasingly over time, it began to directly link Creoles indigenously with the island as well as diasporically with mainland Africa. In this way, Creoles working within the NMCAC, OF and other organizations re-envisioned the island as an historical and cultural part of Africa. These two premises would later become problematic to Orientalists and the Hindu leadership, since Creole Africanity began to articulate those of African heritage as representative of an historical, native Mauritian “nation” deserving of greater claims to the state.

“Le Malaise Créole”

The second punctuation in the Afro-Creole identity movement took place in February 1993, during a speech by Father Roger Cerveaux—one of the few Creole Catholic

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64 The CCA also provided a safety for the Indian-led government by somewhat recognizing additional ethnic configurations in state multiculturalism. This aided in disarming Creole backlash for their lack of official recognition.

65 Although Mauritius is technically an African country by geography, it has for many decades been viewed as distinct from mainland Africa and associated more as an Indian Ocean territory linked to Asia. In addition, Mauritius was generally separated from Africa by the government’s proliferation of Asia-centered cultural parastatals, as well as the myriad trade and transnational pathways that have been set up with India, Pakistan and other Asian countries since Mauritius’ independence.
priests in Mauritius—during a ceremony commemorating the abolition of slavery. Father Cerveaux’s speech articulated a general feeling of discontent with a wider socioeconomic and political system in which Creoles had collectively become the face of the poor and the marginalized. Yet this marginalization took place within a free and open democracy that was internationally heralded for its successful economic development. Father Cerveaux argued that this tension—which he called “le malaise créole”—was specific and distinct to the Creole community. This idea represented a widespread feeling of hopelessness, frustration, and resentment in the Creole community over their extreme poverty and lack of socioeconomic progress in contrast to other groups in society. In this way, Father Cerveaux directly linked ethnicity with socioeconomic class, and attached the thirst for identity that emerged in the previous decade to a concrete problem within the community. In this shift, the state of being Creole and the problem of its fragmented identity was also viewed as the source of the socioeconomic marginalization of Creoles. Prior to this speech, the tension between Creole identity and their socioeconomic experience was not articulated in the public sphere as a problem of national or community concern. With the Catholic Church as a platform, “le malaise créole” became a popular discourse for understanding ethnic tensions in Mauritius.

This wider discourse stemming from Father Cerveaux’s speech would be taken up with Bishop Maurice Piat’s annual pastoral letter, published the same year, which was the first study conducted on the socioeconomic phenomenon of “le malaise créole” (Police-Michel, 2007). From this letter, Police-Michel (2007) states that the Bishop identifies two requirements necessary to rectify “le malaise” as a call-to-action to the Catholic Church: “le
besoin de leadership socio-politique qui interpelle l'Eglise Catholique dans sa mission pour la
libération et la promotion humaine des plus pauvres; le besoin d'une identité culturelle qui souligne la
necessite dans l'eglise d'un travail d'inculturation du message evangélique dans les pratiques culturelles
creoles” (Police-Michel, 2007, p. 127).66

This event was important for the Afro-Creole identity movement in two ways. First,
it opened up a dialogue within the Catholic Church that forced its Franco-Mauritian
leaders to pay greater attention to the concerns of its Creole members. This was
revolutionary at the time in that it was not only voiced by a Creole priest within the
Church, but that it also received a response from the Church that was largely attentive,
a although fleeting. Through Piat’s letter, the Catholic Church officially recognized both the
feeling of discontent of a majority of its followers and the need to connect with its Creole
members on this issue in order to maintain its own relevance in the community. Secondly,
Bishop Piat’s letter also represented a moment in which the socioeconomic experiences of
Creoles would begin to define the boundary of the community distinct from previous
definitions that focused on their African roots.

Nevertheless, in the general public, the discourse of “le malaise créole” was met with
suspicion if not outright rejection. A counter-narrative in the Indo-Mauritian press
dismissed this discourse as an inability for Creoles to take personal responsibility for their
situation, and instead relayed the narrative of the hard-working Hindu laborer who had
toiled in the most difficult jobs throughout history to secure his current status (Mauritius

66 Translation: “the need for socio-political leadership which challenges the Catholic Church in its mission
for the liberation and human promotion of the poorest; the need for a cultural identity which underlines the
need in the Church for a work of inculturation of the evangelical message in the cultural practices of the
creole.”
Times, March 1994). In addition, many Indo-Mauritians viewed “le malaise créole” as an attempt to blame them, and Hindus in particular, for the circumstances of Creoles, rather than their own lack of hard work. They also voiced a view of Creoles as illegitimate citizens in a belief that Creoles refused to engage in “productive work” after their emancipation while Indian and Chinese laborers built the land alone (Baptiste, 2002). In an op-ed in the Mauritius Times, one Indo-Mauritian writer explains that the Hindus’ status as the “communauté majoritaire” was the rightful fruit of the labor of Indo-Mauritians in Mauritian history. In response to the accusation that Hindus have “monopolized” government and politics in the country, the author states:

A cursory study of our history shows that ever since their arrival in the country, as from 1835, under contracts of bonded labour, and even before that, in other capacities, the Hindus have borne on their shoulders the brunt of hard labour. The Prime Minister [Jugnauth] knows full well the condition of affliction, of oppression, of misery, of vexation, of persecution that the Hindus have had to endure during all the time, right up to the present day, that they have been in this country... Never have the Hindus grabbed or unscrupulously appropriated everything in this country... On the contrary, they have been the victims of others, who have grabbed what legitimately should have gone to the Hindus.67

Another writer in the Mauritius Times explains:

An accusing finger has been pointed towards the Hindu community... if any community has cause for malaise, it’s the Hindu community, because it’s the community that has suffered more than any other community. Members of the community have always had to do the most difficult and the worst jobs, right from the time when they landed here as labourers... Inspite of all the odds, the Hindus have been able to save their money, buy land, build their houses, and above all, educate their children. And what have others been doing in the meantime? Our advice – tell members of your community that they should emulate the Hindus. The burden of the malaise would become lighter.68

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These counter-narratives display the importance of the historical and contemporary roles of ethnic groups within the national narrative, where causal stories of victimization and hard work are commonly evoked in public discourse to explain the socioeconomic circumstances of groups. Rather than looking in isolation at the unique experience of each ethnic group, the victimization of one group translates directly to the advantages of another. This discourse extends beyond this period and well into politics today, as the historical “plight” of ethnic groups is used to evaluate whether or not state policies should be directed in their favor. Commonly juxtaposed is the association of Creoles with a lack of personal responsibility and the association of Hindus with hard work and ingenuity, which for many Mauritians justified the state focus on Indo-Mauritian empowerment and community development. Thus culture becomes the explanation for inequality. More specifically, a belief in the inherent strength and vitality of particular cultures over others becomes the dominant frame in politics.

In his anthropological study of Creole culture, Eriksen (1998, 1986b) argues that Creole culture was non-conducive to the upward mobility of Creoles because it featured a breakdown of unity, a lack of deference to authority, and egalitarian and matriarchal (rather than hierarchical and patriarchal) social relations. Eriksen (1998) explains that rather than external factors, the cultural behaviors and values of Creoles have prevented the ethnic incorporation of the group. He states that:

[T]he social organisation and cultural values reproduced among Creoles effectively militate against the formation of a Creole corporate group. The emphasis placed on individual freedom, the shallowness and classificatory breadth of genealogies and kin reckoning, the ‘crab antics’ of friendship, obliging a male Creole to spend liberally on his friends, and the suspicion of formal hierarchies—phenomena that form an important part of the dominant Creole self-identification—have prevented
the Creoles from representing their interests strategically and collectively, as virtually all the other ethnic categories of Mauritius have done. Indeed, by climbing the social ladder and beginning to endorse middle-class values, Creoles may change ethnic membership and become Coloureds, no matter what their actual physical appearance (ibid, p. 76).

Within the Creole community, “le malaise créole” was a direct repudiation of this common narrative of Creole cultural failure. This discourse highlighted the historical circumstances of Creoles by explaining the contemporary underdevelopment of Creole communities as vestiges of slavery. It also explained ethnic inequality as a product of class rather than culture, pointing to Creole cultural patterns as consequences of, rather than causes of, their exploitation, intergenerational poverty, dis-recognition, and subsequent marginalization.

In interviews with Father Cerveaux and Jocelyn Chan Low (a professor in Political Science at the University of Mauritius), both argue that the specific circumstances of Creoles have been unique and distinct from those of other Mauritians and thus require policy solutions that target their specific social, cultural and political development, in addition to economic measures for their community development. Chan Low argues that their distinct historical experiences explain their current impoverishment—enabled by marginalization and exclusion, rather than cultural backwardness—and that there has been a “conspiracy of silence” on slavery in Mauritius that has not been paid attention to until Father Cerveaux’s 1993 speech. He also argues that the Creoles have been “deculturalised” by the Church and the French settlers, and that this has caused their lack of development today. Alike other Creole ethnic activists, Chan Low cites religious funding as a prime factor in the deterrence of Creole community empowerment in a multicultural context in

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which each group is expected to secure and provide political and socioeconomic resources for themselves. He therefore views public policy as the solution, and advocates that the government grants Creoles a form of citizenship that is cultural, social, economic, and political. In this way, “le malaise créole” also made identity central to the solution for the economic blight in Creole communities—an identity that could also enable a Creole cultural revival that would allow for their inclusion in multiculturalism.

Father Cerveaux posits that the concept of “le malaise créole” itself has, if nothing more, awakened a consciousness within the community that has mobilized and organized Creoles under a common banner in the fight against poverty and exclusion. However the concept’s popularity has also led to an intellectualizing of the poverty issue, which he argues has prevented concrete structural change for the community. Nearly five years after his famous speech, Father Cerveaux observes:

*Je note que d’un bout à l’autre de l’île, il y a pas mal d’organisations qui se créent et qui se font entendre. Et la fragilité de la communauté créole était justement qu’elle n’est pas assez organisée. Il me semble par ailleurs qu’il y a davantage d’universitaires que se penchent sur la question de l’esclavage. Et je trouve que c’est très intéressant parce qu’il me semble que du moment que le milieu universitaire s’y met, il y a, une prise de distance salutaire par rapport au problème. On ne l’aborde plus seulement avec ses tripes.*

While there had been an awareness of the socioeconomic inequalities between Creoles and other ethnic groups since the 1980s, what differed after 1993 was a stronger political focus on the causes and solutions of Creole exclusion. Many mostly religious organizations had attempted to alleviate the poverty and marginalization of the poor prior

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70 Ibid. Translation: “I note that from one end to the other of the island, there are quite a few organizations that are being created and that are being heard. And the fragility of the Creole community was precisely that it was not sufficiently organized. It seems to me also that there are more scholars addressing the issue of slavery. And I find it very interesting because it seems to me that as long as the academic community is there, there is a salutary distancing from the problem. One does not address it any longer with his gut.”
to this moment. However, previous organizing focused on purely spiritual or material-based solutions that focused inwardly on the problems of Creole culture at the individual level, such as the lack of educational attainment, financial illiteracy and the teaching of family-based, moral values. But Father Filip Fanchette, a notable Creole social activist, priest, and one of the earliest organizers of OF, explains that in his own personal fight against Creole marginalization, “J’ai cru que la solution c’était la lutte des classes que je trouve aujourd’hui réductrice,”71 and that the Creole struggle was one that necessitated an acknowledgement that this marginalization was specific to the Creole community, let alone that Creoles existed as a community at all.72 Father Fanchette states:

Pour une vraie démocratie, nous avons besoin d’une société civile forte, organisée autour d’intérêts communs. Nous n’avons pas choisi d’être créoles dans ce pays. Nous sommes le résultat de l’histoire. On a souffert d’une situation, de différentes choses et, aujourd’hui, on se retrouve coincé. Le combat pour moi, c’est cette masse de créoles, de pauvres. Quand on visite des quartiers comme Roche Bois73 avec des étrangers, ils te posent des questions sur le miracle économique, même si eux aussi ils viennent de pays pauvres. Où est le miracle, a qui ça profite? J’aime bien ce que dit le Président de la République à l’effet que l’on peut éradiquer la pauvreté à Maurice. C’est sûr, nous avons toutes les ressources, toutes les possibilités. Il ne manque que la volonté politique... Écouter des leaders politiques utiliser l’expression "communauté créole" et le faire en public, à la télévision, c’est que l’on a atteint un point de non-retour. On ne pourra plus ignorer le fait créole. C’est impossible.74

71 Translation: “I thought that the solution was the class struggle which I now find reductive.”
73 Roche Bois is a majority-Creole cité just north of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. It is typically referenced as a symbol of the poverty and alienation of Creoles, as well as the Creole fight for social justice, as it is home to many prominent Creole sociocultural organizations and leaders. Father Fanchette (a resident and priest in Roche Bois) further states that “Des délégués africains qui ont visité Roche Bois ont dit: mais c’est un township!” Translation: “The African delegates who visit Roche Bois say: but it is a township!”
74 Ibid. Translation: “For a real democracy, we need a strong civil society, organized around common interests. We did not choose to be creole in this country. We are the result of history. We suffered from a situation, from different things, and today we find ourselves stuck. The struggle for me is this mass of creoles, of the poor. When you visit neighborhoods like Roche Bois with strangers, they ask you questions about the economic miracle, even if they too come from poor countries. Where is the miracle, who benefits? I like what the President of the Republic says on the effects of eradicating poverty in Mauritius. Sure, we have all the resources, all the possibilities. All that is lacking is the political will... Hearing political leaders using the term "creole community" and doing it in public, on television, is that we have reached a point of no return. We can no longer ignore the creole fact. It’s impossible.”
The post-1993 period of “le malaise créole” instead focused outwardly on the structural factors that led to Creole exclusion, as well as solutions that would involve political and macroeconomic changes at the policy level. The next wave of Creole organizations would act accordingly in their first attempts at entering the policy arena to alleviate Creole exclusion only two years later.

**The 1995 CPE Issue**

The third punctuation is a moment in Creole organizing that demonstrated an increased capacity for mobilization within the community. Between 1993 and 1996, the possibility of new changes to the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exam became a central focus of the government and the public sphere, alongside a second political issue regarding the allocation of seats in Catholic secondary schools. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Prime Minister Jugnauth’s MSM/MLP government pushed for the incorporation of the Asian languages on the CPE exam, and various committees were created in the National Assembly to investigate the means by which this could be implemented. It was decided that the policy would be achieved by adding an optional fifth subject to be tested on the exam for those taking an Asian language course in school.

Directly after the ousting of the MMM from office in 1983, Jugnauth as the new Prime Minister in an MSM/MLP alliance appointed a parliamentary committee to re-evaluate the language component of the CPE exam to include the Asian languages, a policy that Orientalist lobbyists had sought since the 1970s. Chaired by Minister of Education Armoogum Parsuramen, the committee represented members of different ethnic groups within the ruling and opposition parties. Between 1984 and 1986, the committee solicited
policy recommendations from over a hundred mainly Indo-Mauritian sociocultural 
organizations, academics and professionals. These included major organizations such as the 
Arya Sabha, Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha, MSDTF, Tamil Temples Federation, Andra 
Maha Sabha, Basha Andolan (an umbrella group of Indian socio-cultural organizations), 
and civil service associations such as the Government Marathi Teachers Association, 
Government Hindi Teachers Union, and the Human Service Trust. After a contentious 
inter-ethnic gridlock and public debate, the divisiveness of the committee led to the 
resignation of several MMM members. These members claimed that Indo-Mauritian MLP 
and MSM members were unwilling to consider plans short of the full inclusion of the 
Asian languages as a testing subject, while outright rejecting the inclusion of Kreol on the 
exam as a counter-balance (Eisenlohr, 2001). Opposition members were subsequently 
replaced by more like-minded parliamentary members who then unanimously agreed to 
include the Asian languages as a testing subject on the CPE exam.

The final recommendations of the committee concerned how to reach equality 
between the languages and their ethnic groups, rather than the utility of the language 
proposals for the economy, educational attainment or workforce training. Seeking to 
model after Singapore’s language education policy at the time, the committee’s report 
emphasized the importance of the contribution of diasporic civilizations and how this 
could be maintained by adapting a “3+1” style language policy:

We are lucky to have easy access, with just a little effort, to two international 
languages and to several rich and widely used Asian languages. We have to 
encourage everyone to learn three languages... Your Committee feel it should be 
their duty to make the ancestral cultures and civilisations of all the components of

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the Mauritian nation known and understood to our children... all Mauritians should be familiar with the main cultures and civilisations that have contributed towards the making of the Mauritian nation... language, being also a vehicle of culture, must be given its importance in order to understand and preserve worthwhile ancestral values.\footnote{Report of The Select Committee on The Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E.), No. 7 of 1986. p. 10.}

This vision of a language policy based in the maintenance of diasporic cultural connection left little room for local cultural notions of nativity or hybridity. While the committee and a majority of its submissions believed that French should remain a compulsory part of the CPE exams (the committee stated that “French has become a Mauritian fact... It belongs to all Mauritians”\footnote{Ibid, p. 6.}), they concluded that students should also be given the opportunity to be optionally tested in one Asian language. For Creole students forgoing Asian language instruction, the committee proposed an optional test in a newly proposed course entitled “Cultures and Civilisations in Mauritius” (or CCM) in place of an Asian language. This course would aim at “making children aware of the rich cultural heritage of Mauritius, in order to preserve that heritage and encourage understanding and mutual respect.”\footnote{Report of The Select Committee on The Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E.), No. 7 of 1986. p. 11} Kreol was not considered to be taught or tested on the CPE in this proposal (Eriksen, 1988), and while Asian and European civilizations were cited as integral to a multicultural education policy, African or Creole history and culture was never mentioned in the committee’s report.

From the perspective of Orientalist elites, promotion of the Asian languages was not only crucial for the maintenance of an Indian cultural diaspora, but it was also necessary to further increase the Hindu state’s own legitimation in the eyes of the
industrialized world. The worth of Asian culture is also bolstered in this symbiotic arrangement. As Eisenlohr states:

According to Armoogum Parsuraman, Minister of Education from 1984 to 1995, the Mauritian government attempts to combat the negative consequences of economic modernization by the introduction of ‘human values’ and ‘cultural values’ into the school curriculum, which in turn are to be promoted through the study of ancestral languages (Parsuraman 1988, n.d.). This has provided an opportunity for the Hindu activist network and the Mauritian state to collaborate in areas of common interest and has bolstered state support of instruction in Hindi and other ‘Asian’ languages seen as bearers of cultural values (2006, p. 47).

Speaking at the 1991 World Urdu Conference, Jugnauth announced his plan to provide an official status to the Asian languages that would put it on the same footing as French and English (Mauritius Times, December 1991). But the possible public backlash to the proposal was a major concern of government officials that repeatedly delayed its implementation, as they sought to negotiate the terms of Asian language inclusion with outside groups while staving off growing discontent among Indo-Mauritian sociocultural organizations lobbying for the CPE policy. Part of the delay on this policy was the inability for government to agree on a curriculum for “Cultures and Civilisations in Mauritius,” the general course option in Mauritian history and culture for students not taking an Asian language, which each select committee found necessary to provide a balanced opportunity for all Mauritian students to be tested equally in a fifth course. This course was part of a deal made with MMM members of Parliament. However, the policy was pushed through in mid-1995 by Prime Minister Jugnauth—without an equivalent CCM course—in a hurried attempt just prior to the upcoming December national elections that same year. Still, many Orientalist activists and Hindu organizations remained dismayed by the near-decade delay in the implementation of the policy.
After the testing of Asian languages was finally adopted as official government policy, a group of Creole citizens and sociocultural organizations created the *Front Commum*, led by Jean Yves Violette, Francoise Labelle, and Lindsay Morvan. This group organized a public campaign against the policy and ultimately appealed to the Supreme Court of Mauritius. *Front Commun* presented a case to the Supreme Court by arguing that the policy would give an unfair advantage to Indo-Mauritian students taking the CPE exams, who would be able to increase their CPE ranking score with a fifth subject over other students only testing in four subjects. In September 1995, the Supreme Court struck down Jugnauth’s policy as unconstitutional on the grounds that it set up unequal opportunities between students.

During the same year, the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA) pushed the government to enact legislation allowing Catholic secondary schools to reserve for Christian students a percentage of seats awarded for success on the CPE, which they believed would also better preserve the Catholic teachings and traditions of RCEA school curricula. At the time, an increasing percentage of seats in these prestigious schools were going to non-Catholic Indo-Mauritian students. However, because the RCEA schools—which are not government schools—received government funds (alike all religious-based schools), this proposal was met with protest from Indo-Mauritian activists who saw it as an attempt to bar their entrance into these schools on the basis of ethnic discrimination. Since the RCEA schools were among the most competitive schools in the country, Indo-Mauritians favored an insistence on meritocracy in school admissions and pushed for the awarding of seats based solely on CPE exam scores and rankings.
In this debate, there was an underlying assumption that in a true meritocracy, Indians would dominate as pupils within these top schools, and Creoles (who made up most of the Catholic students in state-funded schools, since Franco-Mauritians overwhelmingly attended highly-segregated elite private schools) would not be able to compete intellectually without the allocation of reserved seats. This idea also bolstered feelings that Creoles would receive unfair benefits from the state without putting in the same amount of work as Indo-Mauritians, who characterized themselves as more hard-working and dedicated to the pursuit of education. Because the RCEA issue and the CPE issue came up for political evaluation in the same year, both sides expected a compromise between policies, where Indo-Mauritians would be awarded either one issue or the other in their favor. By the end of the year, the government awarded 50 percent reserved seats to the RCEA.

Many Hindu leaders publicly denounced the government’s inability to both implement the CPE policy proposal and defeat the proposal of the RCEA. They saw this as a failure of the MSM-MLP alliance and evidence of the continued denigration of Indian culture. Leading up to these events, Prime Minister Jugnauth was viewed by many as the leader of the Hindus and was pressured to uphold the interests of the Orientalist lobby, chiefly in the testing of Asian languages. Sir Satcam Boolell, then a leading politician in

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79 Prime Minister Jugnauth, however, consistently rejected this stance, arguing that he was dedicated to the democratic governance of all Mauritians. This pressure to represent Hindus, however, as an ethnically Hindu politician, became a consistent bone of contention throughout Jugnauth’s tenure between 1983 and 1995. Doubts about Jugnauth’s commitment to the Hindu community (represented by his inability to fully institute the Oriental languages during his tenure) was part of the reason the MSM lost power in the elections of 1995.
the MLP, spoke of the importance of Hindu solidarity in securing their continued right to political domination, at a political rally in Petit Raffray in 1990:

Analysis of the figures from previous elections shows we ended up winning some districts by a razor-thin margin... If we don’t win these close races, we don’t get in power. With Hindu votes alone, we can win 13 districts, but that is not enough to take power... If you play around with [Hindu unity], you may lose it... So long as Hindus stay united, the country will be stable. And the prime minister needs to be Hindu for a long time to come. It is only natural: in England, an Indian or an African would be crazy to try to replace Mrs. Thatcher as prime minister. It is natural for the majority community to stay in power. It should have the prime ministership.\(^{80}\)

This fear of Indo-Mauritian or Hindu unity was a common topic in the media in 1990, centered on the government’s creation of new census categories that would recognize religious sects and castes within the Indo-Mauritian community, as well as additional smaller language groups such as Marathi and Gujrathi, which were previously unrecognized. Many believed that this would further fracture the Hindu community, which was already believed to be in dire need of greater unity.

This disillusionment with the MSM-MLP government is expressed by Suttyhudeo Tengur, then President of the Government Hindi Teacher’s Union and secretary general of the National Conference on Hindi, at the National Conference on the Promotion and Teaching of Hindi in April 1991: “The Hindu community, Hindu culture and religion, as well as Asian languages in general, have experienced a decline and are finding it difficult to regain their previous position. The politicians whom we voted for at the time of the last general elections have done nothing to defend our interests and resolve our problems.”\(^{81}\)

Tengur also connects the lack of further Asian language promotion with the death of the

\(^{80}\) _Le Mauricien_, 2 Mar 1990.
\(^{81}\) _Le Mauricien_, 12 April 1991, p. 4.
Asian community at large. He states: “We cannot exist without a language. There is no community or nation without a language. Culture will no longer exist without a language. And when there is no culture, there is no difference between human beings and other animal species.” During this time, many Indo-Mauritian elites voiced disappointment with the decrease in pupils taking Asian language courses and the inability for many Indo-Mauritians—even those highly educated in government and politics—to speak an Asian language. Many Indo-Mauritians instead relied on Kreol and English for most of their public and private communication, and this trend was steadily increasing with younger generations.

Bissoonauth’s (1998) study analyzes the social determinants of the language choices of Mauritian students in 1992 and 1993, both in education and in everyday language use. He found that the general trend was that Kreol was the first language in the home across all the ethnic population groups sampled, and French and English were spoken and studied secondarily. On the opposite end of the spectrum, not only had the study and usage of the Asian languages among the population continued to decline, but they were viewed by most students across all ethnic groups as having little practical use outside of religious institutions (ibid). Kreol, however, remained the dominant language, although most students did not support the institutionalization and study of Kreol in the school system, neither as a cultural language course nor as the medium of instruction. In addition, parents also responded that they preferred their children learn English first, French second, and Kreol third, in ranking order, but most parents did not list the Asian

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82 Ibid.
83 Stein’s (1982) study also supports these findings.
languages as favored languages for their children to learn (ibid). These usage patterns illustrate the disjuncture between the experiences and practices of everyday Indo-Mauritians with the Asian languages and the rhetoric of Hindu elites and activists who used the languages to politically unify Indo-Mauritians from the top down. In the Mauritius Times, for instance, P. Maureemootoo writes that a further rejection of the Asian languages on the CPE was evidence of continued Asian devaluation in Mauritian society:

A country of a people will never be completely free if its culture, its religion, its language continue to be ranked as second-class. The adoption of Asian languages in our schools is a milestone in the development of this country—the cultural emancipation of the majority population and, eventually, as experience has shown here and elsewhere in the past, the cultural emancipation of the whole country. For a country to be at peace with itself, there must be parity of esteem between the cultures of the various people composing it. Without parity of esteem some groups cannot escape a sense of personal humiliation. If this desideratum is applicable to minorities, just think how vital it is for the majority in a democracy.⁸⁴

Despite their heavy promotion by the government since independence, the decline of the Asian languages further induced fears among elites of their loss of sociopolitical power, and spurred desires to further incentivize their study within the school system.⁸⁵

Once the Supreme Court shut down the government’s decision to institute the Asian languages, there was public backlash from many Indo-Mauritian elites who felt that this was a setback for the Indian fight for esteemed recognition in Mauritian society. The CPE issue led to the ultimate fall of Jugnauth’s governmental reign in 1995, and the MLP’s Navin Ramgoolam (son of former Prime Minister Seewoosagur Ramgoolam) won the

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⁸⁵ At the same time, although there was a widespread perception of decreasing Asian language course enrollment, nearly 70 percent of primary school students were enrolled in an Asian language course (Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Arabic, and/or Mandarin) in 1992 (Bissoonauth, 1998).
subsequent national elections later that year with a commitment to instituting the Asian languages. The new Ramgoolam government re-formulated the recommendations of the previous select committees on the Asian language issue by reserving a set number of seats for students scoring the best on the Asian language tests, which were still considered optional (Ramharai, 2007). N. Ramgoolam’s immediate response was to appeal the Supreme Court’s decision to the Privy Council of the British Commonwealth in 1996, which eventually overturned the Supreme Court’s decision in 1998. By 2003, the CPE exam policy was modified to finally include the Asian languages in an arrangement where the best five out of six grades (for those taking an optional Asian language course) would be considered for ranking purposes (ibid).

However, Ramharai (2007) argues that the lack of structural support for the Asian languages outside of the primary school setting (where the languages are solely linked with the CPE and have little more to do in the lives of Mauritian students) did not increase language usage rates for the Asian languages or the number of students choosing to study these languages, which had only further declined by this point. For instance, because there is no need to know an Asian language for employment outside of Asian language teaching, there is little incentive to learn the languages beyond primary schooling. Likewise, the delay in linking Asian language learning with the CPE exam rankings also disincentivized the need and function of the languages for students. Linguistic inclusion, in this policy, amounted solely to the recognition of ethnic identity without identity being exercised for a practical purpose.
While the Kreol language was not much on the radar of Creole ethnic activists at the time, the 1995 CPE issue made the Kreol language relevant to a new conceptualization of language education policy after the striking down of the government’s decision on the Asian languages. While the Front Commun had not initially sought to fight for the inclusion of Kreol in education policy (this was only later taken on as a lobbying issue), their ability to block Asian language inclusion on the exam further opened up a discussion about the importance of education for Creole advancement and the role of Kreol for poor and marginalized children in public schooling. This particular policy struggle, however, was not focused on the recognition and inclusion of the Kreol language, or even the recognition of Creoles in state policy. It was instead about a perceived advantage that would be given to Indo-Mauritian students over Creole students, who would not be able to partake in the same opportunity without needing to acquire an Asian language. Many Creoles viewed this as an “imposition” of Asian culture on students from other ethnic communities. But this policy struggle was equally about interests as it was about identity. This is because the CPE exam was the only means by which most Indo-Mauritian and Creole students could enter secondary schools, and the need to competitively excel in a new subject would also increase the workload of all students. This problem was particularly acute given the low percentages of students who were able to pass the exam each year across all communities.

For the Afro-Creole identity movement, this moment in 1995 was the first time that Creoles were able to organize collectively from the grassroots in civil society, and receive a government response, while working outside of the confines of the Catholic Church. Crucial to this moment was the use of the courts in checking the state. In this
way, Creole ethnic activists were treated as a distinct lobby with public influence, while demonstrating that the state could be responsive to the needs of their community.

However, this event also solidified a concern with the increased control of the state by Hindus, as the Privy Court and the Supreme Court were viewed as moral arbiters distinct from the Mauritian government that litigated between two distinct groups—Hindus (representing the government) and Creoles (a group within society). With this, Creoles begin to see themselves as a collective group within a civic context—putting identity to action—but also a legitimate force against the Hindu-dominated state. However, while this event positively reinforced Creole mobilization and organizing, it would be the only instance in the subsequent decade in which Creole demands were able to be instituted, and in the end, it still ultimately reflected their exclusion from the policy process.

Moreover, the Creole identity issue was further exacerbated by the CPE issue because it further reflected the disjuncture in the ways Creoles viewed themselves and were viewed by non-Creoles. In particular, to Indo-Mauritian elites writing in the media, the Creole fight against the further institutionalization of the Asian languages was viewed as an affront to Asian culture by Creoles who lacked a culture of their own, as well as an attempt on the part of Creoles to erase the boundaries of other cultures. In an article in L’Express, Nirmal Deeah gives a pronounced definition of the origins of Creoles in her comments about Gaëtan Jacquette, the leader of Rassemblement Organisation Creole (ROC), a prominent Creole sociocultural organization working with Front Commun. She characterizes the leader’s origins as convoluted and culturally devoid:

But I would like to know what is the language of the ancestors of Gaëtan Jacquette? Is it French? A case of ‘Papa ou Grand-père était Breton,’ I presume. Or was it one
of the African languages, which so many Creoles look down upon these days?... Why this disdain for the Asian languages? Is there some sort of an inferiority complex, especially as everybody knows that the Indian and Chinese civilizations have far more to offer, both in terms of time-span and depth of thought than any other system? Who is a Creole in Mauritius? A Creole is a Mauritian of African origin, or who is of Indian origin but has been converted to Christianity, or of mixed European and African origin, or of mixed Indian and European origin, whose language is Creole and who is a Christian. He looks down upon his African and Indian origins and looks up to France for his cultural and other aspirations. But in France, and in Europe generally, such persons are looked down upon, whereas the real Africans and the real Indians are given a place of pride.”

In this passage, Deeah evokes a common refrain on Creole identity that continually casts the community as inferior based on their hybridity and cultural usurpation by the French. Such responses not only represent a widening of the gulf between Creoles and Indo-Mauritians on the language issue, it also leads to a disregarding of “le malaise créole” that exacerbates the socioeconomically unequal characteristics of ethnic politics.

The Death of “Kaya” and the 1999 Riots

One of the most notable figures in the Afro-Creole identity movement, Reginald “Kaya” Topize, was a young activist and musician also heralded as the father of “seggae”—a blending in the musical and philosophical elements of Mauritian sega and Jamaican reggae—and an inspirational figure in the community that promoted “Black consciousness.” By 1999, seggae had become an integral part of Mauritian popular culture that influenced artistry in various segments of the population. It was revolutionary in its lyrical style and placed Creole culture prominently in Mauritian national culture. Seggae was influenced by Rastafarian culture, which fit within a narrative of Creole nativity to the island that simultaneously “Africanized” Mauritian and Creole culture.

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Likewise, *sega* was influenced by American hip hop and espoused similar narratives of oppression and resistance in an ethnically stratified society. The Rastafarian lifestyle was also complimentary to the Creole lifestyle in many ways, and *sega* and *seggae* became synonymous with the experiences and cultures of fellow African slave descendants in other countries, particularly in the Caribbean. Through popular *sega* music (with its lyrics expressed in Kreol), Creoles were able to speak to each other through a counterpublic, while the popularity of Creole narratives and discourses increased the visibility of Creole culture in Mauritian society. In this way, *sega* and pop culture was a mobilizing force for Creoles to identify more with their African roots both nationally and abroad, whether through *sega*, American hip hop, or Caribbean reggae.

After publically smoking marijuana at a concert promoting its decriminalization in February 1999, Kaya was arrested and detained by Mauritian police. Some days later, he died mysteriously in police custody with evidence of physical trauma to his body. After a police-sanctioned autopsy cleared the police force of possible misconduct (and declared that Kaya’s death was self-inflicted), riots ensued in Roche Bois, beginning with clashes between Creole agitators and the police force before quickly devolving into ethnic clashes between Hindus and Creoles, leaving many injuries and deaths on both sides of the ethnic divide.87 For the notably peaceful country of Mauritius, the riots shocked the international world and left millions of dollars in damages.

To many Mauritians, the 1999 Riots was the culmination of the boiler plate that had been ignited by Father Cerveaux’s speech in 1993 and the frustration and energy

elicited by the 1995 CPE issue. Kaya’s death brought the issue of police brutality to the forefront, a problem that had plagued the Creole community throughout the 1990s as incarceration rates among Creole men increased. It became clear to many Creoles that greater action was needed to rectify Creole exclusion, as the community had reached even higher levels of unemployment, school drop-out and failure rates, drug abuse, poverty, and incarceration rates.

Moreover, the riots were a further example of the consolidation of the Hindu ethnic group and the state. Much of the violence took place between Creoles and Hindus, but originally began as a skirmish between Creoles and the Mauritian police force, which was overwhelmingly Hindu.\textsuperscript{88} While the riots were instigated by Creole youth attacking the police, government buildings, banks and businesses, they intensified when Hindu citizens began fighting against the Creole agitators in an effort to protect these Hindu-dominated enterprises, revealing a strong identity between Hindus and the state. In addition, the riots stimulated an increased awareness within the Creole community of the failures of a Hindu-dominated government to provide social and economic justice to Creoles. Gaëtan Jacquette of ROC explains:

[The government] has done everything to exasperate the Creole community. The Creole community is the population with the highest level of school failure. They have tried to impose oriental languages on Creole children, and when they did not succeed they call the Creole community demons. The young people throwing rocks at the police, why are they on the streets? It is because they have nothing to lose that they want to destroy everything (Cited in Baptisté, 2002, p. 83).

The domination of the civil service and police force was a common grievance of non-Hindus, who viewed this as a system of patronage. Although government officials

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
insisted that employment in the civil service and the police force was meritocratic, many
felt that the Hindu state set-up advantages in education that provided early benefits to
middle class Hindu students in a pipeline leading from the top secondary schools to
careers in government. Most Creoles (and the poor in general) were largely excluded from
this system. While meritocracy was supported in theory by most Creoles, the allocation of
non-meritocratic low-skilled jobs—such as janitorial and food service workers in
government offices—were also mostly taken up by Hindus, implying a patron-client
relationship with the state. This contributed to a feeling of targeted exclusion and
discrimination against Creoles from a Hindu-dominated state, exacerbating ethnic tensions
between the two majority groups. But the domination of Hindus in the public sector also
provided a concrete and more formidable opponent for Creoles to fight against (more
tangible and visible than economic markets, social patterns or difference-blind state
policies).

Eisenlohr (2006) explains that the antagonism between Creoles and Hindus stems
from the division between private and public labor, further stimulating Hindu
victimization and justification for their state domination. He writes:

In 1998 on the occasion of the mass of St. Louis, a senior cleric of the Roman
Catholic Church in Mauritius denounced the exclusion of Creoles from state jobs
in Mauritius, though without going as far as directly blaming Hindus for the
problem. The Hindu Council of Mauritius, however, promptly protested. The
president of the Hindu Council not only rejected the cleric’s claims, stating that it
was ‘normal’ that all qualified Hindus who were not hired by the Franco-Mauritian
controlled private sector expected to be hired by the state, but also proclaimed that
the Catholic priest had ‘hurt’ and insulted the Hindu community in Mauritius... In
this particular case, by pointing to the disadvantages many Hindus think they face
in the job market for more qualified positions in the private sector, the president of
the Hindu Council managed to draw on a long-standing grievance among Hindus
in Mauritius, which in a compensatory logic provided further legitimization for Hindu dominance in the state apparatus (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 43).

Many Indo-Mauritians who speak politically of Creoles commonly combine them within the “general population” category alongside Franco-Mauritians who control the banks, business and the private sphere (in many cases referring to them more generally as “Christians,” rather than Creoles). This lumping of the “Christians” is used to further justify Creole exclusion. Father Fanchette explains that Creole exclusion was not incidental, but a systematic, vengeful attack on the Creole community by Hindu elites who had taken over the government after independence:

*Lorsque nous avons lancé l’Organisation Fraternelle, la situation était la suivante. Nous avions voté contre l’indépendance et on nous le faisait payer. Déjà, à la transition, il y a eu cet exode, ces pressions. On a perdu 80,000 personnes formées. Nous étions devenus une population exsangue. Et on n’avait pas les moyens de former les gens rapidement. C’était la vengeance à tous les niveaux et c’est ce que a conduit à l’exclusion. Ça a continué comme ça. C’est ça le summum de l’injustice.*

For Fanchette and other Creole intellectuals, Creole exclusion was a purposeful move on the part of the Hindu leadership, who benefitted from the dis-recognition of Creoles and sought to maintain divisions between Asian and French culture.

The public-private division that had enflamed tensions between Creoles and Hindus is also exacerbated by the conflicting relationship between Creoles and Franco-Mauritians, who are dependent on one another within the private sector, as the Franco-Mauritian economic elite typically employ Creoles in their businesses. One activist member

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89 Lebrasse, J. “Interview: Phillipe Fanchette.” Week-End. 2 February 1997. Translation: “When we launched the Organization Fraternelle, the situation was as follows. We voted against independence and they made us pay. Already, at the transition, there was this exodus, these pressures. We lost 80,000 trained people. We had become a bloodless population. And we could not afford to train people quickly. It was revenge at all levels and that's what led to exclusion. It went on like that. This is the pinnacle of injustice.”
of the MMM describes this relationship between Franco-Mauritians and Creoles during the riots:

Look at what happened during the 1999 Riots. [The Hindus] were trying to tell the Creoles you have to not fight Hindus but fight the whites. The Creole said, no, no, no, the whites are with us... And during the 1999 Riots I witnessed this: The protesters, they attack... One from the MCB which is a white owned bank. The other from the SC Bank, a state bank. The only targets were state-owned targets, the police. They never attacked the white banks. You see, there is a practice among the white population to give work preferably to Creoles... And again the whole discourse of malaise creole, apart from Sylvio Michel, is not directed against the whites. It’s directed against the state” (Interview, 9 May 2013).

The activist further explains that the relationship between Creoles and Franco-Mauritians displayed a level of dependency and intimacy that stifled the possibility of a leadership structure within the Creole community. But at the same time, this arrangement also expanded the possibilities for Creole organizing. He states:

If I tell you that there is a Creole in the general population, people always try to separate them, but during the February 1999 Riots, there was a Franco-Mauritian elite who was worried about that, and I had friends that were executives and had meetings about what happened. On a big Franco-Mauritian bus, some were saying, ‘We Creoles are having problems with government.’ You see, identifying themselves with Creoles! Because the thing is, the general population acts politically as a group. Because they fear Hindu domination, they coalesce (Interview, 9 May 2013).

Here, religion and language make up the dividing line between groups instead of race, highlighting a cleavage between “native,” Francophone islanders and Indian immigrants.

Dinan, Nababsing and Mathur (1999) explain that this situation was created by the blocking of Indo-Mauritians from private employment by Franco-Mauritians who controlled the private sector during the independence period. They posit that:

Former political leaders now admit that there may have been an over-expansion of the public administration sector, but add that this may have been the only way to accommodate the then rapidly growing numbers of educated youth, especially of
Indian origin, who had no access to the private sector. This strategy may have averted a serious social crisis with ethnic undertones. Instead of trying to penetrate forcefully into the private sector through greater legal control or outright nationalization, the post-independence government preferred to build up parallel opportunities for those who did not have access to existing occupational structures (p. 77).

Another important outcome of the riots was the creation in 1999 of the *Lavoix Kreol* newspaper by Mario Flore, president of MMKA. This newspaper showcased a variety of articles from Creole journalists, ethnic activists and their allies who publically discussed their own “causal stories” about the plight of Creoles. Written in both French and Kreol as the first newspaper from the perspective of the “Afro-Creole,” *Lavoix Kreol* was a central site of public discourse within a newly-formed Creole public sphere (one distinct from the Catholic public sphere and that of the general public) that became popular within working and middle class Creole households. At the same time, it rose to a level of importance which placed it in opposition with the long-standing Hindu-run Mauritius Times, the Muslim-run The Star, and mainstream *Le Mauricien* and *L’Express* newspapers. Most importantly, this status meant that *Lavoix Kreol* was frequently being considered by Creole and non-Creole politicians in their decisions on policy issues. In this way, *Lavoix Kreol* created a space of critical dissent separate from the voice of Franco-Mauritians in *L’Express* or Hindus in the Mauritius Times.

In addition, the newspaper influenced the set of questions and answers that would represent the Creole voice in politics, including what comprised Creole ethnic interests, who were enemies to Creole interests, and who were their allies. Many of the newspaper’s topics also showed that a Creole ethnic identity that had previously been fragmented, self-loathing, and ambiguous had now become rooted, proud and unmistakable. For instance,
those regularly writing in the newspaper (including Gaëtan Jacquette and Norbert Benoît) made unequivocal proclamations regarding Creole identity, frequently using the phrase “the descendants of slaves” to address the community, and further emphasizing the narrative of their African roots. They also regularly featured a variety of articles on politics and society in mainland Africa, as well as the histories and current struggles of other groups within the Black diaspora (most notably Black Americans, but also Afro-Trinidadians, Afro-Brazilians, and other post-slavery groups). This illustrates the desire to directly root Creoles and the Creole experience in a broader global post-slavery experience of socioeconomic suffering and collective resistance to racial oppression.

Regarding the Kreol language issue, many articles also gave a perspective of the language that differed from that espoused by the Nationalists and in the general public, who viewed it above all as a trans-ethnic, neutral language. Creole leaders and activists conversely promoted it as “the language of the slaves.” A 2002 article entitled, “Les créoles en deuil de leur langue ancestrale,” unambiguously characterizes the Kreol language as a cultural artifact solely linked to the Creole community (while also nodding to its national predominance), and as such, explains the language’s lack of recognition as an affront on Creole schoolchildren specifically:

Or, alors que la langue créole est au mieux de sa forme dans l’archipel... ici la langue qu’ont légué les esclaves a leurs ancêtres créoles est quotidiennement piétinée. A ce jour, le gouvernement ne s’est toujours pas prononcé en faveur de l’introduction de la langue créole à l’école, alors que le ministre Steve Obeegadoo ose parler de réformes dans le secteur éducatif! Mais qui veut berner dans ce pays où l’on parle dix langues, dont plusieurs étrangères, comme le français, l’anglais, l’arabe et les langues ancestrales oriental, mais c’est seulement la langue créole, dite langue nationale, qui n’est pas prise en compte... Et a ce jour, le MMM a complètement trahi sa lutte pour la langue créole. Mais comme il est plus facile d’obliger les enfants créoles à apprendre des langues orientales que de leur faire, apprendre la langue de

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90 Translation: “The Creoles in mourning of their ancestral language.”
leurs ancêtres, alors tous les gouvernements ont joué bourré sur la question... Les descendants d'esclaves n'ont-ils pas droit à l'apprentissage de la langue de leurs ancêtres.\footnote{Lavoix Kreol. (1 February 2002). “Les creoles en deuil de leur langue ancestrale.” Translation: “Now, while the Creole language is on the best terms in the archipelago ... here the language that slaves have bequeathed to their creole ancestors is trampled every day. To date, the government has still not supported the introduction of the Creole language at school, while Minister Steve Obeegadoo dares to talk about reforms in the education sector! But who is to be fooled in this country where ten languages are spoken, including several foreign languages, such as French, English, Arabic and Oriental ancestral languages, but it is only the Creole language, known as the national language, which is not taken into account ... And to date, the MMM has completely betrayed its struggle for the Creole language. But since it is easier to oblige the creole children to learn Oriental languages than to have them to learn the language of their ancestors, then all the governments have played drunk on the question ... The descendants of slaves are not entitled to learn the language of their ancestors.”}

\textit{Lavoix Kreol} was instrumental to the spread of civic organizing in the Creole community, as it provided a platform bridging Creole ethnic activists, the Catholic Church, and the major political parties in the development of a Creole electorate increasingly unified in their socioeconomic and political interests. Although \textit{Lavoix Kreol} publicly supported both the PMSD and the Catholic Church, the newspaper also pushed back on much of the public discourse on the role of the Creole community and pressured the Church to become involved in Creole social justice issues. The newspaper also published most of its articles in Kreol (in addition to some articles in English and French) using LPT’s standardized form of the language, and in doing so further legitimized Kreol’s use as a written language while strengthening its connection to the Creole community. \textit{Lavoix Kreol}’s popularity also made it an important medium by which the government could gauge public opinion within the Creole community on a variety of issues. With the development of an increasingly influential Creole public sphere, the Hindu lobbies that had previously held power within government were faced with more competition in their pursuit of government policy as well.
These events marked the end of the period of Afro-Creole identity development by solidifying Creole group boundaries and directly stimulating more community-based political organizing and government lobbying. Following this moment was a growth in Creole civil society organizations, as the Creole leadership recognized a powerful force within the community that could be mobilized in a more targeted way with the right opportunities, direction and circumstances. Thus in a variety of ways, the aftermath of the 1999 Riots stimulated a stronger focus on identity and ethnicity than previous events had, and Creole activists went beyond questions of one’s place in the cultural mosaic to action towards the elimination of discrimination and targeted exclusion based on their racial difference. Paramount to this shift was also the awareness of two other dividing lines that overlapped with ethnicity—state patronage and the public versus the private labor market—in addition to socioeconomic inequality.

**The Rise of the Fédération Créole Mauricien**

Alongside the political activism of OF, Front Commun, MMKA and other organizations, the Fédération Créole Mauricien (FCM) had a major impact on the direction of politics and policy after its creation in 2001. FCM was an umbrella organization of several Creole associations that banded together under the leadership of Father Jocelyn Gregoire, a Creole priest and musician. Including other prominent activists such as Jean Yves Violette (leader of Front Commun), Jimmy Harmon and Edley Chimon, FCM was a civil society organization and lobbying group representing Creole sociopolitical interests. However, what differed about the FCM was Father Gregoire’s ability to create an avenue for charismatic leadership within the Catholic Church (in particular, his American R&B
and *sega*-inspired gospel music) and combine this with the political activism that had arisen within the community over a range of issues focusing on Creole recognition.

As a charismatic leader, Father Gregoire gave powerful, expressly political sermons, and he was also a gospel singer who gave popularity to spiritual songs through the medium of *sega*. Both his songs and speeches were popular in many Creole households, and his oratory style (similar to the performatory style of Black American Protestant preachers) enlivened Catholic churches dominated by Creoles. Gregoire’s popular gospel *sega* songs were important to this ministry to the Creole public. This music was used to mobilize Creoles in a way that informed what they understood as more authentic, grassroots interpretations of their experiences. Gospel *sega* music also provided a repertoire of discourses from which other Creole political activists could draw from in their attempts to infiltrate and influence the policy process. Using *sega* and the burgeoning Creole leadership within the Catholic Church, FCM facilitated greater levels of community-building among Creoles through their high levels of religious engagement. Under Father Gregoire’s leadership, Creoles were mobilized in civil society and at the polls in ways that had never been done before.

The Catholic Church was now the site for much civil society organizing, but this activism increasingly placed Creoles—rather than Franco-Mauritians—at the lead, as Creoles came to represent a larger proportion of the Church leadership. Father Gregoire, Father Filip Fanchette, and other Creole religious leaders used their charisma to shift the organizing capacity of the Church—preferring to speak in Kreol rather than French and addressing the specific sociopolitical interests of their Creole members. This new
charismatic leadership conveyed revolutionary speech that was both highly religious and political, and their actions showed signs of respect, comradery and brotherhood from the Church towards the Creole community. They also helped to legitimize Kreol as a cultural artifact of value by pushing for the translation of the Bible in Kreol.

In an interview with La Vie Catholique, Father Gregoire describes the plight of Creoles as not only a matter of recognition, but of self-determination. This underscores the feelings of marginalization many Creoles felt from the private sphere and the state, where they have been left to fend for themselves in an arena of ethnic competition:

The Creole cause has been gained. We have had our identity affirmed and at the level of the Constitution it is not yet a reality. Already the derogatory terms have decreased. There is a sense of pride in the Creole identity. We hear less and less the label ‘ti Creole.’ However, we recognize that there is a problem. One cannot accuse the government, the Church or other bodies. Responsibility is shared. The efforts of various partners must be combined together. The head is the Creole itself. He can no longer sit back believing that everything will fall down from the sky. He must take his destiny. Starting with making his own mea culpa.92

In its original conception, the FCM continued the tradition of organizing with a focus on the Church as the locus of opportunity for the empowerment of the community, rather than pushing for government intervention. But in 2004, at the Champ de Mars in Port Louis, the FCM organized one of the largest rallies of Creoles for a political purpose since pre-independence politics. Since 1993, there had been sporadic attempts at lobbying in the policy-making process that—with the exception of the 1995 CPE issue—largely failed. However, the rally took place just prior to the 2005 national elections and yielded such large crowds that the FCM was later able to lobby the N. Ramgoolam government on behalf of Creole political interests. One of the central demands of the FCM to the

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92 La Vie Catholique, 24-30 October, 2008.
government was to replace the category “General Population” with “Creole” to officially separate them from the Franco-Mauritians. This proposal was and continues to be rejected. But from this point on, FCM’s organizing strategy would shift from community mobilization to political action.

The creation of the FCM was a springboard for the participation of Creoles in the policy process, with Creole activists and politicians working together across party lines to negotiate policies in the interests of a newly-mobilized Creole electorate. As a result, Creole ethnic leaders were able to wield considerable influence over public policy at the apex of the Afro-Creole movement. As such, the building of ethnic identity and political power provided momentum within a democratic context in which groups and factions wield considerably more influence in civil society than the individual.

**Africanity and Creolité**

These five punctuations represent moments that influenced the trajectory of Afro-Creole identity-building, and throughout this period two dominant ideologies also competed for influence in the Creole public sphere: Africanity and creolité. Similar to Mauricianisme in its embracement of cultural hybridity, creolité focuses on racial descent, embracing the concept of metissage as both a biological fact and a cultural aspiration. It professes that Creoles are a diverse and predominately mixed racial group that represents the “creole island.” As an ideology, it also seeks to construct a more global identity with other island nations and promotes a cosmopolitan, transracial and transnational identity beyond that of the nation-state. Creolité is especially popular among Creole youth. Parallel to the Kreol language issue within the community, creolité promoted the idea that on the
One hand, to be Creole was to be mixed, as a distinct feature from other groups (including those from mainland Africa) that ought to be embraced in its own right. On the other hand, within the context of enslavement and colonialism in the island nation, African heritage is also a necessary part of this hybridity that also defines what it means to be a “Creole” as distinct from other mixed race groups. This highlights the fact that créolité has only been articulated as a discourse within the boundaries of the Creole community, although there are some who claim that all island inhabitants of any race should also be considered Creole.

One manifestation of this influence in the community is the Festival International Kréol, which has been organized every year in Mauritius by NMCAC and the Ministry of Arts and Culture since 1986. The tension between Africanity and créolité plays out most strikingly at this festival, which hosts a mix of traditional Afro-Malagasy and contemporary Creole performances while also emphasizing the cultural connections between those of African descent across the Mascarene Islands. At the 2012 festival, several Creole community leaders spoke at the conference entitled “Kréolité, nou lidantité” (“Créolité, our identity”). A speech given by Jean Clément Cangy, on the one hand, describes the racial oppression experienced by both Mauritian Creoles and other slave descendants within the Black diaspora, based on their African origins. Cangy argues that Mauritian créolité provides a similar foundation for the pride in their African origins as negritude has provided for blacks in other countries:

In Seychelles, Guadeloupe and Martinique I have met people who are proud of their ‘Creolité’ and identity; as proud as President Obama and his wife Michelle, who say that they are proud to be Black when they say that this portion of negritude is part of their American identity. In Mauritius today, there is no
problem to say that we are Creoles. Meanwhile, it can be seen that we lack some pride; perhaps that we are still ashamed because of our body, skin and hair. In Seychelles and the Caribbean, a lot has been done to the re-construction of the Seychelles, Guadeloupe and Martinique people. Let us remember Aimé Césaire in the beginning of the previous century, in the 90s, who was the mayor and deputy in Martinique, but who was above all a great poet for the Blacks; and who said: ‘This old word ‘negro’ that you have thrown with disdain at me, I accept it and I claim myself a ‘negro’ – yes I am a negro!’ It can be said that negritude is somewhat the predecessor of ‘Creolity.’ (Festival International Kréol, 24 November 2012).

But several moments later, Cangy gives a different conception of creolité and its relationship to Creole identity in his speech:

Creole culture and language is what constitute the Creole identity: ‘Creolity.’ ‘Creolity’ is not a static identity. It is an evolving identity because of all the mixing that there is in society; whereby it is not only mixing amongst the people, but cultural, musical and culinary crossbreeding. Because of all the process of crossbreeding, the Creole identity is bound to evolve and welcome others, since it is an identity which is fundamentally open. It is an identity which welcomes everyone and is open to all, but it is also an identity which is marked by tolerance of all that is found around it. So this is 'Creolity'. (Festival International Kréol, 24 November 2012).

Because creolité exists as a discourse exclusively within the Creole community, it implies that Creoles are the only ones that can be recognized as mixed race and are therefore the only group to lose out to the adoption of either creolité or Mauricianisme. This is because both discourses make the Afro-Creole identity a residual, amalgamation of what is left over from other ethnic groups that have been able to create and maintain distinct, seemingly permanent boundaries. Even though much academic research has demonstrated the “mixedness” of Mauritians across all groups, most people are still aware that metissage identifies one as Creole, and this does not include other ethnic mixtures, such as individuals of Indo- and Sino-Mauritian descent. Thus there is a similar, less rigid “one-drop” rule that exists in Mauritius that facilitates Creole racial designation. It is not only
that African blood designates a Creole, but that African blood means that one is no longer part of an ethnically-defined group (Hindu, Chinese, etc.) and has become a residual member of society.

There is still some tension between Africanity and créolité within the community, but both are generally viewed as integral to a definition of the “Afro-Creole,” which has now been attached to a wider identity movement connected to peoples in Madagascar, Reunion and other parts of the Mascarene Islands. Most importantly, this transnational identity is not just cultural, but it is based in a shared experience that has structured the socioeconomic roles of descendants of slaves for generations, even as these roles have changed and adapted to new wider economic configurations. According to Vaughan (2005), créolité and “the Creole island” is nevertheless based in a common historical connection to slavery that has served to be a curse for Creoles in present-day politics. She states:

Slavery and the struggles against it constituted the only common history binding together gens de couleur and ex-apprentices – all those who would later come to be known as ‘Creoles.’ This might not have mattered but for the fact that, simultaneously, members of the heterogeneous community of Indians were successfully building new identities on the basis of real and imagined common origins. The game of multiculturalism had begun, and the Creole population, dispossessed by the twin processes of enslavement and emancipation, would lose (Vaughan, 2005, p. 276).

Similarly, Boswell (2006) explains that:

[I]t remains difficult for Creoles to ‘defend’ their ethnic boundary, mainly because the boundary is porous and is established by outsiders. The external definition of the Creoles, their treatment as a residual category and their marginalization, has resulted in a culturally open, largely impoverished mixed group of people. Their situation presents major problems for them in a society that deplores mixing and hybridity (p. 6).
Nevertheless, individuals identifying as Creole-Chinois, Creole-Madras, and Creole Milatt are increasingly becoming less and less common, while those identifying as “Afro-Creole,” ti-Kreol,” or just “Creole” are becoming more common. This is not because black-Chinese, black-Indian, or black-white unions are decreasing or have disappeared, but because it has become more crucial for Creoles to more heavily demarcate their ethno-racial boundary in recent decades (Baptiste, 2002).93

The shift towards the focus on Afro-Creole culture was also motivated by the desire to carve a cultural space that was not previously in place. After independence, breaking free of French cultural and political supremacy was the preoccupation of the new Hindu-dominated state, and so the main oppositional cleavage in Mauritian society was between Eastern and Western culture. As such, Creoles were culturally portrayed in public discourse as a rootless people, subsumed within French culture and the Catholic religion, with little agency as a distinct group. Many Creoles also began to view their political location within the “general population” as a form of dis-recognition that exacerbated their marginalization in society. Although they were culturally similar to Franco-Mauritians (both groups being Christian and Francophone), Creoles lacked the economic and social power of the Franco-Mauritians and remained disempowered within a stark racial hierarchy. This was especially visible within the ranks of the Catholic Church.

Roughly between 1986 and 2004, an Afro-Creole consciousness has developed through the merging of African-based philosophical and cultural elements with Creole

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93 These intermixtures are a relatively large sector of the Creole group due to the high proportion of male Chinese and Indian immigrant laborers that immigrated to Mauritius in the early period of indentured labor and took Creole wives. See Baptiste (2002). However, many Chinese laborers who married Creole women were also shunned within the Chinese community (Lau Thi Keng, 1991).
culture, but also as an effect of the shared socioeconomic and political experiences that Creole ethnic activists have been able to articulate within their own subaltern public sphere. As such, Afro-Creole identity has developed as both a symbolic and a social boundary based largely in class difference and the relationship of the Creole community to the state. Socioeconomic and political structures thus have a large influence on the development of ethnic boundaries and identity, including their salience and positioning vis-à-vis other groups, and the desire for ethnic leaders to construct these boundaries.

While the unearthing of the African basis of Creole culture was important on a psychosocial level, it was also politically important in spurring group unity and collective mobilization to counteract the problems the community faced on a variety of fronts. After the year 2000, these factors have culminated in a desire for official recognition that could further facilitate collective mobilization in the political arena, as well as self-determination at the local level.

To conclude, the Afro-Creole identity movement set the foundation for policy work post-2000, and the negotiation between multiple ethnic lobbies subsequent to this development paints a picture of the limits and possibilities of Creole inclusion in Mauritius’ multicultural framework. The movement culminated in a decisive event (not gone unnoticed by the government) that gave saliency to the collective aims of the Creole community, when in October 2006, a large rally led by Father Gregoire launched the *Fédération Créole Mauricien* (FCM), focusing on their shared history, culture, religion, and ancestral language as a distinctive group.
In the end, the Afro-Creole identity movement served as a force of mobilization for Creole ethnic activists within civil society. An increase in Creole civic associations took on both interest and identity-based issues by lobbying the government on multiple issues, including the recognition of Creole folklore in national heritage, calls for historical reparations for slavery, and finally, the inclusion of Kreol in language education policy. The next chapter chronicles this pursuit through the successes and failures of Creole ethnic activists as they navigate the policy arena, the next step in the solidification of group identity and multicultural inclusion.
Chapter 6 – Creole Policy Activism and the Race for Recognition

Recognition is an integral aspect of social identity. At the micro-level, group recognition ensures the dignity and worth of individuals and the groups they feel a belonging to. According to Charles Taylor (1992), the lack of cultural recognition in societies that practice “procedural liberalism” (a distinctly difference-blind application of the law) is tantamount to the infliction of emotional harm against individuals in previously marginalized groups. Accordingly, he states that:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absense, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being... Within these perspectives, misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition... is a vital human need (Taylor, 1992, p. 25-26).

Yet alongside their socioeconomic and political marginalization, the Creole community remains excluded from official multiculturalism and the Census, and are generally unrecognized by government and within Mauritian society. At the tail-end of the Afro-Creole identity movement, this lack of recognition became the main struggle of Creole ethnic activists, who shifted from organizing for the creation of socioeconomic policies as a remedy to “le malaise créole” to the rights of recognition. This shift entailed a focus on the empowerment of the community itself, rather than the external socioeconomic circumstances in which it was found. Creoles continued to rely on the Catholic Church and other private interest-based organizations in navigating their daily lives. But the rise of the Fédération Créole Mauricien (FCM) after the year 2000 shows that
the political arena had become an attractive place for Creole activists to lead the project of identity-building as community-building in a manner similar to the ethnic boundary construction of Asian-descended groups in the independence era.

The Creole struggle for recognition was taken up in three policy areas that each influenced and built off of each other throughout the decade following the 1999 Riots. This chapter explicates the fight for two of these policies by Creole ethnic activists seeking to facilitate their inclusion in Mauritian multiculturalism as an ethnic body. These policies include the recognition of Creole history and folklore in the designation of national heritage sites and the fight for historical restitution and reparations for slavery. Each of these policy struggles were the product of an upsurge of Creole political mobilization and lobbying efforts that, although they did not exactly realize the goals of Creole ethnic activists, helped increase the capacity for Creole organizing.

Through an analysis of these policies, I explain why organizing on these issues unfolded the way it did, given the institutional and ideational constraints of the different political actors involved in the policy process. Government responses to these policy struggles, however, showed a continued reticence to fully incorporate Creole demands for recognition into official multiculturalism. I argue that although these policies were eventually adopted, they failed to provide Creoles with more than symbolic policy representation because they created tensions between racial and national boundaries that

94 Other policies that were pushed by Creole activists included the abolishment of the term “general population” and the inclusion of the category “Creole” as an ethnic group recognized in the Constitution, as well as the creation of an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) that would combat racial and ethnic discrimination while designing measures for affirmative action in the civil service. These policies, however, either did not make it beyond the government’s agenda (in the case of the “Creole” category in the Constitution) or were eventually developed in a different form (in the case of the EOC).
highlighted the cultural nativity and racial distinction of Creoles. Both of these conceptualizations of group boundaries are problematic to the framework of diasporic multiculturalism. In addition, beyond exclusion from multiculturalism, Creoles also experienced a dis-recognition by society and government that further injured their collective organizing. Dis-recognition as such is more than just the lack of recognition—it is a discursive political strategy used by other ethnic elites to disarm Creole demands for recognition and state consideration while ignoring conceptualizations of group identity based on racialized socioeconomic experience or demands for remedies to racial injustice. At the same time, the multicultural framework continues to permit the articulation of diasporic cultural distinction, encouraging state support for Hindu ethnic elites in their scramble to counteract Creole policies with competing policies further privileging diaspora and the experience of indentured servitude in particular. Through these policy battles, the boundaries of the nation were once again upset by a central juxtaposition between “Little India” and the “Creole Island.”

In the end, these policies were considered by many Creole activists to be successes with negative unintended consequences, and they viewed the end result of these policies as politically expedient for government officials seeking more endorsement for multiculturalism, but substantively weak in their ability to provide greater levels of inclusion for the community. Nevertheless, these policy struggles served as precursors to the ethnicization of the Creole community in their future political organizing. Throughout the negotiation of these policies, being recognized or “named” became central to the struggle of Creole activists, while the consistent dis-recognition of the community by non-
Creole political actors continued as a strategy in which the recognition of Creole identity (both racial and ethnic) was denied.

**Colorblindism and Recognition in Multicultural Policy**

In addition to multiculturalism, colorblindism has structured the ideological and institutional terrain in which policies for Creole recognition have been played out. As an aspect of difference-blind liberalism, it is a concept requiring the non-recognition of racial difference in state policies and institutions in pursuit of an equal playing field for all racial groups. As an ideology, it has traditionally sought to remedy the preferences given to dominant groups prior to the dismantling of colonialism, ethnonationalism and white supremacy by getting rid of preferences altogether, including those given to subordinate groups. Fundamentally, both multiculturalism and colorblindism seek antiracist outcomes. But colorblindism also exists in tension with policies of multiculturalism, as multiculturalism seeks to recognize group boundaries and treat them as equal while colorblindism seeks to ignore group boundaries as a method of equalizing them.

Many race scholars have therefore argued that the colorblind stance of governments in many societies actually serves to perpetuate racial divisions by obscuring them under the realities of class inequality. Goldberg (1993) states that because the concept of race is “transdiscursive,” colorblindism (which is embedded in the difference-blindness of liberalism) has enabled modern racism to continue, and has even increased its power by allowing it to operate under the radar through neologisms of cultural, ethnic, and even

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95 This generally does not apply to differences that proponents of colorblindness view as having a more effectual impact on the lives of citizens—such as gender, age, ability, or class—as these differences elicit policy considerations for groups deemed more vulnerable and/or more deserving, such as mothers, children, the elderly, the mentally-ill, or the homeless.
class difference. In addition, in his survey of white American attitudes towards race, Bonilla-Silva (2003) discovers that colorblindism is used as a new form of oppressive rhetoric, what he calls “colorblind racism,” which seeks to eliminate the idea of race while maintaining racialized social hierarchies through coded language. Given that race and class tend to overlap considerably in plural societies due to past stratification in occupation, citizenship status, and historical experience (among other variables), the displacement of racial categories with class-based ones (particularly, the idea of an “underclass”) makes real racial inequalities invisible without allowing the space to solve these problems because of their racial nature (Goldberg, 1993). Colorblindism also has the effect of not only perpetuating racial boundaries but naturalizing and legitimizing them.

In sync with its principles as a liberal democracy, the Mauritian government also actively promotes a colorblind ideology. Although colorblindism appears to be in tension with multiculturalism in the public sphere, together they serve as the conceptual toolkit with which political actors can legitimately engage in public discourse and political action. As such, the Mauritian government seeks to recognize diversity by placing value on cultural differences while ignoring racial differences and their sociopolitical outcomes (including racialized socioeconomic inequality). This dual face of multiculturalism has been promoted in multiple ways, most notably by the replacement of racial categories with ethnic ones in the Constitution, but also with the discontinuation of collecting government census data on race or ethnicity in 1982.

The author also argues that liberalism itself is not neutral but inherently racial, legitimizing “racialized conditions and racist exclusions” in a way that naturalizes the neutrality of the dominant group while racializing subaltern groups as “the Other.”
While the Mauritian Constitution expressly ignores racial difference, it was also set up in such a way as to facilitate the recognition of ethnic difference, particularly for those groups that had been previously unrecognized and relegated to second-class subjects of a white supremacist colonial regime. Therefore the post-independence Census included the recognition of decidedly “ethnic” groupings such as “Hindu,” “Muslim,” and “Chinese.” A fourth category, “General Population”—lumped together any residual groups that did not fit into the first three, and this includes Creoles, Franco-Mauritians, and those of mixed descent, as well as Christian and non-religious Indo-Mauritians. Mauritius’ “Best Losers System” designates Parliamentary seats for minority groups (non-Hindus) based on these ethnic categories. With this emphasis on cultural recognition, the first postcolonial government sought to facilitate the promotion of certain cultural values and practices deemed valuable to the fabric of the new nation-state. This has meant that Hindu, Muslim, and Chinese ethnic groups have been able to celebrate the contributions of their respective cultures—bolstered by the move towards the advocacy of “diversity” and “inclusion” in other liberal democratic states—while also ensuring that each ethnic group would be equally recognized so as to diminish ethnic strife.

However, these groups are recognized in terms of “culture:” that is, an understanding of human differences that recognizes and celebrates diasporic origins that are geographically bounded abroad. Culture is widely celebrated in Mauritius through many holidays recognized and supported by the government (most of which are based in

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97 Many people commonly believe that the Constitution’s ethnic categories denote religious boundaries. But Sino-Mauritians contradict this explanation. While a substantial percentage of the Chinese are Christians, they are not classified within the Christian-implied “General Population” and are instead defined by their diasporic or ancestral connection to China.
cultural or religious tradition), as well as through the presence of different cultural parastatal organizations and unions. Thus beyond the recognition of the different ethnic communities in the Census and ensuring that each group is represented through the Best Losers System, state policy has consistently sought to facilitate the recognition of diverse cultures in a wide variety of policy areas. Three policy areas in particular have had the most extensive reach from the government and the widest impact on civil society: 1) cultural and religious promotion, 2) language education policy, and 3) national heritage site preservation.

**Le Morne Brabant**

Alike Orientalist elites working for the preservation of Asian languages and cultures, Creole ethnic activists attempted to further the promotion of African and Creole culture through the initiatives of NMCAC throughout the 1990s. By the year 2000 however, the management of national heritage became integral to the process of cultural promotion and recognition, coinciding with a flourishing of archaeological and anthropological research in Mauritius at this time. In addition to cultural centers, parastatals of the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MAC) also included institutions designed to identify and preserve national heritage sites that represented Mauritian history and culture. Such historical sites have traditionally included restored buildings, landmarks, monuments, statues, natural structures, and other tangible cultural artifacts, but have more recently included artifacts of intangible heritage such as “culinary arts, cultural traditions, customs, festivities, oral history and traditions, performing arts, rituals, popular memory
and skills and techniques connected with material aspects of culture” (National Heritage Fund Act, 2003, p. 3).

The government’s National Heritage Trust Fund (NHTF) was created in 2003 to ensure the preservation and promotion of designated heritage sites (both cultural and historical) across the country. The NHTF has sought to: “identify and safeguard our tangible and intangible heritage; ensure the sound management of declared national heritage, sensitise the public on the significance, value and importance of our national heritage; and develop a sense of belonging by caring for the past and bequeathing it to the future generations” (Mauritius Pay Research Bureau, 2013, p. 369). There are two key aspects inspiring site identification and preservation: that of scientific historical research and value-based cultural preservation. In most national sites, there is a blending of both, with researchers, historians, and natural scientists collaborating in the identification and management of heritage sites. Through site identification, NHTF provides state support for sociocultural organizations, cultural centers and research institutes seeking to retrace and further demarcate the ancestral lines of their respective languages and cultures. However, the “sense of belonging” sought by NHTF denotes not only ethnic belonging, but national belonging. In this way, the state maintenance of national heritage aids in the construction of group boundaries through historical metaphor, and the coveted official state designation of ethnic heritage sites also influences understandings of which ancestral groups have contributed to the development of the Mauritian nation as a whole, and for what purpose.

NHTF was preceded by the Ancient Monuments Ordinance of 1944, which designated national heritage sites during the colonial period that included parks, lakes, and
colonial monuments and statues representing Franco-Mauritian and European culture. This ordinance was replaced by the 1985 National Monuments Act, when the government shifted to an emphasis on Asian culture in newer formulations of heritage preservation policy; this was a direct attempt of the post-independence government to counteract the predominance of colonial sites signifying Franco-Mauritian heritage. Colonial monuments have been carried over and are still maintained by the NHTF, but additional national heritage sites have since been predominately Hindu cultural and historical sites, with some Muslim and Chinese sites as well. Following a policy framework of multiculturalism, these sites have been designated on the basis of their cultural contribution to the “rainbow nation.” As there are no systematic rules of site designation (board members of NHTF decide privately which sites should be designated national heritage sites), the identification of national heritage sites has become a politically-wrought endeavor that typically involves ethnic-oriented lobbies within civil society.

Boswell (2008) argues that this focus on forging group identity through the reconstruction of heritage is a defining characteristic of Mauritian political culture, and that this is explained by the fact that most Mauritians find group identity essential for political and socioeconomic success. This is also evident not only in the government’s decades-long focus on the promotion of cultural diversity and heritage management, but in the important place that cultural tourism plays in the Mauritian economy, where displays of cultural history and heritage are integral to the attraction of Western tourists. According to Boswell, “in postcolonial societies such as Mauritius, where the dominant majority perceive bounded identities as necessary for survival and prosperity, there are increasingly
concerted efforts to reflect on group history as a means to promoting an authentic and homogenous account of the past” (ibid, p. 41). Creole activists have also participated in the construction of heritage in a way that de-complicates their previously hybridized ethnic identity for one that instead focuses on Africanity and blackness, and allows for the Afro-Malagasy element of the group to be backgrounded. In her analysis of the push for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Mauritius, Boswell (2008) outlines the void of Creole cultural contribution represented in national heritage sites as a catalyst for Creole engagement in heritage preservation. “A maritime monument close to Mahebourg (a town historically associated with slaves on the east coast of Mauritius),” she writes, commemorates the Dutch presence in and contributions to Mauritius. In the town itself are a few signposts indicating a slave presence on the island but these do not indicate their contributions to society. Again, at Pointe Canon (also in Mahebourg) there is a monument... that commemorates the arrival of slaves in Mauritius. Here, there is a testimony to freedom but no information in the adjacent building about the cultural practices or social life of slaves. A similar lack of detail on slaves and their descendants is apparent at the recently inaugurated Blue Penny Museum at the Port Louis Waterfront. The museum celebrates the philately of Mauritius and provides an overview of the making of Port Louis. Nowhere in the exhibition is there mention of the slaves (or other labourers) that built the port and of the diverse ways in which they contributed to Port Louis society. Instead there is mention of Anglo- and Franco-Mauritian contributions including an elaborate exhibition on the story of Paul and Virginie, the Romeo and Juliet of white Mauritius. These ‘silences’ on black Mauritian identity and history are not going unnoticed. In a context where (tangible and intangible) heritage is creating a new playing field for representation, there are increasingly competing attempts to package blackness (Boswell, 2008, p. 42).

Given the dearth of nationally-recognized Creole heritage sites, it is remarkable that the bulk of cultural tourism on the island is heavily connected to the legends and folklore that speak of the early marooned slaves, who are characterized as creating and inhabiting a sacred and hidden homeland deep in the coastal forests and mountains. The sega is also
performed at most hotels and resorts on the island, and is the first cultural artifact of Mauritius that most tourists become accustomed to. The widespread popularity of Sega in cultural tourism has been a source of frustration for many Orientalists who view the domination of Creole culture in the tourism industry as indicative of Mauritius’ characterization as a “Creole Island” mutually exclusive to the inclusion of Asian culture. The race to inscribe Le Morne Brabant and Aapravasi Ghat on the UNESCO\(^9^8\) World Heritage list and as state-designated national heritage sites in the early 2000s is a chief example of the desire for Hindu and Creole sociocultural associations to negotiate their ethnic inclusion within the nation through competing conceptions of “Little India” and the “Creole Island.”

The story of Le Morne Brabant invokes ancestral connections to Africa, and has recently become a large part of cultural tourism on the southwest sector of the island. The popular legend of Le Morne tells a story of a secret village of marooned ex-slaves, who lived on the plateau of the mountain for multiple generations prior to their discovery during the British takeover of the island. The legend goes that as colonial soldiers approached, the villagers each jumped off the summit of the mountain and into the ocean, preferring a death in freedom over being captured into a life of slavery. The summit of the mountain, in which the villagers were said to have jumped, points towards Africa, and is viewed as a symbol of their return to the motherland. In juvenile renditions of the legend, the maroons did not fall to their deaths, but jumped westward towards Africa to return to their homeland. Archaeological research since the late 1990s has confirmed the presence of the

\(^{98}\) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
abandoned villages and burial sites on Le Morne Mountain, stimulating a wealth of private investment in the area to develop it as a tourist destination.

But what most makes Le Morne politically salient is its connection to a specific narrative of belonging for Creoles in Mauritius—one that makes central a narrative of Creole ethnic identity as based in a quasi-indigeneity to the island, as well as resistance and struggle against European colonialism—and the tension this narrative has created for groups conceptualized as conversely immigrant. Mauritius became a French colony in 1715 when the Dutch abandoned the country after a fitful and sporadic attempt at settlement between 1638 and 1710. Before French arrival, African maroons (slaves previously imported with the Dutch who had escaped) were the predominate inhabitants of the island, many of whom became regular pirates and raiders of European encampments, and had established their own communities. While the French imported additional slaves mainly from East Africa and Madagascar, they had to contend with revolt and resistance regularly on the island, as there was a strong culture of transience and a lack of governance and organization in the early French settlements of the island (Vaughan, 2000). However, slavery became well-established within the following decades, due to the application of repressive practices on black African inhabitants by French settlers.

The fight for Le Morne as a policy struggle began with the purchasing of the mountain and its surrounding area in 1999 by a Franco-Mauritian business owner, Francis Piat of Innovative Leisure, LLC, who sought to build a cable-car and an adjacent hotel as a tourist attraction on the mountain. Piat was allowed to purchase the property after the creation of the Integrated Resorts Scheme (IRS), an initiative of the Mauritian government
to attract foreign investments in the tourism industry by allowing the acquisition of land by foreign developers for luxury villas and other tourist attractions. Many Creole activists and organizations eschewed this government initiative and attempted to advocate for the designation of the mountain as a national heritage site, which would recognize the mountain as an aspect of the national culture and protect it from private enterprise. Alongside many Creole Rastafarian groups, Sylvio Michel and other activists were involved early on in giving recognition to slave descendants through their annual pilgrimage to Le Morne. But their plans were ignored by the government in 1999 when the mountain was sold.

In response, organizations fighting for the preservation of Le Morne worked quickly to have the mountain inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as an international cultural site. This entailed strategic interaction by Creole ethnic activists at the international level, as earning a title on the UNESCO list would also prevent profit-seeking endeavors at the site and pressure the Mauritian government to officially recognize the site. But because world heritage sites must first be nationally recognized before being nominated, Creole activists endeavored to contacted UNESCO experts and academics and researchers from as far as the US and South Africa to pressure the government to declare Le Morne as a national heritage site. Capitulating to these pressures—and with the understanding that it would provide a boon for cultural tourism in the country—the government officially recognized Le Morne in 2003, followed by the creation of the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund (LMHTF) in 2004.
On the opposite side of this struggle was not only the cable-car developers (who were forced to settle into a joint ownership agreement with the government in 2004), but a Hindu ethnic lobby that viewed Le Morne’s inscription as problematic to their own cultural inclusion in the nation without the inscription of another historical site, the Immigration Depot—its name later changed to its Hindi translation “Aapravasi Ghat”—on the World Heritage list. Aapravasi Ghat had been the historical building in which Asian immigrants had been received at the beginning of British colonial rule, and represented to many sociocultural associations the birthplace of the Mauritian Asian immigrant population. At this time, no sites in Mauritius had been recognized by UNESCO, and those seeking the recognition of Aapravasi Ghat intended for this site to be the first to be recognized internationally for Mauritius. Many fighting for Le Morne’s inscription believed that Aapravasi Ghat’s dossier was only pushed through in response to the threat of Le Morne’s inscription, and more specifically, the threat of having the Creole community come to represent Mauritius to the international world. Those working on Aapravasi Ghat’s dossier, however, have claimed that its inscription had been in the works for many years prior to Le Morne’s dossier began, sponsored by the Mauritian and Indian governments.

The scramble of advocacy around both historic sites had to do with more than the construction of ethnic boundaries—it was a race to imbibe the boundaries of the nation-state and the international image of Mauritius as either “Little India” or the “Creole

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99 The naming of Aapravasi Ghat was not without conflict, as some Indo- and Sino-Mauritians believed that because a variety of ancestral groups came as immigrants through the Immigration Depot—including but not limited to Muslims, Chinese, and Africans—the historic landmark should keep its English name. However, some Hindus felt that the use of its English name would over-emphasize British influence on the island, and because Hindus represented a majority of immigrants, the landmark should adopt a Hindi moniker.
Island,” as many believed that the first site to be recognized by UNESCO would also be the first to represent the country internationally. With the full backing of the government, Aapravasi Ghat was designated as a national heritage site in 2001 (a prerequisite for UNESCO recognition). Hindu ethnic activists were then able to quickly complete a dossier for submission after the creation of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) in 2004, and in 2006, Aapravasi Ghat was the first Mauritian heritage site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This took place to the chagrin of many Creole ethnic activists who viewed the sudden competition from Aapravasi Ghat as an attempt to make further claims to the Mauritian nation that were exclusive to the Asian diaspora. After a feverous push for the government to submit the dossier to UNESCO, Le Morne was finally inscribed on the World Heritage list in 2008.

For many Creole activists, Le Morne’s recognition represented the entrance of the Creole community into the nation’s multicultural fabric. Edley Chimon, President of the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund, explains this desire to participate in Mauritian multiculturalism as a form of self-determination seeking both identity recognition and institutional support for the community. He states that prior to the Creole organizing movements that burgeoned in the late 1990s:

The Creole was left behind at the time. You know, we were not involved much in politics. We were not so much involved in economic development. We were left behind in schools, we were left behind in everything, and so we try slowly through these Creole associations, try to make people think that we got our place in Mauritius. Yes, we were left behind at the time, but now we must try to, whatever the government is putting for everybody, we must also try to fight for, if you want, to improve ourselves so that we also have a place in this rainbow country (Interview with Edley Chimon, 9 June 2013).
This policy battle—ending with what many activists felt was a defeat\textsuperscript{102}—also invoked civilizational discourses that characterized Indian immigrants as the builders and creators of modern Mauritius and African slaves as the symbols of resistance and courageousness against colonialism and the ills of Western modernity. In the dossiers for both sites, these narratives were important in the justification of their inclusion by UNESCO, but they also further demarcated ethnic lines that are temporally and geographically bounded. Both projects engaged in historiography, with a wealth of researchers and academics being involved in advocacy for the sites based on relatively recent archaeological research. Funding for this research has mainly been received from the government, although Le Morne’s advocates were also able to retain investment from hotel developers and other investors in the tourism sector in the region. Advocacy for Aapravasi Ghat was also funded by the government of India.

The national funding reports for research at these sites justified their support on the basis of their ancestral and historical value, as well as the likelihood of UNESCO to invest in and recognize the sites. In addition, this policy battle showcases the nature in which the government would respond to requests of the different communities from then on. For instance, nationally-recognized holidays such as the Abolition of Slavery Day and Immigration Day were created for both groups, after a considerable amount of activism on the part of the Creole community to have the holiday officially recognized for many years.

\textsuperscript{102} While Creole activists had succeeded in getting Le Morne inscribed on the World Heritage List, Creoles viewed the prior inscription of Aapravasi Ghat as a measure that counteracted its salience. However, many tourists today become acquainted earlier on with the legend of Le Morne and its scenic mountain than Aapravasi Ghat, as its location is less remarkable and less likely to be advertised in most hotels.
The race for the inscription of Le Morne and Aapravasi Ghat shows how ethnic elites—working towards the construction of their own ethnic boundaries—created and promoted new narratives around ethnic distinction, and how the competition between these ideas further shaped institutions of multiculturalism in a lasting way. While Creoles sought to define their community by the suffering, resistance and survival that their enslaved ancestors endured in the past (represented by Le Morne), Hindus sought to unify the various Indian ethnic groups through the promotion of immigrant toil and ingenuity in the building of the country’s political systems (represented by Aapravasi Ghat). Both narratives sought to influence how the unknown island nation would be viewed to the rest of the world, but also how each group would be represented themselves. The Creole community would now be defined exclusively based on their African roots, as well as by their slave ancestry (in a “one-drop rule” fashion), and Indo-Mauritians of various ethnic and religious identifications would now be represented in unison with the Hindu community as perpetual immigrants. Hindus also sought to define themselves as the true “builders” of the country and thus the rightful owners of the state, qualifying their political domination through Aapravasi Ghat’s recognition. These narratives speak to the deservedness of each group as both victims and saviors in a colonial nation.

**The Truth and Justice Commission**

Between 2000 and 2006, Creole organizing and civic engagement reached its peak, with a number of organizations and activists mobilized together in the promotion of a variety of policy issues. This included the inscription of Le Morne on the UNESCO World Heritage List, but also a second major policy issue: the establishment of a Truth and
Justice Commission (TJC) in the pursuit of reparations for slavery. Advocacy for a Truth and Justice Commission began after the 1999 Riots and took more than 10 years before it was actually created and implemented. Creole ethnic activists pushing for its creation hoped that the TJC would provide specific acknowledgement of slavery and its effects by the Mauritian state as an aspect of Creole recognition. Some activists envisioned that the goal of the TJC was also to provide an institutional arrangement for reparations to the descendants of slaves, whether in institutional or financial form. But most importantly, the TJC was to investigate the connection between the historical circumstances of former slaves in Mauritius and the present circumstances of their descendants, and provide a form of historical restitution to the Creole community for a series of state-initiated predicaments that activists believed led to Creole marginalization.

This struggle was led by Sylvio Michel’s OF (the party’s name was by this time changed to Verts Fraternelles or VF), who gained some influence in the government as the Minister of Fisheries through an alliance between VF and the MLP (the “Social Alliance”) in 2000. This party alliance allowed Michel to gain influence at the state level and push for the creation of a Truth and Justice Commission, as well as the consideration of financial reparations for the descendants of slaves, which became a mainstay of his party platform during this time period. Such alliances had been used by Michel and OF in previous elections as a way to negotiate for specific policy benefits. For example, as early as the fall of the MMM government in 1982, OF joined an alliance with the Labour Party and the PMSD during the 1983 elections under the agreement that four OF members would be a part of the Alliance’s 60 candidates, and that the 1st of February would be declared a
public holiday in the commemoration of the abolition of slavery, among other
compromises aiding OF’s social projects. February 1st subsequently became a public
holiday in 1985 (after the declaration of the anniversary of the arrival of Indian immigrants
as a public holiday in 1984), but because other agreements of the alliance were not met,
Michel subsequently resigned as Minister of Local Government and withdrew from the
alliance (Interview with Sylvio Michel, 1 July 2013).

Prior to the creation of the TJC, there were several other government initiatives
enacted under President Cassam Uteem (the country’s first and only Muslim president,
governing from 1992 to 2002) in response to the discourse of “le malaise créole” that had
become popular in the mid-1990s. During his 1996 address, President Uteem formally
announced his goal of “reinsertion of those who have been left out of the mainstream of
economic and social development” and funded research on the problem of “exclusion” in
Mauritian society (Etude Pluridisciplinaire sur L’Exclusion a Maurice, Rapport Final, 1997). In a
collection of studies commissioned by the President, researchers on social exclusion in
Mauritius developed a more structural understanding of the socio-historical processes of
exclusion, including the cultural and linguistic practices of exclusion, arguing that:

Exclusion is certainly not due only to financial difficulties or constraints; there are
other factors such as history and trajectories of people within that historical set up,
the perceptions that people hold of themselves in relation to the ‘other,’ the mental
processes that impact on those perceptions and shape them, the cultural ‘life world’
of people, ‘socially perceived necessities’ from which access is denied, are equally
important... Exclusion is concerned with the severing of social links, the feeling of
being left out, the inability to take charge of one’s life...\textsuperscript{101}

The government subsequently established the Ministry of Social Integration and
Economic Empowerment to combat the economic and social marginalization of a large

\textsuperscript{101} Etude Pluridisciplinaire sur L’Exclusion a Maurice, Rapport Final, 1997, p. 4.
section of the Mauritian population. But these initiatives focused mainly on class difference as the basis of exclusion and sought out remedies that directly aided the economic development of poor geographical regions. Although many of these studies noted that Creoles disproportionately make up the poor in these marginalized areas, up until that time the government was unwilling to identify and implement remedies that would directly target Creole development as a group, reparations or otherwise. Many believed that these class-based remedies only placed a bandage on the problem of Creole exclusion, as unemployment, poverty and especially, economic inequality between ethnic groups, continued to increase during this time period. Most importantly, these remedies failed to prevent the 1999 Riots. Creole ethnic activists advocated for the TJC as a means of applying more targeted programs to remedy Creole marginalization. But as a means to socioeconomic advancement, they argued for empowerment first through national recognition and national belonging.

Creoles pushed back against the proposals of such class-based socioeconomic remedies most prominently by demanding to be named—urging the government not to focus merely on remedying exclusion for “the poor” but also directly on the experiences of Creoles as a group. Many Creole activists believed that such social exclusion programs tended to benefit the Indo-Mauritian poor at a disproportionate rate in a system in which ethnic differentiation segmented socioeconomic remedies for empowerment, especially in terms of housing (as neighborhoods and districts tended to be ethnically segregated) and the job market. In reference to civil service positions, the tendency for Indo-Mauritians to dominate even the lowest paying, low-skilled jobs in the government service, such as
janitors and maids, was a source of frustration for Creole activists who believe that ethnicity and race were the central factors in this form of exclusion, rather than education, skill, or opportunity. Low-skilled Creoles depended instead on the smaller number of positions in the private sector, in particular in the tourism industry as hotel clerks, maids and service workers for wealthy Franco-Mauritian or European business owners.

Moreover, they argued that civil society was structured in such a way that religious or ethnic associations were the central means by which collective organizing in the policy arena could take place, and therefore the means by which political goods and resources were obtained from the state. Through these modes, Creoles were marginalized on both fronts. While sociocultural organizations receive funding from the government on the basis of religious status (viewed here as a subset of culture), government funding received by the Catholic Church was controlled in a hierarchical arrangement by Franco-Mauritians at the head of the institution. This same hierarchical arrangement has historically prevented Creoles from influencing action towards the social issues in which the Church could become mobilized. In addition, the hierarchies of the Church also served as a barrier to grassroots organizing, in contrast to the more decentralized, loosely structured arrangements of Hindu temples.

One Creole ethnic advocacy group that played a major role during the Truth and Justice Commission was Grupman Larkansiel Kreol (GLK), led by Jean Marie Richard. The group was created prior to the 2010 elections and sought to promote the election of Sylvio Michel through the Social Alliance. In their deposition before the Commission, the group explains that the current status of Creoles were directly linked to the changes in
government since 1967 that left the community both dis-recognized and socioeconomically stymied:

It is quite unfortunate that in spite of many official reports from both local and international experts during the past thirty years on the extremely marginalised situation of the Kreol community in Mauritius, there is still a high number of Kreols suffering from all the social plagues affecting the Republic of Mauritius. This situation, though having its roots deep from the slavery period, has persisted after the elections of 1967 where the electoral campaign leading to the independence of Mauritius fragmented the nation between the population of mainly Asian descent and the “General Population” (composed mainly of Whites/mixed coloured and people of African descent). While the Whites of European descent had the economic and cultural power to face the situation, the majority of Kreols of mixed euro, African, Asian descent who were the majority in the public sector and also in the subaltern jobs of the private sector – mainly sugar estates and trading companies left for other pastures mainly Australia, Canada, and South Africa – the Afro Kreols, deprived of all socio-economic and cultural tools fostering, were the main victims of the collateral damages. The ethno communal conflict of 1968 between the Muslims and the Kreol worsened the situation already deeply affected by the post- Carol cyclone of 1960. Though the setting of CHA housing estates responded to the housing requirements of those affected by the Carol cyclone, it is an undeniable fact that this measure, however necessary, tended to push the Kreol community in ghettos around the suburbs of Port Louis and the Plaines Wilhems. Areas plagued by numerous social problems, even if recent reports mention a greater mobility accomplished through education in those areas, which remain branded as ‘difficult areas’ with a high failure rate at CPE levels.102

To remedy this situation, GLK had previously made demands of the government calling for the “recognition of the Kreol community in the Constitution, recognition of the Kreol language as an ancestral language, recognized right to use the Kreol language at all institutions starting with the National Assembly, inclusion of Kreol language at school—as an ancestral, education and optional language... [and] setting up of a Museum of Slavery,” among other proposals for the empowerment of poor and working class Creoles.103

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102 Grupman Larkansiel Kreol, Memorandum presented before the Truth and Justice Commission, 1 September 2010.
103 Ibid.
In this way, the value of the TJC was also in naming Creoles as a group with a distinct nationally-located experience and recognizing their place in the history of the country, which many Creole activists believed would provide a variety of political, psychological and socioeconomic benefits. It also sought to pay homage to slavery and the slaves of the past for their part in the building of the nation, and from this, made specific recommendations for the ways in which their descendants, as a community, could be fully incorporated given their unique experiences. Land rights was a crucial part of the TJCs research and recommendations, as the dearth of land ownership of Creoles was pinpointed as a direct cause of the socioeconomic inequality between Creoles and Indo-Mauritians. This stems from the fact that Indo-Mauritians held a concentration of land (both residential and commercial) that was awarded during the grand morcellement of the late 1800s. In similar fashion to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set-up in South Africa, Mauritius’ Commission would serve as a forum in which Creole voices could be heard and together with others could—after forming connections between the history of slavery and the present state of the Creole community—formulate solutions that could rectify their current situation as a marginalized group.

Although the issue of slavery and reparations was added to the ruling government’s party platform prior to the 2000 elections, the newly-elected government remained unresponsive to the demands for a commission to consider the reparations for slavery. The government’s position changed, however, after the United Nations hosted the “World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” in Durban, South Africa (focusing on reparations for slavery and the slave trade) and
passed a resolution declaring the slave trade a crime against humanity (Interview with Sylvio Michel, 1 July 2013). The popularity of this conference in the news media spurred further conversations on the creation of a TJC in Mauritius.

But in the end, the TJC was alternatively set-up as a compromise seeking to balance Creole and Hindu interests. After debate on the issue in the National Assembly, the final goals of the Commission sought to include the evaluation of the effects of both slavery and indentured servitude, a move that many Creoles felt effectively “gutted” the policy. In addition, the inclusion of indentured laborers was viewed as a strategy to effectively prevent the possibility of financial compensation, which would have been owed to a much larger segment of the Mauritian public (nearly 98 percent of the population were the descendants of slaves and indentured laborers) (Interview with Sylvio Michel, 1 July 2013).

The TJC was thus created at the expense of a sole focus on the Creole community and instead, the Commission was established under the condition that it would also seek to outline the history of indentured servitude and its negative effects on present day Indo-Mauritians, especially those who also lived in poverty. Similar to the race between Le Morne and Aapravasi Ghat for international recognition, the TJC became another example of the “tit-for-tat” politics present in Mauritius that ethnically-colored the policy process. With this, the appointment of a majority of Indian researchers and policymakers on the Commission and across its administration was said to have doomed the policy at its start.

However, the TJC’s three-volume report—released in 2012—focused overwhelmingly on the historical effects of slavery and argued for Creole reparations on an historical, educational and structural basis, which created awkwardness in the public regarding its
recommendations. Those involved in the findings of the report include Vijaya Teelock, Benjamin Moutou, Lindsay Morvan, and Jacques David. The Commission’s report focused more heavily on slavery as a crucial effect on the Creole predicament, and made strong claims about the necessity for rectifying the current inequalities directly caused by the injustices of slavery. In the following passage, the TJC Report (2012) underscores the direct connection between Creole dis-recognition and disempowerment:

[H]aving a fixed identity and known heritage is very important in Mauritian society and is considered significant in the kind of contribution that an ethnic group can make to the construction of the nation. If Creoles are deemed not to have an identity, then they are generally perceived as unimportant and as having nothing of value to offer in the making of the society in which they live. This can have devastating consequences for an individual or a group because what they do offer is not publicly valued and, in general, they are perceived as not ‘useful’ to the society. The disregard generates poor self-esteem and self-doubt (p. 288).

These circumstances have also leads to a lack of organization and leadership within the community, yet an increasing sense of “linked fate” (Dawson, 1994).

The public recognition that the TJC was able to provide was also important, as it helped to establish the boundaries of the Creole community by grounding its heritage more explicitly within the institution of slavery. Additional monikers had begun to be used to label the community during this time—most notably “ex-slaves” and “descendants of slaves” as interchangeable for Creole, which the TJC further propagated. On the one hand, this was a policy struggle for the recognition of a marginalized group, a group who shared a common experience in a system that inhibited the growth of individual families and persons among those with this shared experience. On the other hand, however, this struggle was also a way for Creole political elites to draw the boundaries of the community
in such a way that would make central those who claimed a substantial amount of African blood.

Yet there has not been much attention paid to the prescriptions outlined in the report to date, and the government has failed to enact any reparative policy changes targeted to the descendants of slaves or indentured servants as a result. This was not because the general public had failed to recognize Creole exclusion or the ramifications of slavery as a direct cause of their collective disempowerment. Rather, many also viewed Creole culture as a backwards culture that privileged current over future gratification and aversion to thrift and savings, and that their own collective lack of personal responsibility and hard work was the cause of their marginalization. This “culture of poverty” was viewed as stemming from the unfortunate experience of slavery in its ability to divorce Africans from their culture, but also the lack of ingenuity of black African culture in comparison to Asian cultures. In other ways, Creoles were viewed as having no culture or cultural roots from which to pull a source of inspiration for advancement, a circumstance that reparations could not address. This narrative encouraged many to prefer a hands-off approach to the problem of Creole exclusion that they believed could only be remedied on an individual basis.

Furthermore, the TJC report described the intricacies involved in locating bloodlines that were exclusively descendants of slaves (as many wealthy Franco-Mauritians and individuals of other backgrounds could also claim lineage given the widespread practice of metissage during and after slavery). Limiting the possibility for reparations was the need for evidence of a substantial lineage—in the form of the “quantity” of African
blood, however measured—to make claims distinct from other individuals. Underlying this argument was the demarcation of the lines of the Creole community based on racial distinction, rather than ethnicity or culture, which also complicated measures for reparation.

Nativity, Diaspora and Multiculturalism

A Nationalist activist of Hindu origin aptly describes the problems inherent in the “naming” of the Creole group boundary that can be perceived as threatening to non-Creoles. Describing how Creoles problematically respond to the term “Creole,” he states:

You rob my name, I change name. Instead of fighting to get back my name. This systematic resignation is going on and on and on. That is one problem with the word Creole as an ethnic term. When I say that Mauritius is a Creole island, they simply say “so it is our island?” I say “no it is not your island. It is a Creole island but not your island.” Why? From a purely scientific point of view Mauritius is a Creole island, not from a political demogagy point of view. And when I start to explain this, they say “no we cannot accept that. It’s a Creole island because it’s the land of the Creole.” “But you are Afro-Creoles.” “No, no, no we are not Afro-Creoles, we are just Creoles because we have nothing to do with Africa.” “And I say to them but I’m an Indo-Creole, because I live in a Creole island. You can have a Euro Creole, Sino-Creole, etc.” “No, no, no we are the only Creoles.” And that is a stupid stand. It is not a stand where you open your arm to greet others, so that you can live together (Interview, 21 June 2013).

From this view, Creoles are characterized as changing their names throughout history due to an inability to maintain their own identity, as well as a “systemic resignation” to the domination of others who have defined their boundaries for them. At the same time, the speaker re-defines “Creole” altogether and instead defines Creoles narrowly with their “Afro” appellation. Implicit in this perspective is also a tension between Creoles being defined within a multicultural, diasporic framework (stressing their “Afro” roots) and defined as a native population specific to the island (singularly “Creole”). Thus, the Creole
fight for recognition is interpreted as attempting to locate their roots in Mauritius—an identity that threatens national unity by making sole claims to the Mauritian “nation.” But for many non-Creoles, Creoles can only be accepted by embracing African culture abroad in a way that supports diasporic multiculturalism. This embracement would allow a form of nation-sharing among different ethnies defined by cultural difference.

At the same time, the shift towards the term “Indo-Creole” above instead of the more common “Indo-Mauritian” is part and parcel to a politics of dis-recognition, albeit from a trans-ethnic, Nationalist frame. This serves as a discursive strategy that dually enlists colorblindism and multiculturalism to render the native culture of Creoles as boundless and thus neutral or invisible while upholding their racial distinction. In addition, it also undermines the distinctly racialized aspects of the Creole experience that Creole activists have sought redress for. Similar to this negation of Creole identity and culture in Mauritius, Da Costa (2016) explains that other discursive mechanisms (or “non-performative speech acts”) exist as a “strategy of power” in Brazil, which are ever-present in society and actively seek to counteract Afro-Brazilian demands for racial justice. The author collectively calls these “post-racial ideologies,” defining them as:

those forms of thought, discourse, and action that evade, delegitimize, and seek to eliminate racial differences and their effects from the focus of academic scholarship, activist struggle, public debate, and state policy. Post-racial ideologies operate through racialized forms of power while simultaneously claiming the non-significance of race. They generate fraught understandings of belonging and

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104 During my interviews, I frequently witnessed the downplaying of Creole distinction among Hindu interviewees, but the consistent marking of identity among Creole interviewees. For example, many Hindus referred to Creoles as “Christians” and sometimes corrected me when using the term “Creole,” stating that Creoles also included those mixed with European, Indian or Chinese ancestry. This disjuncture was confusing at first, as I was persistently told by many Indo-Mauritians I had encountered that racial thinking did not exist in Mauritius, while my Creole acquaintances spoke openly of their own experiences of racial discrimination. Some Creole interviewees also addressed me as “a Creole” even after finding that I was a Black American, which signified that their own identities were equally racial as they were ethnic/cultural.
inclusion that elide racial difference and structural racism in ways that allow the re-articulation rather than the transformation of racial inequalities within national and global developments. Moreover, when deployed as a strategy of power, postracial ideologies continually seek to depoliticize race, racism, and difference in ways that demobilize anti-racist politics, substantive cultural recognition, and material redistribution (Da Costa, 2016, p. 496).

Da Costa (2016) identifies such ideologies as strategies of demobilization that seeks to allow the continuation of racial inequality and structural racism while eliminating the political and legal tools by which racial exclusions can be identified, targeted and eliminated. Coastal populations of Afro-descended groups in Mexico also experience such invisibility, where their existence and experience has been ignored in national constructions of Mexican history and politics, yet Afro-Mexicans view themselves as a distinct group with distinct experiences stemming from their racial distinction in Mexican society (Jones, 2013). Post-racial “speech acts” in the United States has also become a popular means by which to downplay accusations of racism or calls for racial justice, particularly by citing the election of its first black president, President Barack Obama, as proof of racial progress. In many ways, the ideologies of Mauricianisme and multiculturalism in Mauritius also operate by ignoring race while engaging with discourses on ethnic difference, and neither holds a place for which the distinct racial experiences of Creoles can be addressed. This is also because, significantly, Creole experiences are localized within Mauritius’ historical and cultural landscape, rather than through re-constructed diasporic linkages to the African continent.

The inscription of Le Morne and the Truth and Justice Commission were two of the largest accomplishments of Creole advocacy in the post-independence era. Stimulated by the desire for a more defined Creole ethnic boundary, Creole ethnic activists used
strategies such as framing, agenda setting, and international pressures in their attempts to (re)construct ethnic and national meanings in the negotiation of these policies, and in turn, increased their own salience in the public sphere as a collective interest. Creole activists were able to gain access to the state on a collective basis, but the inability for these policies to spur lasting political and socioeconomic changes in the following years created feelings of disillusionment among the Creole population. These policies were viewed by many Creole activists as disappointments in the sense that they each demonstrated the limits to recognition and social justice within a multicultural framework. Both policies stopped just short of the goal of official recognition, which also further exacerbated feelings of sociopolitical exclusion. The policies were limited by the government’s need to prevent the perceived domination of one culture over another in the context of multiculturalism. Additionally, the outcomes of these policies as solutions to socioeconomic inequality provided little motivation for their receptiveness from the government in comparison to their ability to increase public favorability and strengthen the illusion of “unity in diversity” to the international world.

Most importantly, through policy engagement, Creole ethnic actors benefitted from the intentional use of organizing on the basis of ethnic identity to make political claims. This further illustrates the tension between the boundaries of the Creole community and those of the multicultural nation, while also helping to secure those boundaries in a more enduring way. Paradoxically, the pursuit of these policies ultimately led to the strengthening of the boundaries of the Indo-Mauritian community, and the Hindu ethnic
group in particular, whose elite actors responded by placing greater claims on diasporic cultural distinction to counteract the possibility of Creole inclusion.

Like the political conflict caused by the language policy debates during the independence period, the inscription of Le Morne created a tension with the boundaries of the multicultural nation because it was an attempt to promote group boundaries that were also conceptualized as native to Mauritius. In addition, the Truth and Justice Commission invoked a focus on racial injustice that was problematic because it demanded institutional remedies for racial rather than ethnic considerations. Together, these issues show that both racial designation and nativity served as threats to the way the national boundary was configured as multicultural and diasporic. For this reason, Creole ethnic activists have sought to construct a more ethnically-defined group boundary by attempting to link socioeconomic and political interests to multicultural inclusion, but have only succeeded where they have been able to make purely cultural claims based on diasporic connections to Africa and eschew their connections to local Mauritian culture as a racialized group. These policy struggles demonstrate the ways in which Creole ethnic activists have been constrained in their possibilities for group boundary configuration, and this further constrained civic organizing around a third policy—Kreol’s institutionalization in language education policy—outlined in the next chapter.
Chapter 7 – The Institutionalization of Kreol

In many countries worldwide, language has been central to ethnic politics. As a representative of ethnic group boundaries, it has both symbolic and practical value that directly affects the livelihoods of individual language speakers. Languages that are recognized and officialized by the state are given sociocultural value that lend to group empowerment through sociocultural funding, access to democratic channels, and other means of institutional support. Moreover, languages allow individuals to move more freely across group boundaries and access social networks that are otherwise rigidly bounded for non-language speakers (Weinstein, 1983). When languages are backed by state power, these social networks are afforded more power in society and the polity.

Focusing on language policy as a prime method in which states promote the culture of dominant groups, Stilz (2009) argues that “civic” polities are unable to completely uncouple the culture of dominant groups from that of the polity because a common language is necessary for public deliberation and participation in the democratic process. As such, she presents a “least cost model” of “layered multilingualism”—that is, government support of a common language plus several minority languages in a decentralized language policy model. Laitin (1992) similarly promotes the use of a multilingual language model in order to minimize conflict and promote national solidarity. But because language policy is allocated within a political system of scarce resources, the above factors afford languages with power that also translate into the strengthening of some ethnic group boundaries over others, and this is particularly the case when an ethnic language also serves as the national language. It should be no wonder then, that language policy has become the most
contentious political issue in Mauritius, especially since the post-independence introduction of Kreol and the Asian languages in language policy. Both are indicative of native and diasporic group boundaries, respectively, that (as I argue in Chapter 4) clash in terms of their contribution to the composition of the national boundary, even when this national boundary is multilingual.

However, in Mauritius, putting aside the practical benefits that many believe can be obtained by learning English or French, the other languages in Mauritius have largely symbolic value that does not afford unequal advantages among groups in society, since nearly all Mauritians speak Kreol as their first language while the Asian languages have been sustained within a relatively small segment of the population principally through state promotion. In addition, the Kreol language has only taken on an ethnic nature worthy of state consideration in multiculturalism within the past two decades, oscillating between its conceptualization as the ancestral language of Creoles and the national lingua franca of Mauritius.

Prior to 2000, advocacy for the Kreol language had developed slowly and incrementally over four decades across the work of two different advocacy groups, beginning with Nationalist language advocates and then later being picked up by Creole ethnic activists. But Kreol’s standardization and institutionalization began to materialize relatively rapidly in the early 2000s, as several major gains were made for both Creole ethnic and Nationalist language advocates. This began with the creation of the Prevokbek program in 2005—a Kreol literacy program set-up in select Catholic schools. The Prevokbek program is funded by the RCEA, and allows students failing the CPE exam
more than once to enter a “prevocational stream” in order to obtain alternate certification for advancement into some Catholic secondary schools. Designed by Dev Virahsawmy in conjunction with educators at the Institute Cardinal Jean Margéot (ICJM), Kreol is both taught as a subject and used as the medium of instruction for other subjects, including math, sciences, and French and English language courses. Still in operation today, the program provides an alternative route to secondary education for lower class children who would typically be unable to continue beyond the primary school level in Mauritius’ highly competitive education system. The RCEA also proposed setting up an additional program extending the use of Kreol as the medium of instruction in some Catholic schools beginning in January 2010 (Parliamentary Questions, No. B/823, 14 July 2009).

Following the creation of Prevobek were two additional institutional milestones in Kreol language advocacy: the creation of the Akademi Kreol Morisien (AKM) and the Creole Speaking Union. As a result of continued conversations between Nationalist academics and the MIE, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources organized a national forum on the introduction of Kreol as an optional language in August 2010, and from this, the government created AKM in October 2010. The AKM was set-up to spearhead the standardization of the Kreol language, and aid in the design of the Kreol curriculum for its 2012 introduction in government schools (in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Mauritian Institute of Education). One of their first publications included the creation of a harmonized writing system for Kreol, the organization’s “Grafi Larmoni” (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. B/823, 14 July

105 Prior to the introduction of the Prevobek program, other initiatives of the Church also included the translation of the New Testament into Kreol by ICJM.
Members of AKM included a number of activists on both sides of Kreol advocacy, including Dev Virahsawmy, Jimmy Harmon, Danielle Turner, Jean Marie Richard and Lindsay Morvan (L’express, 29 October 2010). Shortly after, the Creole Speaking Union was created with the purpose of promoting Kreol in wider society and encouraging and supporting its use through publications, conferences, workshops, scholarships and other forms of exhibition.\textsuperscript{106}

These institutions were both parastatal organizations created by the government in a negotiation process that also gave way to the introduction of five other speaking unions, including the Arabic, Bhojpuri, Sanskrit, and Chinese speaking unions. Prior to 2011, several other speaking unions were created at various stages in time, including the English Speaking Union in 1993, the Hindi Speaking Union in 1994, the Urdu Speaking Union in 2002, and the Marathi, Tegelu and Tamil Speaking Unions in 2008, in addition to the Alliance Francaise established prior to independence (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 7, 10 May 2011).

How did these institutions come about and what did they mean for Creole organizing at the policy level? This chapter investigates how advocates for the Kreol language were able to re-appraise the value of both the language and the Creole ethnic boundary in multiculturalism by pushing for the inclusion of Kreol in language education policy. After two prior attempts at multicultural inclusion at the policy level by Creole ethnic activists, I outline the adoption of a Kreol language course in the public school system and analyze state and political responses throughout this process. I first analyze the debates on Kreol within political society to show how Creole ethnic activists

\textsuperscript{106} Creole Speaking Union Act of 2011.
simultaneously advanced the recognition of Kreol and the development of their own
ethnic boundary, exacerbating a coalitional split between Creole activists promoting the
language as an artifact of “identity” and culture within the Creole community and a
multiethnic coalition of Nationalist advocates pushing for the language under a more
“pragmatic,” class-based goal of nation-building. Then, I explain how the prior struggles for
policies of recognition and the debates on Kreol combined to produce a political context
that made the Creole ethnic boundary central to party politics, increasing the influence of
Creole ethnic activists. Finally, I additionally explain why the government’s response to
Kreol language advocacy during and after the 2005 and 2010 elections became rapidly
receptive, but only as a balance between the pragmatic and identity-based arguments for the
language that left its institutionalization incomplete. In the end, this analysis demonstrates
how dominant ideological frameworks in Mauritius influence democratic institutional
structures, how both influenced the trajectory of language education policy, and how this
policy environment, in turn, dictated distinct organizing strategies for Creole ethnic
activists across civil and political society.

The Debate on Kreol: The National vs. the “Identity” Dimension of Language
Value

The shift in the government’s focus towards Creole lobbying efforts was the result
of not only the influence of other policy struggles taking place at the time, but also the
strain between the activities of Creole ethnic and Nationalist language advocates, and
Hindu nationalists seeking to maintain predominance within the state. While Creole
activists gained a considerable level of political value by mobilizing their community to
push for other policies of recognition, how exactly the state would seek to recognize and address Creole interests constituted a delicate balance of these multiple interest groups, both ethnic and non-ethnic alike, and this was an especially sensitive endeavor concerning Kreol.

Nationalist Kreol advocates mainly argued for its officialization as an issue for practical consideration linked directly to the status of an education system in which a large percentage of Mauritian students could not obtain education beyond primary schooling. Backed largely by the success of the Prevokbek program, they noted that the policy would be a solution to the problem of high drop-out and failure rates at the primary level. In addition, the 2008 report of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Mauritius argued that using Kreol as the medium of instruction would prevent the problems of school failure at the primary and secondary levels by increasing the quality of education for students early on and effectively reducing the number of students placed within the prevocational stream. ZEP (Zones Ecole Prioritaire) public schools providing remedial education in certain provinces had already been designated by the government to remedy the situation after the 1999 Riots, but had little effect in outcomes for primary and secondary education rates (NHRC Annual Report, 2008; “The Prevocational Stream,” Institute Cardinal Jean Margeot, 2005). 107

Nationalists also focused the value of the language on its cross-cultural element as the island’s lingua franca. From this perspective, advocacy groups such as LPT, Lalit and Rezistans ek Alternativ organized around the recognition of Kreol as the national language in

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107 ZEP schools, or those schools within state-designated Zones Ecole Prioritaire were schools targeted as underperforming by the state and thus given increased funding to “catch up” academically. ZEP schools are mainly located in poor Creole neighborhoods with predominately Creole student bodies.
addition to pushing for Kreol’s institutionalization as the medium of instruction in public schools and Kreol’s use in the National Assembly and other formal public institutions. In October 2009, LPT organized a conference entitled “International Hearing on the Harm Done in Schools by the Suppression of the Mother Tongue,” where they linked Kreol’s value to a more human-rights centered argument for social justice for the poor; in particular, the rights to the use of one’s mother tongue in the education system and as a pathway to participation in democratic governance.  

Creole ethnic activists took a different approach to Kreol’s advocacy, arguing for both the practical and identity-based elements of Kreol. While Creole leaders were less focused on the Kreol language prior to the late 1990s (even in the midst of an emerging identity movement centering on redefining Creole culture), by 2005, Kreol had become increasingly connected to the Afro-Creole identity movement and was adapted as a central rallying point in the community. As a language that had been devalued in Mauritius, many Creole activists believed that Kreol epitomized the status of the Creole community and how it sought to re-envision itself: it represented an excluded and denigrated cultural artifact whose true value lay in its underlying power as both “native” and trans-ethnic, but also in its linkage to African civilization. For these activists, the consistent denial and rejection of the language by the state and the wider public was proof of Hindu domination and Creole exclusion that also increased political mobilization and community consciousness among Creoles. According to Olivier Precieux, a schoolteacher and member of the FCM, Kreol’s lack of recognition had to do with the historical devaluation of  

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Creoles as a group, and a hierarchical society in which the darkest individuals continued to be actively discriminated against. He points to the lack of famous Creoles mentioned in historical textbooks in public schools, such as Gaëtan Duval, and the over-emphasis on Indo- and Franco-Mauritian historical contributions to Mauritian society (L’express, 17 June 2010). As a result, the institutionalization of Kreol became extremely important to Creole ethnic activists—not only for the practical benefits its inclusion could produce for Creoles in the public school system, but for the benefits of identity and recognition that could further garner political mobilization in other areas.

The Church also broke its silence on the Kreol language issue during this time, taking a strong stance supporting the teaching of Kreol from its identity dimension. Bishop Maurice Piat, in his annual Pastoral Letter, made the following statement that promoted Kreol not only as a medium of instruction for the early years of education, but on the basis of Creole identity, dignity and empowerment:

[Creole as the language of instruction] is not to lock up children in their cultural universe or in the relatively small network of their native language. This is just beginning his formal education respecting the language learned in the lap of his parents, the value, and thus joining in its cultural context. Experience shows that a child who feels respected opens more easily later in the learning of other languages he needs to grow humanly. This diagnosis is nothing original. It was made in Mauritius in various reports and since 1941 is officially supported by UNESCO. It is time to overcome the ingrained prejudices that exclude the Creole language of its rightful place at school. Although it is clear that this language is less old and less developed than the other languages that exist in Mauritius, she happens to be the mother tongue of 80% of our compatriots. As such, it deserves to be respected... As regards the introduction of Creole as an optional subject in the curriculum... All Mauritians, regardless of origin, now have the opportunity to study at school the language of his ancestors and the culture that goes with it. It just seems to me in line with respect for fundamental human rights, that the Creoles also have the opportunity to study the language that has been nurtured by their ancestors in the terrible circumstances of slavery. Knowing these cultural roots, appreciating the true value, is an essential condition for human development. The introduction of
Creole and ‘Creole Studies’ in the school curriculum, would benefit not only to respect the right of our Creole brothers and sisters, but also to fill a void, and to restore some social balance in school and in Mauritian society (Bishop Piat, Pastoral Letter 2010).

While Creole priests such as Father Roger Cerveaux, Father Filip Fanchette and Father Jocelyn Gregoire had previously made similar claims to the importance of Kreol for Creole cultural empowerment, the announcement by a Franco-Mauritian bishop was monumental to Creole organizing and lobbying efforts, as it provided legitimacy from the Church for their stance on Kreol’s relevance to the Creole community.

The parliamentary reading of the Creole Speaking Union bill and the parliamentary debates on the creation of the speaking unions gives a glimpse of the different ways that different forces have articulated the value and role of each language. In particular, the Kreol language was mainly evaluated in juxtaposition with the other ancestral languages. During these debates in the National Assembly, arguments were made from the Nationalist, Orientalist, and Creole ethnic perspectives. They demonstrate that languages are representative of cultural groups, and their values continue to be viewed as a competitive resource for each community. With a Nationalist frame, Member of Parliament (MP) Sayed-Hossen makes the argument against the invoking of identity in the promotion of languages in general, and states as a specific example, Kreol should not be closed to those only ethnically-described as Creole, as he himself is not a Creole but speaks Kreol as his mother tongue. Sayed-Hossen states:

M. le président, ce qui se présente comme des facteurs de lien, comme des ponts, comme des articulations, ces différents Speaking Unions peuvent aussi devenir des facteurs de cloisonnement intercommunautaire. Il nous faut à tout prix éviter l’amalgame entre langue/ethnicité, langue/religion. J’ai très souvent l’habitude de dire à certains amis avec qui je discute à propos de la langue Créole, que si le Créole est un facteur identitaire, il est clair que
je ne suis pas Créole. Mais la langue Créole m’appartient comme elle appartient à tous les autres mauriciens. Donc, j’utilise cet exemple, M. le président, to make my point, comme on dit, que la langue ne doit pas devenir dans une île Maurice plurielle, multiple et diversifiée, un facteur identitaire, ce serait même dangereux que les langues que ces projets de loi visent à promouvoir deviennent ainsi des facteurs identitaires.109 (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 10, 31 May 2011).

Further, MP Bérenger, former leader of the MMM, ties Kreol to a broadly “Mauritian identity” mutually exclusive to the languages under debate with diasporic or ancestral connections: “M. le président, il ne faudrait pas que notre intérêt pour les langues qui s'imposent en raison de la mondialisation nous porte à négliger les langues qui sont propres à l’identité mauricienne. C’est pourquoi la proposition de loi en faveur d’une Bhojpuri et d’une Créole Speaking Union se justifient d’elles-mêmes”110 (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 7, 10 May 2011, p. 121). Bérenger also labels the Kreol language with a more fluid linguistic (rather than ethnic) identity by positing in the following passage that the preservation of Creole and Bhojpuri are necessary to maintain the societal value of these languages for the benefit of all those speaking the languages, as they are reflections of cultural “vectors” that connect Mauritians with cultures and histories that would otherwise be lost:

Il nous appartient à nous, législateurs, de donner cette reconnaissance officielle au créole et au bhojpuri, mais aussi à toutes les langues qui font partie de notre patrimoine linguistique. Il nous échoit d’en faire des langues à part entière pour des générations à venir. Il nous revient de tout faire pour que ces langues soient préservées et encouragées. Or la disparition d’une langue n’est pas seulement une perte pour la communauté de ces locuteurs, mais aussi pour

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109 Translation: “Mr. President, what is presented as factors of linkage, such as bridges, such as the joints, these different Speaking Unions may also become factors of intercommunity subdivision. We need to avoid the danger of conflating language/ethnic group, language/religion. I often used to say to some friends with whom I discuss about the Creole language, if the Creole identity is a factor, it is clear that I am not Creole. But the Creole language belongs to me as it belongs to all other Mauritians. So I use this example, Mr. President, to make my point, as they say, that the language must not become pluralistic in Mauritius, multiple and diversified, an identity factor, it would be even dangerous as the languages that these bills aim to promote are thus becoming identity factors.”

110 Translation: “Mr. President, we should not have our interest in the languages that are necessary because of globalization lead us to neglect the languages that are specific to the Mauritian identity. That is why the bill for a Bhojpuri and a Creole-Speaking Union are justified by themselves.”
notre connaissance humaine commune car une langue est bien plus qu’un instrument de communication. C’est aussi le vecteur d’une façon de penser, d’une culture, le dépositaire de l’histoire d’un peuple, d’une mythologie, d’une cosmogonie, d’une musique. Ce ne sont pas seulement des mots que l’on perd avec une langue, mais un regard sur le monde.\footnote{Translation: “It is up to us as legislators to give official recognition to Creole and Bhojpuri, but also to all the languages that are part of our linguistic heritage. It falls on us to make full-fledged languages for future generations. It is our responsibility to do everything so that these languages are preserved and promoted. Or the disappearance of a language is not only a loss for the community of these speakers, but also to our common human knowledge because a language is more than a communication tool. It is also the vector of a mindset, a culture, the custodian of the history of a people, of a mythology, a cosmogony of music. These are not just words that we lose with a language, but a look at the world.”}

(Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 7, 10 May 2011, p. 124).

Creole politicians in support of Kreol include MP Francoise Labelle, MP Aurore Perraud, MP Mirielle Martin, and MP Georges Pierre Lesjongard, who were among the first wave of self-proclaimed “Afro-Creoles” elected into office post-1999 (representing different political parties across the spectrum). Speaking in contrast to the perspective of Nationalist advocates in the parliamentary debates, MP Perraud directly connects Kreol with its slave origins:

> It is worth underlining that the Creole language is the language spoken and understood by almost all Mauritians et c’est une langue qui a pris naissance dans la souffrance; la souffrance des esclaves. Le créole, la langue ancestrale des descendants d’esclaves, est aujourd’hui la langue maternelle de la majorité des mauriciens... Creole language is an ancestral language as it is the first language spoken by children born during slavery period. This is why Creole is an ancestral language for slave descendants and is linked to the cultural identity of slave descendants.\footnote{Translation: “It is worth underlining that the Creole language is the language spoken and understood by almost all Mauritians, and it is a language that originated in suffering; the suffering of the slaves. Creole, the native language of the descendants of slaves, today is the mother tongue of the majority of Mauritians... Creole language is an ancestral language as it is the first language spoken by children born during slavery period. This is why Creole is an ancestral language for slave descendants and is linked to the cultural identity of slave descendants.”} \footnote{The original statement was given in English and French. Switching between the two languages is common in parliamentary discourse.}

(Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

In a similar fashion that underscores the cultural value of the linguistic descendants of a community, Perraud further argues that Kreol’s value is determined not just by its national
ubiquitousness, but its connection to Creole culture, including sega and Ti Frere (dubbed the father of sega), and its role in the expression of their suffering through “le malaise créole”:

Mr Speaker, Sir, culture is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual, institutions and art, music and drama. Nous devons ici, saluer la grande contribution des artistes mauriciens dans la lutte de la reconnaissance et la valorisation de la langue créole à Maurice. A commencer par le griot Alphonse Ravaton, Ti Frère, qui, de par les ségas qu’il a composés, a donné à la langue créole ses lettres de noblesse. On se rappellera aussi de l’apport musical de Fanfan avec « Ile Maurice ki joli joli » entre autres, et de tous les autres ségatiers qui ont suivi, ainsi que les dramaturges, les écrivains, les poètes qui ont été les défenseurs de la langue créole. M. le président, la langue créole est une langue qui est née dans la souffrance et qui a beaucoup souffert pour se frayer un chemin et s’épanouir dans le paysage linguistique mauricien... De facto, les utilisateurs de la langue créole ont été stigmatisés et, pendant longtemps ont eu le sentiment d’être inferieurs, d’être moins bien que les autres, ont eu un sentiment de malaise, de mal être.114 (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

She thus associates Kreol with the Creole community as the medium in which their suffering has been expressed, as well as a medium popularized by the work of Afro-Creole artists. Perraud also notes that the historical denigration and humiliation of the language in wider society has directly been an aspect of its connection to the Afro-Creole—and blackness, specifically—and links the creation of the Creole Speaking Union with the ending of the era of “le malaise créole,” since the language, and thus its people, are finally recognized, valued and respected. Regarding the proposal of the Creole Speaking Union Bill, the MP states:

114 Translation: “Mr Speaker, Sir, culture is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual, institutions and art, music and drama. We must herein commend the great contribution of the Mauritian artists in the fight for the recognition and appreciation of the Creole language in Mauritius. Starting with the griot Alphonse Ravaton, Ti Frère, who through the séga he composed gave Creole its acclaim. We are also reminded of the music of Fanfan with “Ile Maurice ki joli joli” among others, and all other ségatiers that followed, as well as playwrights, writers, poets who were the defenders of the Creole language. Mr. President, the Creole language is a language that is born in suffering and has suffered a lot to fight its way and grow in the Mauritian linguistic landscape... De facto, the users of the Creole language were stigmatized, and for a long time had the feeling of being inferior, to be worse than others, have a sense of unease, of being bad.”
C'est un grand pas pour la promotion de la langue créole et la valorisation de la culture créole. L'heure n'est plus au malaise Créole, mais à l'appropriation et la valorisation de l'identité et la culture Créole. Les artistes choisissent des noms de groupes pour montrer avec fierté et revendiquer leur identité et leur culture Créole. Par exemple, nous avons des groupes tels que « negro pu la vie », « nasty black», « blackman blues », entre autres. Les tenues vestimentaires, les coiffures symbolisant la culture créole sont portées avec fierté et beaucoup d'aisance. Avec le Creole-Speaking Union Bill, la langue créole a un avenir prometteur.\(^{115}\) (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

MP Labelle responds with a counter-argument to those of Nationalist politicians, comparing the UNESCO speech on the importance of languages with the colonial government’s statements on the necessity to promote the Kreol language specifically for the African community. In doing so, she builds a case for the inclusion of Kreol as an ancestral language that promotes identity—an identity that she argues is necessary for an individual’s self-development. MP Labelle states:

Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, promoting a language is promoting the identity of the individual, and promoting the identity of the individual is promoting the individual himself. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the five languages that we are talking about today are well present in our society, true it is, at different degrees. If the Chinese language happens to be the ancestral language of some of our citizens, we all know the growing importance of Mandarin with the growing economy of China. We also, all know how better the relationship can be established when you address someone in his or her own language, the language of an individual being such an integral part of that individual. (Parliamentary Hansard, No. 10, July 2011).

Labelle also points out that the identity-dimension of the languages are important for the empowerment of the individuals within their respective communities, notwithstanding the more practical economic, historical and global value of the languages beyond this identity-dimension. The MP additionally argues that Kreol can be accepted as both the de facto

\(^{115}\) Translation: “This is a big step for the promotion of Creole and the valuing of Creole culture. The time is no longer that of "malaise creole," but the appropriation and valuing of Creole identity and culture. Artists choose the names of their groups to show their pride and demand their Creole identity and culture. For example, we have groups such as “Negro life,” “Nasty Black,” “Blackman Blues,” among others. The outfits, hairstyles symbolizing the Creole culture are worn with pride and great ease. With the Creole-Speaking Union Bill, Creole has a promising future.”

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national language and the ancestral language of Creoles, and that it can both “belong to me and belong to all Mauritians.”

However, other politicians noted that treating Kreol as an “ancestral language” similar to Mandarin or Arabic would have impractical impediments in terms of its standardization and curriculum development. In response to whether Kreol could be considered as an optional language on par with the Asian languages, Minister of Education Bunwaree states:

Our multicultural and multilingual entity makes it important to give due respect and recognition to languages brought by our ancestors. This explains why Asian languages and Arabic have found their rightful place in the school curricula. One would wish to have a similar recognition of and value added to Kreol Morisien with its introduction as an optional subject. This has already been announced publicly by the hon. Prime Minister and we are going in this direction. But this in itself, has implications regarding the production of curriculum materials, recruitment and training of teachers and especially nationally accepted and standardized written form of the language. (Parliamentary Questions, No. B/92, 30 March 2010).

Responses from the perspective of Orientalists continued to bolster the multicultural framework for language inclusion (mirroring the debates on the Asian languages in the 1970s), and in doing so, these actors argued in chorus for the creation of the proposed Asian language speaking unions for their ability to pass down and maintain cultural boundaries. MP Peetumber explains that languages represent identity by facilitating the dissemination of the past and providing direction for the future. Through language, culture can be produced and practiced, and likewise, identities can be valued. He explains:

Why should we give a boost to our linguistic heritage? Well, languages are vehicles of communication and socialisation par excellence which enable us to acquaint ourselves with the norms of a society, its customs and traditions, its religious, social and cultural values. They are also a sine qua non condition for the acquisition of
knowledge and science. Through language, we can express our joy, thrill and excitement, our frustration, apprehension, miseries and sufferings. We can also give vent to our feelings and emotions through songs, poetry, ballads and groom our children through storytelling and plays... In a nutshell, languages are essential to the identity of groups and individuals and any measure to suppress people’s languages will be tantamount to suppressing the identity of the people whose reactions might well lead to unrest and instability in the country... When languages disappear, the identities of the communities which use them tend to dissolve. With the death of a language, a whole way of thinking, living and acting dies too. Each takes with it a storehouse of consciousness. (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

MP Sayed-Hossen further argues that languages are not just simply a tool for communication, but are “vehicles or vectors for culture,” and that they structure how people think, as well as their beliefs, values, and expectations (National Assembly, Creole Speaking Union Bill, Second Reading, 31 May 2011). The parliamentary member also personifies languages by stating that they represent differences between human speakers in the following passage: “When we study a language we are uncovering in part what makes us human, getting a peek at the very deepest nature of human nature. As we uncover how languages and their speakers differ from one another, we discover that our human natures too can differ dramatically, depending on the languages that we speak and the cultural background wherefrom we draw our philosophical references” (National Assembly, Creole Speaking Union Bill, Second Reading, 31 May 2011).

But at the same time, those from the Orientalist perspective continue to dis-recognize the Kreol language as an ethnic or cultural expression of the Creole community as such. These politicians adopt Nationalist arguments when regarding Kreol, viewing it as a language for all Mauritians, long due its recognition as a unifier across ethnic groups. For instance, MP R. Uteem states:
Today, through the Creole-Speaking Union Bill, we are recognising Creole as a language à part entière in its own right, a language which is spoken by every Mauritian irrespective of its race, colour, creed or social background. Creole is a language of our sega, a language which needs to be promoted et valoriser...

And further:

The Creole language has progressed in strides recently. Regarded as an inferior medium of communication during the pre-independence era, the Creole language has now taken firm roots in every Mauritian and is the primary source of identification for the average Mauritian as it cuts across all cultures and ethnic components. Creole has taken a national dimension and is now a language recognised in its own right. This Bill in many ways formalises its wide use by Mauritians of all walks of life and today students will have the opportunity to learn, write and speak Creole without any inhibitions or complex, with the right to submit an application for a job.” (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

Through this argument, Creole is described as the language of all Mauritians, and sega is claimed to belong to all Mauritians rather than recognized as an artifact of Creole culture. Here again, the boundaries of Creole culture stand in tension with the boundaries of the nation, and Creole heritage is essentially erased or backgrounded.

Orientalists also linked Kreol internationally with the “creole” languages spoken in other island nations, rather than characterize it as a distinctly Mauritian language. Furthermore, Kreol’s linkage to slave resistance and marronnage was more squarely placed within the context of oppressed island nations across the African diaspora, in Seychelles, Reunion, or the Caribbean islands, in addition to Mauritius, rather than a distinct feature of Mauritius—or Mauritian Creoles—itself. Minister of Arts and Education M. Choonee describe Kreol’s relevance in this way as follows:

Creole is the mother-tongue of the majority of Mauritians. It is the language we use every day and everywhere in this country. We use it to converse, to teach, to joke and to share our beliefs! It is the language par excellence to bind the nation. Creole is not restricted to Mauritius, it is the vernacular that is used in many countries,
Reunion, Seychelles, Tahiti, Nouvelle Calédonie, etc. This is the language of those who rebelled against inhuman treatment. They expressed their feelings and emotions in this language. Today, by rehabilitating the Creole language, we are also paying homage to those who contributed to making our Nation... we can say that Bhojpuri and Creole are the languages of Unity in Mauritius. Both of them have played a pivotal role in the construction of the Mauritian nation. They so developed that they share words and expressions with other languages prevalent in our rainbow nation. They will continue to flourish and play their part in fostering dialogue between cultures. (Mauritius National Assembly, No. 7, 10 May 2011, p. 110).

In this passage, Kreol is conceptualized as a language of trans-ethnic and transnational unity and a language of resistance common to other island nations. In this way, it is divorced from a specifically Mauritian Creole community and viewed as a medium of cultural contact across diverse island nations. Many Creole activists have viewed such descriptions of Kreol as a consistent form of dis-recognition of their ethnic community, signifying much of the disillusionment they feel with the political system and its process.

In stark contrast, the Asian languages under debate—Arabic, Mandarin, Bhojpuri, and Sanskrit—are consistently described as being brought over from abroad by their respective ethnic groups, and more specifically, living through their descendants diasporically rather than being frozen in their countries of origin. The following passage from MP Uteem demonstrates this:

Besides its religious importance, Arabic has also been the language through which major breakthroughs were recorded. During the middle ages, it was the Arabs who contributed mostly to the advancement of such fields as astronomy, science, medicine, philosophy, mathematics and literature. For example, Al-Idrisi who is considered the greatest geographer and cartographer of the Middle Ages, constructed a globe of the world map of 400 kg of pure silver and it is this map that has been used for centuries by Europeans. It was even used by Christopher Columbus when travelling abroad. Mr Speaker, Sir, all these works were written and recorded in Arabic language and with the knowledge of Arabic, we can better understand the basic principles that were used to make ground-breaking discoveries some 1200 years ago. Along with the Indian immigrants came the Chinese with
their work ethics, religion, culture and language. My friend, Hon. Li Kwong Wing, has dwelt comprehensively on the contribution of the Mauritians of Chinese origin as well as on the origin of the various Chinese spoken languages such as Hakka and Cantonese much better than what I can ever do. I would very humbly state that I concur with my learned friend and join motion with him on the Chinese-Speaking Union. (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 8, 17 May 2011).

Arabic and Chinese are frequently connected with their histories in their countries of origin, French and English with their currency in a “global marketplace” but also their roots in Europe. Such linguistic interpretations are not afforded to Kreol through its connection with Creoles, however.

In addition, Kreol was described above as a language of “emotion” necessary for passionate expression, while in contrast, Minister Choonee describes Arabic and Sanskrit as languages of “science” and reason, and attaches value to the Chinese languages (encompassing Mandarin, Hakka and Cantonese) through their connection to China as an economic “powerhouse” important for its trade relations with Mauritius. (For example, Minister Choonee later asks, “how do we trade with China without knowing its languages?” (Mauritius National Assembly, No. 7, 10 May 2011)). The Chinese, Indian and Arabic languages are generally linked to “economic diplomacy” in this way as a means to welcome business and trade from the major foreign countries in which these languages originate. Similar arguments are made for English as the new global language, and in fact, one of the impediments expressed by Minister Bunwaree during the debates was the possibility of the teaching of Kreol coming into competition with the learning of English (which continued to falter among pupils). This economic element attempts to rationalize the languages beyond their ancestral value in an instrumental fashion.
Comparisons between Kreol and Bhojpuri take a similar tone during the debates. While Bhojpuri is also spoken of in a way that underscores its trans-ethnic use across the Mauritian population, it is still consistently linked to its Indian ancestry, and its trans-ethnic, national use is characterized as a testimony to its value originating in the Indian subcontinent, rather than a signal of its de-ethnicization. As an example, Minister of Arts and Culture M. Choonee states:

Bhojpuri is widely spoken by our population. It is not restricted to people of Indian origin. In the villages, it is not uncommon to find the Chinese shopkeeper using the language fluently. This language is shared by almost all the people of Mauritius. As all dynamic and active languages, Bhojpuri has evolved and enriched itself with inputs from other sources. A typical Bhojpuri sentence will nearly always contain a word from Creole, French, English, Hindi, etc. It seems that Bhojpuri is one of the most widely spoken languages outside India after Hindi. This is the language spoken by people from the Indian diaspora who settled in Mauritius, Trinidad, Fiji, Surinam and other countries during the indenture period. This language was carried to other shores in Europe and America when children of the diaspora emigrated there. Today, you will find people speaking Bhojpuri in the major world capitals” (Mauritius National Assembly, Debate No. 7, 10 May 2011, p. 109-110).

Kreol and Bhojpuri are both characterized as national languages, but for different reasons. In some ways, Bhojpuri is spoken of as an ancestral language, but also made to appear on equal footing with Kreol as a national unifying language, although the number of Mauritians speaking Bhojpuri are similar to those of the other ancestral languages: considerably lower and steadily decreasing in recent decades.

Shifting Strategy: From Cultural Worth to National Value

In the debates on Kreol, language was viewed as representative of culture and seen as a competitive resource for each community. While other languages were linked to religion, diaspora and culture, the Kreol language was de-ethnicized and spoken of as a
national language but also an international language characteristic to island peoples.

Overall, many in the public began to support the Nationalist argument for Kreol’s institutionalization, both in the form of the creation of the Creole Speaking Union and a subject for study in public schools. But Kreol’s “identity dimension”—promoted by Creole ethnic activists—placed it in a precarious position for government consideration.

In face of mounting counterattacks to Kreol’s inclusion on this basis from its opponents, Creole ethnic activists began to shift in their demands, backing a more generalized support of the Kreol language as the national language rather than solely a language of Creole ancestry. During subsequent readings of the Creole Speaking Union bill, MP Labelle states that:

La langue Créole est le véhicule de la culture mauricienne et les tentative de placer cette langue uniquement sous une perspective ethno-identitaire n’aide pas à donner à cette langue la reconnaissance qui lui est dû. Nous parlons de la reconnaissance en tant que langue nationale. Voilà pourquoi, M. le président, le lancement de la grammaire kréol morisien le jour de la Journée de l’Afrique est, à mon humble avis, inopportun. C’est inopportun parce que là on le met sous cette perspective ethno-identitaire et cela n’aide pas cette langue à s’épanouir.  

(National Assembly, Creole Speaking Union Bill, Second Reading, 31 May 2011).

This marks a clear shift in Labelle’s prior arguments for the introduction of Kreol as a cultural right to ensure equal opportunity for Creole students.

In many ways the Creole ethnic perspective had all along combined both identity and practical motives for socioeconomic empowerment, which cannot easily be separated. One Creole activist explains that although Kreol was instituted for the benefit of any

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116 Translation: “The Creole language is the vehicle of Mauritian culture and attempts to place this language only from an ethno-identity perspective does not help to give this language its due recognition. We talk about recognition as a national language. That is why, Mr. President, the launch of the grammar Kréol Morisien on the day of the Africa Day is, in my humble opinion, inappropriate. This is inappropriate because then we put it in this ethno-identity perspective and it does not help that language to flourish.”
Mauritian student, it was dually expected to remedy the exclusion of Creole students in the school system:

Every pupil in the Mauritian republic has a right to an ancestral language... So how can we prevent that kid from feeling that he’s not being treated in the same way as the others. Now, whether he chooses to do it or not, once it is there this is something. But he was the one who did not have any choice. Either he do Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Arabic, where he has absolutely no cultural involvement or attachment and the only language which he could have attachment was not offered in school. So this situation could not last long. And it was a fight of social justice that the government could not prevent to address. (Interview, 4 April 2013).

A former member of FCM working in Kreol pedagogy with the Bureau d’Education Catholique (BEC) describes how these forces ultimately limited Kreol from its “identity dimension,” which affected both practical and identity-based considerations for Kreol policy advocacy:

I was against that Kreol should be introduced in 2012. I said that we should look at the recruitment policy. But then the Minister said no, let us take all teachers who volunteer to teach Creole. Let us launch the subject... But I was convinced that this was not a good decision. That sooner or later we would get trapped in that. I think today that I am right. I was right when I said that Kreol should not be introduced in such a hurry, not looking at important issues like who they were going to recruit. What type of training, what will you put in that training. So the Creole dimension has been diluted. If you look at the content of the training that is being delivered at MIE, you will see there. And it’s quite normal for me, because most of the trainers delivering courses there, it’s a Hindu establishment. And now if you do have some Creoles, these Creoles have to downplay their Creole identity in such institutions... But we have to be positive, it has been a real victory for the Creole community, that Kreol has been introduced in schools. And if you look back at the time of lobbying and all that, I’m very proud of that. (Interview, 18 June 2013).

For the activist, Kreol’s inclusion was important not only because of the recognition it would lend to the Creole community in multicultural policy, but because it also could have stimulated the recruitment of a greater number of Creole teachers in government schools. But to date, most Kreol teachers in the public schools are of Asian descent, a continuation
of their overrepresentation in the civil service. In addition, the incorporation of Creole teachers (as well as Creole political appointees in parastatal bodies and other bureaucratic offices) has also meant the minimization of Creole identity and recognition in exchange for the employment gains of a few largely middle class Creoles and the increased nationalization of the Kreol language.

In the end, however, Kreol’s nationalization created a favorable situation for its institutionalization, as the idea of Kreol’s inclusion in multiculturalism became increasingly tenable to the public. This is because the language could serve as a counter to Creole demands for recognition as an ethnic body, provided that it was introduced as a trans-ethnic, nationalistic language. This public perception stands in stark contrast to perceptions of the language during the onset of multiculturalism in the 1970s, where Kreol’s nationalistic origins were viewed as in tension with multiculturalism. Instead, the discursive negotiation has now set the pace for Kreol to be viewed as complimentary to a specifically diasporic multicultural framework that excludes notions of nativity, but also prevents the increase in cultural power to a specific community (the Creole community).

For some, this was the best way for Kreol to be introduce in language policy. According to one member of VF, the decision to push for the language as an optional course instead of as a medium of instruction was also a shift to an incremental approach to the official adoption of the language that would provide the least resistance possible from the government and opposition forces. She states:

Those who do not identify themselves with an oriental language, did not want these subjects to be imposed on their children and considered that their children would be in a less favorable position than those who choose the oriental language practiced by their elders or religious community. After discussion, the Verts
Fraternels found that the best way to remedy a discriminatory situation against the Creoles was to ask for Kreol to be taught as an optional subject at school: the language is acknowledged by the Creoles as one of their main identity features; the education system gives the possibility to add easily a language to the programme as an optional subject; other Mauritians interested to choose this language for their children could do so; as an option, Kreol could be taught on a democratic basis, without being imposed on those who are against it; prejudices against the teaching and learning of Kreol at school could gradually be reduced through the testimony of the parents who would accept to choose the language (Interview, 5 July 2013).

According to Bissonauth (1998), the failure of Kreol to become normalized and institutionalized formally in society can be explained by its past lack of “intellectualization,” as well as its lack of “rootedness.” In this case, because the language was prevented from being developed through formal academic study, it was not able to begin to become a literary language until the 1990s, which exacerbated its view as inferior in academic and formal settings in the eyes of most Mauritians. In addition, in a multicultural framework in which state-sanctioned languages are assigned value based on their ancestral and diasporic lineages, Kreol’s lack of association to a specific and exclusive community fed perceptions that it did not hold any valuable cultural attributes or a culturally-informed value system, which is thought to imbibe a language with value by connecting its use with the knowledge and aspirations of its “people.” For this reason both French and the Asian languages are viewed as worthy of state promotion and preservation although they did not display a functional value in society—instead, the “identity” value they provided was made prominent in politics. In this way, the Nationalists who helped to intellectualize the language and the Creole ethnic activists who sought to culturally “root” the language in both a diasporic “African” and a native, national “Mauritian” culture in
public discourse contributed to its eventual institutionalization by combining all of these strengths in promoting the language.

**Creole Mobilization and the Infiltration of Party Politics**

The strategic participation of Creoles in party politics also shaped the trajectory through which the struggle for policies of recognition would ultimately play out. Through their advocacy in three policy areas—Le Morne’s inscription, the findings of the Truth and Justice Commission, and Kreol’s institutionalization—Creole ethnic activists worked in concert towards the goal of Creole recognition and ethnic inclusion, whether at the grassroots and within the public sphere, by raising questions and debates in Parliament, or within governmental ministries and parastatal bodies. From these different vantage points, they were able to use agenda-setting, framing, and policy formation to obtain a seat at the table of decision-making and influence the direction of policy. At the agenda-setting level, FCM’s mobilization of the Creole public stimulated attention from government and the political parties to view the Creole community as a collective force in electoral politics. MMKA’s Lavoix Kreol also effectively featured articles that linked “Creole issues” with the goals of major political parties and government programs. Because the MLP government was aware that the public sphere influenced the thoughts and actions of individuals and organizations in civil society, it also understood the need to respond in a way that would intercept possible counters to government actions from civil society.

Creole activists also publically framed the language issue as an ethnic issue over a national one in a way that utilized the multicultural framework, pointing to the government’s hypocrisy in espousing the virtues of cultural preservation while preventing
the recognition of Creole culture as a segment of the country’s multicultural fabric. In this way, they did not demand the acceptance of their hybridity, their Mauritian nativity or the trans-ethnic cultural commonality between all Mauritians, but instead, increasingly advocated for the recognition of their own exclusive boundaries linked to an African diasporic heritage connected to the slave experience. Framing the issue in this way made MLP government officials more attentive to considering the policy of Kreol’s institutionalization by providing the possibility of both a large, predictable constituent—Creoles as a new voting bloc—and an additional fortification of multiculturalism that would complement the efforts of Orientalists in furthering the project of cultural preservation. This explains the fact that those appointed as the main figureheads of institutions such as AKM and the Creole Speaking Union were Creoles, including Arnaud Carpooran and Daniella Police-Michel, although many Nationalists such as Dev Virahsawmy and Vinesh Hookoomsing were included in the teams tasked to engineer Kreol’s standardization.

On the other hand, the Nationalists had also continued their advocacy during this time period. At the policy formation stage, Nationalists were central to the development of Kreol’s standardization and curriculum development, and both Creole ethnic and Nationalist advocates helped to delineate Kreol’s role in language policy in different ways. While Nationalists did the work of standardizing the language and developing a pedagogy that would bridge Kreol with English and French, Creole ethnic advocates promoted the historical and cultural roots of the language to the wider public. But Nationalist advocates attempted to frame the language by highlighting the benefits for all Mauritian children if
Kreol became the medium of instruction in government schools. But this type of advocacy was viewed as incompatible with the state goal of multiculturalism, as well as the interests of Orientalist supporters promoting nation-building efforts that would equalize the various groups in Mauritius and not challenge the primacy of Indian culture in the national narrative. Thus Kreol’s introduction as a trans-ethnic, optional language took on both identity-based and interest-based elements that satisfied neither side of Kreol advocacy completely.

Alongside the lobbying and organizing work of Creole organizations, the simultaneous placement of prominent Afro-Creoles across the leadership of the three parties and as parliamentary candidates during the 2010 elections also strategically placed Creoles in influential positions that, together, pressured for the inclusion of Creole recognition on the national agenda. Subsequently, a greater number of Creoles identifying as “Afro-Creoles” were elected into Parliament after the 2010 election, representing a growing segment of middle class darker-skinned “Afro-Creoles” in politics. These “placements” included prominent mainstays of Creole activism such as Sylvio Michel, who continued to serve as Minister of Fisheries, and Francoise Labelle of Front Commun, Edley Chimon and Filip Fanchette of the FCM (now Chairmen of the LMHTF and NMCAC, respectively), and others who actively participated in Creole sociocultural associations since the early nineties.

Creole politicians and civil servants spanned across the MLP, MMM-MSM, and PMSD and although they were in opposing parties, they acted in relative unity when it came to the Creole recognition issue. This is partly because the lack of space addressing the
interests of Creoles left a blank slate in each party, allowing some latitude for Creole politicians to influence new party platforms bolstered by the work of Creole activism in the public sphere. The general platforms of each party still structured how Creoles were able to argue for policies of recognition. For instance, MMM-MSM party leaders such as MP Labelle made arguments in favor for Kreol’s support as a national language in addition to its teaching within an ethnic Creole culture, while MP Aurore Perraud of the PMSD made stronger arguments in favor of Kreol’s importance for the ethnic empowerment of Creole school children more specifically. At best, these political actors presented a united platform for Creole recognition that bolstered the organizing efforts of their counterparts in civil society, and at minimum, they tended not to act against each other in their various spaces.

This strategic participation in party politics illustrates the fact that Creole party recruits (many of which were previously active within sociocultural and social justice organizations) had become attractive as candidates to the party leadership of the major parties prior to the elections. This stems from the public mobilization that had taken place in civil society, as well as the lobbying work of civil society organizations. While many Creoles had traditionally leaned towards supporting the PMSD or the MMM, some aspiring Creole leaders welcomed recruitment from the MLP in its attempts to garner newly mobilized Creole votes. The lobbying of the FCM with the three parties and party support of new Creole recruits were a strategic operation between these various elements—each using the other to advance policy at the agenda-setting (lobbying and media discourse), framing (within parliamentary debate and the media) and policy formation (within parastatal bodies and government cabinets) stages, but also for their own individual
political leverage. This strategy sought to facilitate the ascent of Creole candidates into multiple parties and ensure their voices were continually being paid attention to.

As Creoles have never traditionally voted as a bloc, they also did not vote for any particular party during the 2005 and 2010 elections. Many instead voted for particular issues related to Creole recognition that had been adopted in the platforms of the major political parties. This meant that while Creoles had traditionally voted in larger numbers for the PMSD (and secondarily the MMM) they voted in substantial numbers for the MLP during the 2005 election. Their ability to vote together in lock-step but with little allegiance to a political party made the Creole electorate a “wild card” during subsequent elections that could prove risky to ignore. Creoles had also publicly demonstrated the development of a Creole public sphere that could be used to directly communicate and influence the group as a section of the electorate.

Many have attributed these strategies to the FCM, whose members implied their singular allegiance to each party. The strategy of the FCM was to meet privately with each of the three major parties (the MLP, MMM-MSM, and PMSD) and encourage each party to place policies of Creole recognition on their party platforms. This led to a situation where the three major parties each scrambled to add Kreol’s introduction to their party platforms prior to the 2010 elections, hoping to secure an advantage over the other parties. One former FCM member explains that this was an intentional play on the MMM and MLP parties, stating that:

The government had to [incorporate Kreol]. They had no choice. Because what we did, Jocelyn, I remember, Jocelyn had to meet Navin Ramgoolam... Steve Obeegadoo phoned me and asked me are you for the introduction of Kreol as an optional language? And he said he is not for that, because he is very nationalist and
all that... So he’s not very pleased with the ethnic issue. So I remember he phoned me and told me do you think the MMM must take position on it. I said yes, you must also take position. And so they also put in their manifesto Creole as an optional language... So both then, when they came out with their manifesto, this was the agenda on both manifestos. So this was a victory for us. You see? They did not know that, you see? When I talked to Steve, he did not know that the Labor party was coming out with that. This was lobbying. (Interview, 18 June 2013).

The FCM also worked directly and indirectly with Creoles within government offices, seeking to exploit the prevalence of shifting alliances (a common practice in Mauritian politics, stemming from its British-style system of plural, proportional representation). This was a major tactic of Sylvio Michel and OF, whose propensity for exploiting shifting alliances helped put the TJC on the government’s agenda. These policies—the Le Morne and TJC issues, and later the Kreol language issue—then became wedge issues in the 2005 and 2010 national elections.

However, this strategy changed when, working alone just prior to the 2010 elections, Father Gregoire publically endorsed the MLP, a move which many Creole ethnic activists believed weakened their multi-party positional strategy for political negotiation. Although this endorsement did not entirely weaken their previous arrangements with the other political parties, many believed that it gave Creole lobbying greater visibility in the public sphere and stimulated a considerable amount of backlash and competition from Hindu lobbies. In particular, the FCM’s entrance into “politics” evoked negative connotations of “communal” politics in the Mauritian public because it was viewed as an attempt to gain unfair advantages for a minority group over the interests and needs of the Mauritian majority. Father Gregoire was also publicly chastised as a prominent figure in the Church who had openly mixed religion with politics. As a result, although each of the
policies for Creole recognition had rapidly developed, they also endured much pushback with increased levels of bargaining from other lobbying groups who viewed the recognition of Creoles and the incorporation of their political interests as a blow to their own influence within a zero-sum political system. Hindus in particular advocated for balancing Creole social, political and historical recognition with increased recognition of Hindu history and culture. For each of the policies fought for by Creoles, Hindu lobbies wielded considerable force in influencing the outcome of these policies to include concessions to Hindu interests. For instance, alongside the struggle for the creation of the TJC, the inclusion of indentured servitude in the final report and the creation of the Sanskrit and Bhojpuri Speaking Unions were very much influenced by the Hindu lobbies.

Creoles were in an inimitable position in politics because as a newly-formed ethnic group, they did not have any specific political allegiance and their electoral preferences beyond the issues concerning Creole ethnic activists were not a given. However, although this particular political strength lent itself to a window of opportunity between the 2005 and 2010 elections in which all three major parties sought Creole votes, it also provided a somewhat short-lived and superficial response from the political parties and the government. For this reason, while the Kreol language issue was rapidly taken up in language education policy, it was also severely weakened in its implementation by the influence of Orientalist lobbyists. Nevertheless, an understanding of the strategic ways in which Creole ethnic activists navigated the political system (separate from the ideational constraints that limited Kreol’s consideration for multiculturalism) is significant because it demonstrates that institutional and ideational structures also directed the way the Creole
ethnic boundary would take shape. Thus rather than view the construction of diasporic nationalism as wholly intentional, their work also demonstrates an enterprise in negotiating multiple constraints within the democratic polity as an arena influenced by prior events, and including institutional, ideational and rival interests as constraints.

**Government Responses in Kreol’s Negotiation**

The initial government response to calls for the inclusion of Kreol was for the most part responsive, extending from the Afro-Creole identity movement and their political mobilization regarding policies of recognition prior to the 2010 elections. Prior to this period, government response to Creole concerns was minute. However, alike the Le Morne and TJC policy issues, the government’s decision on how to proceed with the policy (whether they would ultimately lead to Creole recognition in multiculturalism or segment Creole culture as trans-ethnic/transnational, arrested in a primordial past, or dis-recognized altogether) was unclear. In the 2010-2015 Government Programme, the President announced the government’s intention to introduce both Kreol and Bhojpuri as optional languages in government schools to encourage the use of mother tongues in facilitating instruction (Government Programme 2010-2015, 8 June 2010). The government’s programme did not, however, give support for the languages in recognition of the cultural or ethnic identity of language speakers and their descendants.

In 2012, Kreol language courses were introduced in public schools, but this resulted in a policy that mollified a combination of interests at the intersection of ethnic and national negotiation. Kreol was instituted as an optional language but not an instructional medium, to the dismay of many Nationalist advocates. Yet its lack of a
culture-based curriculum also disconnected the language from the Creole community. Many advocates on all sides of the debate had pushed for Kreol to be instituted as a medium of instruction, and plans were made for the government to support the language in this capacity at the lower levels of schooling, but this has so far materialized only at the proposal stage. In addition, while Kreol became recognized de facto as a national language, it was not officially-integrated and supported beyond the creation of the Creole Speaking Union and AKM, both institutions that are today underfunded with limited institutional power (for instance, as of 2012, the Creole Speaking Union was composed of only a single member).

Finally, the creation of the Creole Speaking Union had also spurred the negotiation for several additional speaking unions seeking to balance its inclusion in the multicultural framework, including a bolstering of Bhojpuri to a similar transnational status as that of Kreol. Additionally, the negotiation of these policies were shown to interact in a way that limited their complete institutionalization, as the limitations of initial policy proposals influenced the success of future proposals, and vice versa, in a pattern of “give-and-take” bargaining. However, Kreol’s institutionalization differed in that it was more incrementally introduced into the policy arena through a series of institutional initiatives in the private and public realms. For Creole ethnic activists, this outcome came as both a bane and a boon to the struggle for recognition; it would be seen as a failure at worst and a small step in a positive direction at best, depending on the government’s treatment of Kreol in the future.
Furthermore, the creation of AKM and the Creole Speaking Union were further attempts after the 2005 elections at accommodating Creole organizing and lobbying as a social and political collective and thus a potential electoral bloc. Many of those appointed as members of AKM were also Creoles, which was a strategic move on the part of the MLP government to signal to the Creole community an attempt at addressing the issue of Creole recognition and representation by the state. However, the language of the Creole-Speaking Union Act disconnects Kreol from the Creole ethnic community in Mauritius and instead connects it to “Creole-speaking peoples,” both nationally and internationally. The Act states that the Union’s central goals are to “promote the Creole language in its spoken and written forms; [and] promote friendship and understanding between the Creole-speaking peoples of the world and to engage in any educational, academic, cultural and artistic work to further that objective” (Creole-Speaking Union Act, July 2011). This de-ethnicized the language and also opened up its value globally and transnationally. This angle was well-known by some members of the two organizations, who viewed both organizations as ultimately empty vessels and symbolic gestures rather than substantive moves towards Kreol’s institutionalization.

While Kreol was linked to the Creole identity movement in public debate, the government consistently disregarded the identity dimension of Kreol’s introduction in language policy from early on. Kreol was first approved for use as a “support language” before the government considered instituting it as an optional language in public schools. But the political debate on Kreol showed the government’s sustained focus only on attempts to institute the language as a medium of instruction or support language, with no
element of cultural identity being recognized or supported. This response shows that the government did not seek to incorporate Kreol out of multicultural concerns, but out of the desire to manage population groups in a way that minimized tension and increased the legitimation of the state from all sides.

During a parliamentary question session, MP Labelle asked Minister Bunwaree “whether, in regard to the primary and secondary school students, [the Minister] will state if Government is contemplating implementing measures to ensure that equal opportunities be provided to all of them, on the basis of linguistic and cultural rights” (Parliamentary Questions, No. B/597, 23 June 2009). Minister Bunwaree responded that the prior creation of ZEP schools was already the government’s attempt at instituting a policy of affirmative action for academically-struggling students in poor areas, and that any continued inequalities between students were otherwise due to differences in the “facilities and aptitudes” between students. For this reason, the Minister further argued that culture had been a subject avoided in schools and that “there is, therefore, no linguistic or cultural discrimination of any kind in primary and secondary schools” (Parliamentary Questions, No. B/597, 23 June 2009). Considering that Minister Bunwaree did not recognize the possibility of inequality or discrimination in education, calls for remedies specific to the Creole community—including through Kreol language education policy—fell on deaf ears.

The importance of Kreol advocacy for the political mobilization of Creoles was monumental however, as many Creoles still expressed positive sentiment for the policy, even though Kreol was not incorporated in language education as intended. Nonetheless, while many viewed the introduction of Kreol as a step in the right direction, other activists
were skeptical about the true motives of the government’s rapid support for the institutionalization of Kreol. According to one activist working within a cultural parastatal body, Kreol’s recognition by the state came at the coattails of activism that had taken place within civil society for decades, but its rapid governmental support was the direct result of collective mobilization and party politics (both outcomes of the Afro-Creole identity movement). He states that:

There is no other country which did in a democratic way what we have been doing these last 10 years. And without the help of the government. The government, they came when everything was done. They gave their official recognition when there was nothing more to do. The dictionary [was done] without them. The prime minister just came and launched it. Everything was done. In spite of this, so, at one moment, when you are a government you have to decide, is there a political gain in recognizing this issue, or is there political gain in avoiding it? So if I don’t do it, the opposition will take advantage of it. So if I want to prevent the opposition from taking advantage of it, I better recognize it myself. So this is what the government of Navin Ramgoolam did. All these issues are linked. The ethnic quest is closely linked to the rapidity at which the government took the decision at the eve of the last general elections. (Interview, 4 April 2013).

Throughout the growth of the Afro-Creole identity movement and the political mobilization of Creoles in the struggle for policies of recognition, Kreol was utilized in several ways as a point of negotiation: for the ethnic incorporation of the Creole community, the Nationalist eradication of ethnic boundaries, the Orientalist reinforcement of the Hindu ethnic boundary, and ultimately, in the strengthening of official multiculturalism. By the early 2000s, both Nationalist advocates and Creole ethnic advocates had advanced the government agenda on Kreol in different ways that, in conjunction, affected its trajectory and incorporation. These advocates worked in parallel, rather than in concert, and only occasionally at odds. Nationalist supporters of Kreol supplied a standardization of the language informally among linguists and artists in the
private sphere (Hookoomsing, 2004); this enabled the government to incorporate the language into the school system with greater ease, less public backlash, and less institutional resources. Creole ethnic elites were able to provide heavy electoral pressure by facilitating an expansive social movement that pushed for the recognition of the Creole ethnic boundary as a means to both Creole ethnic empowerment and interest-based pragmatism in primary schooling.

However, Kreol’s inclusion was limited in the eyes of both advocacy groups, in that on the one hand, it was introduced as an optional language, but on the other, was not attached to a particular community. To date, there has also been much less investment in the Kreol curriculum than within the Asian languages and the prevention of its use as a medium of instruction has done little to change the life chances of struggling Mauritian students without the socioeconomic and cultural advantages to advance to secondary school. These responses from the government signify a number of conclusions about the prospects for Creole inclusion in multiculturalism and policies for recognition. First, the government views the Creole community primarily as a residual group, and as such, Creole activists have little political influence within the policy process beyond the contribution of public opinion and party politics. The 1995 CPE issue, Le Morne and the TJC, and Kreol’s institutionalization each gained most headway during the lead up to contested national elections, although each were incremental and symbolic modes of inclusion that had not necessarily built off of each other. At each moment, policy influence was attempted in order to solidify the boundaries of the Creole ethnic community, through the inscription of history, culture, and language, yet forces from both a racially-neutral government and
multicultural coalitions from within an ethnic-differentiated civil society constrained the possibilities for Creole organizing within and outside of the policy arena. This situation made racial and ethnic identity mutually exclusive, yet did not allow for the shedding of racial identity for an ethnic one. It is precisely the lack of an ethnic identity (and the perception that Creole ethnic activists were attempting to falsely create one) that further racialized the community and thus made their concerns impossible for a racially-neutral state apparatus to address.

The Kreol language instead became a symbol to be used by the government in a moment in which national and global discourses on human rights, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism had become possible, and in which the discourse on Mauricianisme could be used to both neutralize Creole activism for recognition and unify the Mauritian rainbow under a framework of hybridity and nativity that could work simultaneously with (rather than in opposition to) multiculturalism. For the Creole community, each of the above policy struggles could be perceived as failures because they ultimately signified policies that included Creoles on a broad-scale basis that residually recognized specific historical artifacts (such as Le Morne, Kreol and slavery) as present but not integral to the Mauritian multicultural nation, and did not recognize their distinct experience as a group. This divorced these policy issues from the Creole community as an ethnic or racial community. Therefore their ethnic boundary remained dis-recognized while the boundaries of other groups, such as Bhojpuri speakers and those whose ancestors immigrated through Aapravasi Ghat, were increasingly strengthened by their exclusion.
Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the political terrain of exclusion, and how, through the creation of group boundaries, processes of exclusion are constructed and practiced in liberal democracies that, in theory, strive for the full inclusion of its citizens. It has sought to answer a central, overarching question concerning these processes: Within contexts of official multiculturalism, why have some groups remained unrecognized, marginalized and excluded, while other groups in society have instead achieved official recognition and full democratic inclusion? The marginalized experience of Creoles in Mauritius illustrates the political dynamics behind two processes—the construction of multiculturalism and the negotiation of group and national boundaries—that serve to facilitate exclusion within a liberal-democratic context.

Contrary to the arguments made by proponents of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 1996; Modood, 2013), Mauritius’ system of multiculturalism strengthens intra-ethnic group ties within civil society, making ethnic-based civic engagement a critical necessity for citizens to participate democratically. In particular, because Mauritius’ political system privileges diasporic attachments and the essentializing of group differences in the distribution of economic and political resources—and because Creoles are devalued and unrecognized in the social realm for their racial and cultural hybridity—Creoles are now clinging to a more Africanized identity in order to reap the benefits of ethnic-based collective action (Boswell, 2005). This turn may improve the sociopolitical cohesiveness of Creoles but may further exacerbate group tensions in politics. For other groups in Mauritius, their full incorporation into politics and society has been bolstered by
multiculturalism, affording equal rights to the benefits of citizenship for these communities. By and large, politics has typically consisted of inter-group competition for state resources (doled out through religious, linguistic and other sociocultural funding) in which Creoles have lost out the most. Even though Mauritius has remained a peaceful country in spite of the ethno-racial inequality it exhibits, major riots in February 1999 showed that tensions between groups have boiled over, as the marginalization of Creoles and the pervasive feeling of “le malaise créole” has begun to test the country’s social structure, as well as its future peace and stability.

While the 1999 Riots signaled the looming effects of Creole marginalization on Mauritian society, it also served as an impetus for change in the country, further solidifying an Afro-Creole identity movement seeking to combat the high levels of poverty present within the Creole community. This movement, beginning in the mid-1980s, developed across five different punctuations of events that shaped Creole ethnic identity. Including the articulation of “le malaise créole,” the inclusion of the Asian languages on the CPE exam, and the 1999 Riots, these events were socioeconomic and political circumstances that culminated in the creation of a more Africa-centered Creole identity. Interpretations of these events by Creole ethnic activists were influenced by a discourse of Africanity that had burgeoned within the movement (inspired by discourses of negritude and Black Consciousness in other parts of the African Diaspora), as well as a distinct socioeconomic experience of Creole marginalization that produced a durably social (rather than symbolic) boundary between Creoles and non-Creoles in lieu of their symbolic recognition. This identity movement culminated in a stronger desire for official recognition by Creole ethnic
activists. In addition to further politically mobilizing Creoles as a group, the 1999 Riots also opened a window of opportunity in which the Mauritian government had become more receptive to Creole organizing efforts in the name of ensuring peace and stability.

Creole ethnic activists then sought official recognition and inclusion in multiculturalism through their advocacy in two policy areas—the inscription of Le Morne on the UNESCO World Heritage List and the creation of the Truth and Justice Commission to evaluate reparations for slavery. Through these policies, Creole ethnic activists attempted to make demands for state consideration on the basis of their contribution to national heritage and their deservedness for racial justice. Within this context, Creole activists used framing, agenda setting, and transnational pressures in public discourse to (re)construct the ethnic meanings of their group and the role of their community within the nation. These policies failed to provide Creoles with more than symbolic representation, however, because they created tensions between racial and national boundaries that pointed out the group’s racial distinction and cultural nativity. They further produced a threat to Hindu ethnic elites who scrambled to counteract them with competing discourses of diaspora and indentured servitude.

The previous chapter outlined how Creole ethnic activists also advocated for a third policy—the institutionalization of the Kreol language in the public school system—and attempted to re-appraise the value of both the language and the Creole ethnic boundary in multiculturalism. Influenced by a political structure balancing multiple ideological frameworks and political and sociocultural interests, the government’s response was to institutionalize Kreol in a way that many Creole activists felt weakened the effects of the
policy. It provided optional instruction of the language (to the behest of Nationalist and Creole ethnic activists who sought Kreol as a medium of instruction as a pragmatic solution to school failure among the poor), but devoid of a cultural curriculum linked to the Creole ethnic experience (to the chagrin of Creole ethnic activists claiming Kreol as a cultural artifact of the community). Alike the competition within language policy illustrated in Chapter 4, policy discourse in this later period ultimately produced an ethno-racial divide between Creoles and non-Creoles based on Creole cultural nativity in contrast to the diasporic cultures shared by other ethnic groups. The backlash from Hindu elites in particular has further encouraged Creole activists to re-define their boundary within the folds of multiculturalism and increasingly ascribe their group as bounded within an African diaspora.

However this shift was problematic because Creole conceptualizations of blackness and hybridity as boundless, diasporic and native trans-identities meant that the promotion of Kreol was seen as a threat to the boundaries of Asian-descended groups. Not only were the Asian languages endangered by a natural ecological death in the face of global forces encouraging cosmopolitanism in everyday life, but Kreol’s association with Africa as morally backwards, historically arrested and culturally barren rendered it a powerful void in which other cultures and languages could be subsumed. As a result, once Kreol was adopted on the government’s national agenda, the Nationalist proposal for it to be officialized as the medium of instruction in government schools was rejected in favor of it being incorporated as an optional language on par with the Asian languages. As such, the current course curriculum and textbooks for Kreol created by the government lack any
cultural instruction on the language related to Africa, slavery, or other aspects of Creole heritage, nor any of its decidedly “Mauritian” cultural elements.

Using a theoretical framework that centers the politics of diaspora within the broader study of national inclusion, I have argued that the correlation between Creole marginalization and their lack of recognition and inclusion in multiculturalism are the result of an active process of dis-recognition in which Creole identity has been consistently negated by non-Creole political elites despite Creole demands. In this vein, there are two main conclusions of this research that together explain the exclusion of Creoles in Mauritian multiculturalism. While Creole demands for recognition increased, these demands have been mitigated by the Hindu-dominated government in two major ways: 1) through the creation of an over-arching institutional framework of diasporic multiculturalism that problematizes native cultural groups while incentivizing intra-group organizing within cultural groups conceived of as diasporic, and 2) several ideological frameworks that interact at the local and global levels to constrain the discursive strategies available for the justification of Creole inclusion.

Diaspora versus Nativity in the Negotiation of National Boundaries

Throughout the post-independence period, several competing discourses arose in the public sphere that reflect a tension between the demarcation of ethnic boundaries and their full erasure. These include discourses of multiculturalism versus Mauricianisme, Africanity versus creolité, and diaspora versus nativity. The tension between Mauricianisme and multiculturalism in public discourse after independence principally involved the competition between Nationalist and Orientalist politicians and activists in the formation
of language policy. These discourses sought to promote either unifying the country under the Kreol language or minimizing Kreol for the preservation and promotion of the Asian languages. During this time, the burgeoning Afro-Creole identity (focused on rekindling diasporic linkages to Africa) was initially viewed as non-threatening and simply an additional identity within the Mauritian “rainbow” that could increase the island’s positive image of cultural pluralism. Unlike Mauricianisme, Africanity fit within state multiculturalism as one of the many cultural pillars of Mauritius, and many Creole activists sought to position Afro-Creole ethnic identity in this way. Pushing for a more exclusive identity within a multicultural framework, this activism reinforced and legitimated the state promotion of the Asian languages while further seeking the additional inclusion of Kreol as an ethnically-bounded cultural artifact worthy of state promotion. In general, advocacy for Kreol from the Afro-Creole perspective concerned the desire for equal recognition within a multicultural system already structured on ethnic pluralism.

But throughout the 1990s, Africanity and Afro-Creole identity was increasingly seen as a threat to other elite ethnic actors in society, as it became inhospitable to other discourses operating in the public sphere. Because of its focus on the Kreol language in consolidating an identity that was both locally “Mauritian” and African, Africanity contended with the discourse of Mauricianisme promoted by Nationalist advocates. Likewise, as Creoles sought to define their cultural boundaries, negotiating between Africanity and creolité, their boundary was increasingly viewed by Orientalist elites as seeking to absorb the boundaries of other groups in society. On the other hand, Mauricianisme (and creolité as its complimenting variant) was not only a threat to the
multiculturalism promoted by Hindu elites, but it threatened Creole ethnic inclusion within the multicultural framework as well. For Creole ethnic activists, Mauricianisme was viewed as particularly damaging because many of them saw it as seeking to claim the Kreol language and the Creole ethnic boundary within a more amorphous, national culture of hybridity, rather than simply existing alongside Kreol and Afro-Creole identity the way it had for Hindu or Indo-Mauritian identity. Mauricianisme claimed the Kreol language was culturally hybrid, distinctly “Mauritanian” and thus un-African. But many Creole activists found Kreol necessary for the articulation of Africanity because it was a cultural artifact that had historically developed among Afro-Malagasy slaves and therefore provided a connection to Africa for Creole slave descendants. Kreol could also give potential cultural value to the group within Mauritius’ multicultural nation, and for practical reasons, its promotion within government schools could help increase the academic aspirations of predominately poor Creole children.

Collectively, these themes within Mauritian public discourse illustrate a primary tension between nativity and diaspora. Multiculturalism and Africanity both privileged diasporic cultures over articulations of native culture that serve to challenge immigrant belonging and absorb the ethnic boundaries necessary for group advancement. For Hindus and other Asian-descended groups, their status as perpetual “foreigners” prior to independence cultivated a sensitivity to discourses that sought to promote assimilation and

117 Many Nationalist advocates have promoted the embracement of a singular national culture as an addition to the diverse ethnic cultures of Mauritian ancestors, rather than as a replacement for them. For this reason, Nationalist advocates have usually insisted on bringing Kreol into the multicultural kaleidoscope of languages while also continuing to support the state promotion of the Asian languages.

118 This conceptualization was partly strategic, as some Nationalist advocates have argued that emphasizing the African roots of Kreol would be counterproductive to its promotion in the general public, believing that many Indo-Mauritians would be hard-pressed to embrace any possible ancestral connection to Africa or blackness.
hybridity over the maintenance of their own ethnic boundaries. In a postcolonial context where multiple ethnic groups had to negotiate the ways and means of national inclusion at independence, a focus on diasporic boundaries also helped to facilitate nation-building and ethnic power sharing in the polity without the tensions of nationalistic claims to the state.

Ethnic politics in Trinidad and Tobago illustrate a similar case in which the development of multiculturalism has signaled a tension between diaspora and nativity in politics. Alike many Caribbean countries, multiculturalism in Trinidad does not seek to integrate minority groups into a dominant, native majority, but it seeks to provide an equal weight of national belonging to groups who were previously denied citizenship. However, the dominant culture in Trinidad has been centered around Afro-creole culture, based on an Afro-Trinidadian population that now make up roughly 34 percent of the population (Rampersad, 2014). Trinidad first instituted an official policy of multiculturalism in 1995, when the first Indo-Trinidadian was elected as Prime Minister. Its official multiculturalism was spurred by complaints from Indo-Trinidadians who believed that state resources had been unevenly distributed towards Afro-Trinidadians who had taken over the government for most of the country’s post-independence history, including civil service employment, scholarships, and sociocultural funding for cultural festivals (ibid). As such, political life in Trinidad is ethnically-based, split between two relatively equal majorities that view politics through a prism of ethnic competition. For some, the introduction of multiculturalism was a political maneuver targeting a growing Indo-Trinidadian population (that has now recently surpassed the Afro-Trinidadian population) that may upset the country’s peaceful history (Taylor, 2012).
The brief period of Indo-Trinidadian control of the government (which ended in 2002), was viewed as a threat to the Afro-Trinidadian establishment and the national boundary itself, as the desire to maintain diasporic ties to India through multiculturalism invoked further feelings that Asians would put India first (Rampersad, 2014). Afro-Trinidadian elites have instead favored an “assimilationist” model of national culture characterized by the island’s “hybrid” Caribbean culture. This is because throughout history, the Afro-descended population has had an historical identity with Trinidad as a cultural birthplace, and they therefore emphasize cultural rootedness and nativity within the territory itself. Not only is this also a characteristic of Afro-descended populations in the wider Caribbean, but of the African diaspora in general (Falola, 2013). As Gilroy (1993) posits, many groups within the African diaspora have developed a “cultural nationalism” plagued by the negotiation between the recognition of their creolized origins and a Pan-Africanist reconnection of ethnic purity in the articulation of their post-slavery experience. However, Indo-Trinidadians continue to identify with India and Indian culture abroad, and they seek to preserve these connections through a government policy of multiculturalism as “unity in diversity.” This continued connection with the Indian diaspora has also made Indo-Trinidadians appear as perpetual foreigners in public discourse. Afro-Trinidadians, however, have been able to make cultural claims to the island as being integral to its native culture, and as such, their boundaries exist as a force that Indo-Trinidadian political actors believe they must fight against. According to Khan (2004), discourses of creolité, racial democracy, the “callaloo nation,” mestizaje, and others emphasizing racial mixture and hybridity as a national ideal exist in contrast with that of.
multiculturalism, diaspora, and ethnic purity across the Caribbean and Latin America. The author explains that:

Throughout the colonial period, ‘creole’ was an identity that distinguished someone locally born in the Caribbean rather than in Europe or Africa. But it also indicated newness: emergent cultural, racial, social forms. The distinction between sides of the Atlantic in Caribbean societies had consequences for claims of ancestry and other markers of identity. For New World blacks, creole implied both a loss (or abandonment) of African heritage and the creation of a subsequent, New World identity (although based in part on aspects of African heritage) (p. 7).

I argue that while Afro-descended, post-slavery populations balance both ideological streams in their cultural experiences, multiculturalism has been increasingly constructed with an emphasis on cultural differentiation that is located abroad and/or non-natively. Even while indigenous populations are accepted into the multicultural fabric, their cultures have been conceptualized as pre-modern and pre-dating the birth of the modern settler and/or postcolonial nation-state—they thus serve to compliment multiculturalism and uniquely contribute to the pre-modern development of the nation from a vantage point arrested in the past. The modern birth of Afro-descended cultures, however—embedded in the racial projects of modern state formation—have existed in tension with contemporary multiculturalism.

In these cases, multiculturalism has remained limited as a policy for inclusion because it creates a rubric by which the civic nation, or “state-nation” is defined by the exclusion of native or “hybrid” cultures. Accordingly, diasporic multiculturalism has created a distinction between groups that elevates ethnic, immigrant status and its associated cultural contribution to the nation over populations whose cultures have been natively-constructed and are thus viewed as in tension with a diasporic revisioning of
previously colonial nations. A central goal of this research was to critically interrogate the tension between race and ethnicity within the liberal-democratic context, where groups have been ascribed by these terms differently and therefore have experienced different levels of integration and inclusion into their respective societies. More than just the demarcation of difference based on phenotype and culture, I have found that to become “ethnicized” affords the opportunity for groups to experience full democratic inclusion while those problematized and denied national membership and inclusion have instead become “raced,” particularly as economic inequalities have continued to exacerbate between “ethnic” and “racial” groups. In other words, multiculturalism advocates the belief that there are commonalities between distinct cultural groups across the human species while still legitimizing and reinforcing the belief in a sub-humanity. Diasporic multiculturalism is a new variation of what Mills (1997) called the “racial contract:” in an era of colorblindism and post-racialism, Afro-descended groups in particular are viewed as separate and distinct peoples stripped of the value of cultural rootedness and humanity.

Discourses, Policy Norms and Institutional Constraints to Inclusion

In Mauritius, the government’s resistance against Creole demands for recognition and the “tit-for-tat” scrambles between Hindu and Creole ethnic activists in public policy also showed that dis-recognition acts as a political strategy of exclusion in an ideological context where colorblindism, post-racialism, multiculturalism (or diversity), and liberalism structure political discourse in the “civic” polity. These ideological frameworks together serve as a conceptual toolkit with which political actors can legitimately engage in public deliberation and policy-making in the construction of their group boundaries. They also
exist as global policy norms that structure politics in other liberal democracies. Interestingly, they operate in the service of anti-racist ideals that endorse cosmopolitanism and universal human rights, but still seek to uphold the racial institutions of the past and actively resist calls for redistribution and racial justice. As such, they collectively permit discourses of exclusion that no longer explicitly reference race—and in fact, actively discourage the mentioning of race (DaCosta, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2004)—but continue the work of racial exclusion (Goldberg, 1993). Expressions of diasporic lineage work within the confines of these frameworks by “fixing” and defining racial difference as that which is non-diasporic, and by extension, lacking cultural purity.

In Latin America, ideologies of diaspora and multiculturalism have typically been promoted by both diasporic ethnic minorities and indigenous American populations alike, but have also increasingly been utilized by Afro-descended groups seeking to navigate policy norms of multiculturalism and colorblindism. In Brazil, Da Costa (2016) identifies the prevalence of post-racial ideology as a “strategy of power” similar to the way colorblindism is used in the negation of Creole identity in Mauritius. Hooker (2005) argues that with this setting, the rights of indigenous populations are viewed as more deserving because of their perceived cultural contribution to the mestizo nation, which emphasizes their cultural distinction over their racial distinction. Black populations, on the other hand, have been given a much smaller spectrum of rights, and using different discursive strategies and modes of political organizing, they have struggled to justify their deservedness for similar policies of inclusion. An understanding of power is important in explaining this phenomenon because unequal power relations underlie politics. In liberal democracies, the
virtues of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism are expressed in a way that ignores unequal power relations between groups that are already in place, but in seeking to equalize groups, they eschew as a remedy the rebalancing of resources of power. In this way, such expressions of multicultural equality do not necessarily generated changes in the daily lives of marginalized citizens.

Alike Mauritian Creoles, Afro-Colombians have also shifted towards demarcating their boundaries on the basis of ethnic or cultural difference rather than racial inequality (Paschel, 2010). According to Paschel, their social movement exploited the opening of “policy windows” that represented a shift in global policy norms towards multiculturalism and colorblindness in order to situate their demands for inclusion. Paschel argues that Afro-Colombian organizations strategically used “framing” to situate their claims within multiculturalism by shifting from a “racial equality” to an “ethnic difference” frame, where the former emphasized equality and the breaking down of barriers between groups while the latter emphasized the cultural distinction and autonomy of groups. By 1993, the Colombian government had instituted several policies recognizing the Afro-Colombian community and addressing their specific demands for redress, not through reparations or racial justice legislation, but in the form of guaranteed consociational legislative representation for “black communities,” community development, and the incorporation of Afro-Colombian history in the public school curriculum (ibid). Creoles’ attempts at recognition have similarly sought to rebalance unequal power relations while also working through the institutional language of multiculturalism. Many Creole activists ceased in their demands for reparations for this reason. Instead, Creole activists attended
international conventions, cited United Nations resolutions, and pitched appeals to the cultural tourism sector in packaging their claims for consideration by the Mauritian government.

Nonetheless, internal divides within the Creole leadership have also served as constraints to their collective organizing, as the liminality of Creole identity had not been completely solved by the Afro-Creole identity movement. The ideologies of creolité (as well as Mauritianisme) and colorblindism also gained ascendancy in the Creole public sphere. These ideas promoted a liberal abstractionist vision of the Mauritian nation as both mixed race and transracial—a boundless space in which cultures have amalgamated to become something new and uniquely Mauritian. Because a fusion of multiculturalism and colorblindism became an ideological framework of the state by the early 2000s, some Creole activists sought to use creolité as a bridge to incorporate the community into the “rainbow nation.” Yet both the discursive strategies of Africanity and creolité have been opposed in the policy arena, leaving Creoles in a gulf where they have largely remained politically, economically and socially excluded as a collective. Moreover, because of the structural circumstances in which Creoles found themselves that necessitated more heavily demarcated group boundaries, creolité increasingly became downplayed in more contemporary articulations of Creole identity.

As a consequence, many Creole sociocultural organizations have shied away from expressly political forms of organizing in recent years, either in disillusion of the weak policy outcomes of their previous organizing efforts or with the desire to create “real” change in the socioeconomic realm. Interest-based organizing and involvement in
community associations that address the more pressing, practical needs of Creoles (for instance, through religious charity, neighborhood clean-up, job training, or the creation of after-school programs) had continued throughout the period of Creole political mobilization, but today make up the majority of Creole associations. Beginning in 2011, the Rassemblement Organisation Kreol African (ROKA) is a new sociocultural association including a number of well-known activists recruited by a relatively unknown leader, Jean-Noel Bridiane, previously a business owner and musician who was the former President of an artists’ association. This organization has rejected engagement in politics and has sought to meet the practical needs of the community by organizing to provide free adult community courses in business development, job training, or domestic skills, as well as art and music courses. Many members, some of whom were previously members of FCM and other politically active organizations, expressed the desire for the organization to remain “secret” in such a way that they could aid in the economic advancement of Creoles without spurring backlash from other groups. Working outside of the confines of the Catholic Church, such organizations face an uphill battle in their efforts to mobilize Creoles post-2010, as the decline of the FCM and the un-substantive effects of Creole policy advocacy have created a wide sense of disenchantment and further fragmentation.

The death of Mario Flore in 2010 and the decline of MMKA and Lavoix Kreol also symbolize the fragility of Creole organizing that has for the most part been dependent on the work of single, charismatic leaders. Without a larger institutional framework from which to carry on these legacies, Creole organizing has been characterized by short, intense periods of high civic interest and mobilization followed by longer durations of détente, in
which disillusionment and fragmentation decreases Creole civic engagement. Many Creoles also feel that there is a lack of political leadership within their community. This is not to say that Creole political actors have decreased their engagement in community organizing and politics, but that these candidates have had a more difficult time gaining attention and support from the general public and their Creole counterparts. Many of the Creole activists interviewed expressed a general frustration with the inability to keep sustained support after the decline of the FCM in particular. In addition, while the Catholic Church had been used as a platform integral to these periods of high mobilization in recent decades, this dependence on the Church has also led to a situation where institutional support is uncertain and frequently dependent on justification to Franco-Mauritians and other non-Creoles in the general Christian community.

These internal barriers highlight a possible link between civic participation, group identity and inclusion that deserves further exploration. Therefore, while identity and recognition can increase collective participation in civil society and the policy process, such engagement and influence also increases group identity and recognition in turn. Beyond analyzing how group boundaries are maintained within liberal democracies, this research leaves unanswered questions concerning what motivates the boundary construction of groups in these contexts, and why more cosmopolitan, transracial or trans-ethnic ideologies have not “stuck” in the public sphere. To the contrary, transracial ideologies have been deployed in the continuation of racial and ethnic divisions. How might a better understanding of the relationship between participation, identity and inclusion explain the durability of group organizing and calls for multiculturalism in democratic contexts?
Identities, Interests and the Pull of “Groupism”

To begin answering this question, scholars must first question the faulty distinction between “identity” and “interests” that is prevalent in political science. To date, the standard understanding of civic participation focuses on its virtues at the individual level, where citizens are empowered through activities such as voting in elections, writing letters to government officials, or engaging in associations that act on their individual interests (Fukuyama, 2002; Putnam, 2000). However, where collective organizing and engagement provides increased mobilization and influence, the building of group power has become integral to full democratic inclusion. Thus as Hero (2003) suggests, because civic organizing is typically contained within groups as ethnic- or race-based social networks, its positive effects are limited, and instead tend to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities between groups in society. This is a pattern in many liberal democracies that further incentivizes a dependence on identity-based (rather than interest-based) organization.

The Afro-Creole identity movement developed in response to Hindu political hegemony and widening group-based socioeconomic inequality, reflecting a desire for collective organizing to solve the practical problems of the community. The incentive for such organizing has been largely identity-based. As follows, it is important to note that local ethnic associations in Mauritius have been actively engaged with their diasporas, and that these diasporic connections have been more than symbolic: they represent ethnically-exclusive social networks that have also aided in the socioeconomic mobility of individuals within these communities to the exclusion of those outside of these networks. In fact, the country’s high economic growth that took place after the creation of EPZs in the 1980s
benefited from direct foreign aid and investments from China, India, and Arab states, who have held diasporic connections with Indo- and Sino-Mauritian elites in Mauritius (Bowman, 1991). As Sino-Mauritians have historically maintained business connections with Hong Kong, the post-independence state also allowed foreign Chinese entrepreneurs residence for their enterprises during this time (ibid). Indo-Mauritians have also had strong connections to Indian economic elites. India is the main international partner of the country because it provides considerable financial aid to support cultural ties with Indo-Mauritians in government and civil society, and Indian prime ministers, politicians, and leaders publicly visit Mauritius on a regular basis to reaffirm their ties with Indo-Mauritians (Eisenlohr, 2006; Bowman, 1991).

In contrast, Mauritius has had little ties to Africa besides through the economic linkages of mainly non-Creole business elites. As Creoles are the one group in Mauritius that has little direct ties to a homeland or access to foreign capital, their lack of diasporic ties has also perpetuated their socioeconomic inequality. Although the foreign connections and entrepreneurship of Sino-, Indo-, and Franco-Mauritians have made economic contributions to society that have rapidly spurred growth and human development in general, they have simultaneously contributed to an accelerated socioeconomic gap between Creoles and non-Creoles, as resources from these economic ties have generally become ethnically segmented. In this vein, Baldacchino (2005) argues that Mauritius’ practice of “island neo-corporatism” has harnessed network-driven social capital to create and sustain its high levels of economic development. Regarding the ties between political and economic elites and the island “ethnies” present in Mauritius, the author states that:
One should recognize ‘identity’ per se as a political resource, with obvious links to some of the most powerful forces of our time, powerful enough to transform human beings into rebels, martyrs, revolutionaries: nationalism, ethnicity and sovereignty... One therefore cannot discount that the desire for, and pursuit of, self-government and identity are strong inducers of contemporary social change in modern history (34).

Attachments to group identities may therefore be the result of the economic and political resources extracted from these diasporic linkages.

My analysis shows that the mobilization and organizing efforts of Creole ethnic activists connected civil society organizing with politics in political society, reinforcing a trend towards a type of identity-based organizing that is distinct from, yet informed by, notions of ethnic and national identification. Instead of being solely based on an ancestral identity, their efforts were largely motivated by an experiential identification marked by the overlapping of identity and interests within a system of ethnic-based socioeconomic stratification. In this way, promotion of the Kreol language was used as a means to bolster an ethnic identity that could politically mobilize Creoles, but its inclusion in the government school system was also important to the experiential interests shared by many in the community as lower class citizens with lower levels of educational attainment.

I have mainly discussed the identity dimension of language and culture, and in particular what language policy does for a specific group’s identity in the process of boundary construction. However, pragmatism is also an important aspect of language policy advocacy, specifically where it overlaps with education policy, but also more broadly in the ability of the state to enable the use of certain languages over others in different aspects of daily life. From this perspective, Kreol language advocates recognized the practical merits of teaching classes in the mother tongue for the vast majority of Mauritian
children—sans the goals of identity and nation-building—and the utility of providing it as a more effective strategy in boosting the grades of poor, failing students in other subject areas. At a basic level, identity construction acts as a method for collectively mobilizing large numbers of people on single issues that may affect them. In fact, many of the elites I interviewed from both the Nationalist and Creole ethnic advocacy camps noted that pragmatism was a driving force in their goals in changing language policy, but their definition of what it meant to be “pragmatic” was conceptualized in different ways: while Nationalist advocates saw Kreol’s institutionalization as a matter of material interests (noting the gains that could be made in education for poor children who happen to be Creole), Creole activists saw the identity dimension as crucial in that Kreol’s institutionalization could both collectively mobilize and enable Creoles as a group to set the terms for their development through more collaborative access to state resources. Thus while ethnic boundary constructions help to secure political power and allocate resources, it also empowers groups to realize their own self-determination.

In sum, the arguments against what Brubaker (2009) calls “groupism” within multiculturalism, as well as those that embrace cosmopolitanism and transracialism (Gilroy, 2000) have not fully addressed demands for the redistribution of power that incentivizes “identity politics.” This scholarship views individual-level reforms for democratic inclusion, justice, or economic mobility as more equitable and fair from a mindset of difference-blindness, but such measures can also inhibit the ability for collective mobilization or community-level development, particularly among groups and localities that remain socioeconomically, ethnically and racially segregated. In this way, the problem
of multiculturalism is that it has schematized the ways and means by which groups can access, use and maintain political power, rather than upset balances of power in the goal of group equality. With this, rather than doing away with multiculturalism altogether, further research into the connection between collective participation, identity and inclusion may help to identify the ways that multicultural policies can be enabled to achieve their full potential.
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