1. Introduction

The Setting, the Subject and Methodological Considerations

‘What will keep us [in Mauritius] if we don’t have the seaside anymore?’, a Franco-Mauritian woman told me after the government had proposed to raise the leasehold of the campement (seaside bungalow) sites.¹ She was voicing a widely shared opinion among the white Mauritians, ‘officially’ called Franco-Mauritians, that the government’s 2006 proposal to increase the leasehold was unjust. Franco-Mauritians, who by far own the most campements, feared the proposal would jeopardise the continuity of their pleasant (elite) life style along the island’s sandy beaches and turquoise lagoons. The argument of many Franco-Mauritians was that back in the days nobody wanted that land. Now that spending leisure time at the seaside had become popular, Franco-Mauritians argued, the government wanted to get rid of them to cash in on the land’s new-found value. The Franco-Mauritians could do little more to stop the government from pursuing its intention than complain: a clear departure from the colonial heydays.

The approximately 10,000 Franco-Mauritians, in some ways the living heritage of the European colonisers, can still be considered to represent an elite, however, but are living in a society that has tremendously changed since the island left the colonial period behind in 1968. Mauritius’ vibrant capital, Port Louis, has modern corporate buildings rising above the traditional one or two-storey buildings, congested roads during rush hour, and neatly dressed businessmen found side by side with shopping Mauritians and tourists. Franco-Mauritians have had to adapt to the new situation, and their political power in particular has declined substantially now that many other Mauritians are aspiring for power and privilege. And yet, this said, the old Mauritius is difficult to ignore because in all corners of the island one still finds large swathes of sugarcane fields, often owned by Franco-Mauritians and the island’s traditional economic revenue. This makes the Franco-Mauritian case a very interesting one with regard to the comparative understanding of how elites balance between continuity and decline in general.

1.1 Setting the Stage

Mauritius is a small island in the Indian Ocean, situated some 800 kilometres to the east of Madagascar. Its closest neighbour is the French Département d’Outre Mer La Réunion. Mauritius itself together with the island of Rodrigues and the outer islands of Agelega and St. Brandon

¹ Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
constitutes the Republic of Mauritius. The estimated total land surface area is 2,040 square kilometres (the island of Mauritius representing 1,864 square kilometres), this being inhabited by a population of 1,260,400 in 2007. The population density makes Mauritius one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

Remarkably, the islands were uninhabited when European seafarers first set foot on the island. For this reason, nobody can claim the island as the homeland of their ancestors. This fact connects the island, and more specifically its population, to many corners of the globe: present-day Mauritians have their origins in distant locations such as China, Europe, India and Africa. Franco-Mauritians nowadays constitute slightly less than 1% of the population, and Creoles about 27% (gens de couleur with the much larger group of Creoles). The largest group are the Hindus (52%) and there is a smaller minority of Muslims (16%). Both groups originate in India. Finally, there are the Sino-Mauritians, who make up 3% of the population. This has yielded an interesting cultural and ethnic mixture, as is exemplified by the fact that one can eat Indian-style snacks on a French baguette. Three main religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, co-exist together. The official language is English but the mass media mainly uses French and the majority of Mauritians speak the local Kreol. The political system of Mauritius is modelled on the British Westminster system. This implies that it does not have proportional representation but ‘first past the pole’ in the republic’s 21 constituencies (20 in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues). It has developed a hybrid legal system whereby the (French) Code Napoleon and British judiciary principles form an integral part. With such a variety of customs, cultures, religions and ethnic groups it is not surprising that Mauritius presents itself as ‘the rainbow nation’ (like South Africa, which uses the same slogan).

Notable Exceptions

The Franco-Mauritians were the hegemon during the colonial period and faced little competition. Today, even though the Franco-Mauritians have adapted to modern realities in many ways, they remain a community associated with the colonial past. This is partly due to their continuing involvement in the sugar industry and their continuing possession of large tracts of land. Although much attention has been paid to the Franco-Mauritian contribution to the island’s

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2 The Republic of Mauritius also officially includes the contested islands of the Chagos archipelago and the tiny island Tromelin. The Chagos islands were detached by Britain from Mauritius prior to independence and have been renamed since then British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT). The British subsequently made the largest island, Diego Garcia, available to the US who used it to establish one of its largest overseas naval bases. Tromelin is claimed by both France and Mauritius and these governments have agreed on the principle of ‘co-gestion’ of the island.


4 Apart from a population of 38,000 on Rodrigues, the population on the other islands is negligible.

5 The gens de couleur are, more or less, the elite layer of the Creole community. A Creole ascending in the socio-economic hierarchy automatically becomes a gens de couleur.
history (this cannot be ignored) this attention has tended to come in the form of more general studies. Only a few notable exceptions have focused on the Franco-Mauritians directly.

*Le Bal du Dodo* (1989) by the French writer Geneviève Dormann is a novel, not an academic study. I would like to mention it, however, because it parodies the island’s white community and strikes a sensitive chord. Many Franco-Mauritians refer to the novel as an offensive interpretation of their lives. But other Franco-Mauritians and Mauritians said that in order to understand the Franco-Mauritian community one ought to read the novel. One Franco-Mauritian woman said that the fact ‘that the [Franco-Mauritians] criticise it that much probably implies that there is much truth in it.’ Geneviève Dormann herself argues that the story is universal and could have been set in somewhere other than Mauritius. Even so she did say, with some panache, ‘the aunt in *Le Bal du Dodo* is based on the mother of a friend I didn’t like. That at least three Franco-Mauritian women recognised themselves in the aunt says something about them.’ The interesting point here, though, is the fierce criticism the novel generated among Franco-Mauritians, not so much because of its content (this being fictional literature) as for its general atmosphere and its characterisation of people.

The most notable and rigorous academic study of the Franco-Mauritians was carried out by Catherine Boudet, a political scientist from Mauritius’ neighbouring island, La Réunion. Her doctoral thesis, *Les Franco-Mauriciens entre Maurice et l’Afrique du Sud : Identité, Stratégies Migratoires et Processus de Récommunautarisation* (2004), focuses on Franco-Mauritian migratory flows to South Africa, flows which notably peaked around independence. However, in her analysis she devotes a significant part to the Mauritian side of affairs where she describes the history and the context of departure. At a later date Boudet also published on Franco-Mauritian identity in Mauritius (Boudet 2005). She has a good understanding of the subject, and reading her work and exchanging thoughts with her has been very useful for me, especially in light of the fact that there are few others involved in studying Franco-Mauritians.

When I was already well underway with my fieldwork I also became aware of a study purely devoted to the Franco-Mauritians and their position in Mauritius. The thesis by Astrid de Gentile, of white Martiniquais origin herself, the so-called Békés, was not publicly available on Mauritius but I did find it in the library of La Réunion. It is called *Les Franco-Mauriciens; Étude Ethno-Géographique* and has the sub title *Évolution et Transformation Socio-économique de la Communauté Franco-Mauricienne à l’Ile Maurice*. The thesis appeared to have a similar focus to my project, and the three questions she posed were the following:

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6 Interview: Mauritius, 9 January 2006.

7 Interview: France, 14 October 2006.
Astrid de Gentile’s thesis identified a number of aspects relating to these questions that I also considered important, and I realised that I was heading in the right direction. I had identified similar aspects important to the elite position of the Franco-Mauritians, their culture and their lifestyle. The work itself, however, did not live up to the title and questions. The study contains a lot of factual information on the socio-economic and spatial organisation of the Franco-Mauritian community, the Mauritian sugar industry and the history of the island’s population but, as Boudet argues, the study is weakly conceptualised and perceives Franco-Mauritian identity as something primordial and static (Boudet 2004: 7). The main impression that I gained of the thesis was that de Gentile had failed to give sound analytical answers to the interesting questions she has proposed, a gap that I will try to fill with the current thesis.

1.2 The Research

The main question to be addressed in this thesis is the following:

*What challenges to their dominant position do the Franco-Mauritian elite in Mauritius face and via which social, political, economic and discursive practices have they met these challenges in order to achieve continuity of their position?*

In order to answer this question, the thesis will analyse and ‘deconstruct’ numerous (historical) challenges threatening a decline in the Franco-Mauritian elite’s position (political, economic and social). With respect to these challenges, I propose to look at Franco-Mauritian agency in terms of the efforts made to consolidate their elite position. I will also, however, address the impact of structural phenomena on both the decline and continuity of the elite position, as this will help to explain and understand the elite’s actual room for manoeuvre. Studying Franco-Mauritians from an anthropological perspective can, in my opinion, significantly contribute to our knowledge of the interaction between agency and structure in terms of both the comparative understanding of elites and the context of Mauritian studies.

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8 Translation: ‘Why and how has the Franco-Mauritian community, though it only represents one percent of the total population, maintained such a dominant position in the Mauritian economy? Does this economic power have social and ethnic repercussions? Finally, could one say that, as for Martinique, their internal cohesion represents the power of the Franco-Mauritian community?’
Studies on Franco-Mauritians, as I have noted, are few. Hopefully this study will contribute to an empirical, more in-depth understanding of certain issues regarding the Franco-Mauritians in the society of Mauritius. It can therefore also be considered to be an ethnography of the Franco-Mauritians. Unlike Catherine Boudet’s study, this thesis will deal with Franco-Mauritian everyday life in detail, and will explore Franco-Mauritian culture and (self-)perceptions. And, in contrast to de Gentile’s work, it will focus on analysing socio-economic aspects relevant to the context of maintaining an elite position.

Opinions in Mauritius about the Franco-Mauritians are diverse, ranging from fierce criticism because of their colonial past and persistent control of power, to more nuanced opinions or indifference. Both Franco-Mauritians and other Mauritians perceive substantial cultural differences between their respective communities, differences which they often consider insurmountable. Franco-Mauritian numbers are, moreover, small. It is estimated that there are, nowadays, some 10,000 Franco-Mauritians, but since there are no official figures this remains an estimate. Judging from the data available, if anything they probably number less than this figure. In any case, there are relatively few of them and encounters between Franco-Mauritians and other Mauritians are, therefore, not very much in evidence. With their past and continuing presence as a strong economic power this obviously makes for easy stereotyping. History, in this respect, often tells us more about the present than about the past, as the past is often selectively used in power struggles. It is, therefore, easier for an outsider, like the 2008 Nobel prize-winner for literature, the Frenchman Jean-Marie Le Clézio, of Franco-Mauritian descent, to talk on these matters:

I appreciate your interest for the Franco-Mauritian community, somehow a vanishing species. Being of Mauritian descent, from my mother and father, I do have the feeling to belong to this inheritance [sic] and culture. It gives to me the … to acknowledge a common heavy past, linked with the atrocities of slavery and man exploitation in the system of the plantation. Nevertheless I cannot forget the extraordinary accomplishment of this small society, most of which from popular rural extraction, who was lead to exportation due to the extreme poverty in their homeland – in my case, Brittany.⁹

The quote cited here refers to a number of aspects that justify a more in-depth study of the Franco-Mauritians in the context of Mauritian studies. The ‘somehow a vanishing species’ is an interesting remark as the Franco-Mauritians, with their one percent, are a minority in the most

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⁹ Personal communication with author, 11 November 2004.
literal sense of the word. In everyday life Franco-Mauritians did not always seem to be too worried about their small numbers but I did sometimes sense a latent sense of anxiety concerning this issue, also reflected in the defence of their associational (club) life. The assumption is often made that an outsider like Jean-Marie Le Clézio, who favours intercultural dialogue (*Week-End*, 16 November 2008), more easily expresses these kind of feelings. In the same sort of way, most Franco-Mauritians prefer to avoid or to downplay the topic of the atrocities of slavery, atrocities often committed by their ancestors. This does not imply that Franco-Mauritians shun history, though, as will be illustrated by the many who have a keen interest in the accomplishments of their ancestors. The ethnography of the Franco-Mauritians will touch upon these issues and other patterns of Franco-Mauritian social behaviour and culture. It should, therefore, contribute to our understanding of the wider Mauritian context.

*Elite Studies*

The main contribution of the study, and theoretically more challenging, will be in the context of elite studies, a field that, according to Mike Savage and Karel Williams, has been largely forgotten in the social sciences and that has been stultified by those who appear to know the answers to the questions before the empirical research has actually been done (Savage and Williams 2008: 15). The Franco-Mauritian case study is fascinating and will enhance the understanding of a wide spectrum of aspects regarding an elite’s efforts to achieve continuity of its position in the face of change. It can be recognised that Franco-Mauritians still hold on to their elite position forty years after Mauritius became independent. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that their political position has declined notably in that period (which to a lesser extent also impacted on their socio-economic position).

In the new reality of the twenty-first century, the Franco-Mauritians are, obviously, not the same as they were during the colonial period. Ethnographically addressing the Franco-Mauritians may show the importance of studying apparently trivial aspects, such as daily routine and practices, and the culture of elites. Apart from a few notable exceptions, like Abner Cohen (1981), George Marcus (1983), Cris Shore and Stephen Nugent et al. (2002), and Jean-Pascal Daloz (2003), studies on elites generally pay little attention to cultural dynamics. At the same time, it is unfortunate that anthropology pays so little attention to elites as an object of study since elite studies have much to gain from an anthropological perspective. Cultural aspects may, for example, contribute to understanding the complexity involved in elites and their hold on power and may also enhance our knowledge concerning why one elite survives and another does not. Elite perceptions, for that matter, should receive substantial attention as well. *Elite Perceptions*
of Poverty and Inequality by Elisa Reis and Mick Moore et al. (2005), for example, gives interesting accounts of the elites in terms of their perceptions. In my opinion, it is necessary to study how elites are guided by their perceptions when using their power – especially, when taking into consideration that the Franco-Mauritians are a small minority who also feel threatened by competing powers. This also indicates how elites do not exist in a vacuum and how their positions can only be understood in relation to other social groups and to the wider social structure.

1.3 Methodology

This case study of Franco-Mauritians is first and foremost the ethnography of an elite. An ethnography is characterised by its focus on culture, its holistic approach, contextualisation (describing routine and the daily lives of people) and the use of fieldwork (Fetterman 1998). My specific role, as will be illustrated below, was important as well since the ethnographer him- or herself is a determining factor for the success of the study. ‘Fieldworkers learn to use themselves as the principal and most reliable instrument of observation, selection, coordination, an interpretation’, writes Peggy Reeves Sanday (Reeves Sanday 1983: 20). Moreover, as David M. Fetterman argues, ‘[a]n open mind also allows the ethnographer to explore rich, untapped sources of data not mapped out in the research design’ (Fetterman 1998: 2).

The content of this thesis would have been different had it not been flexible. Initially, the research design adopted a historical and a contemporary point of view and set out to apply a multi-sited approach. The multi-sited approach remained constant throughout the project with research conducted in Mauritius, South Africa (Durban and Cape Town) and France (Paris, Montpellier and Toulouse). The focus of the research was, however, adapted in the light of new insights. After pilot research in February and March 2005 in Mauritius and Durban it was decided to mainly conduct research on Mauritius instead of spending an equal amount of time at the other sites.

The original research design focused on Franco-Mauritan transnational (business) networks. It appeared interesting to study the origins of these transnational networks and the changes that had occurred because network research has tended to neglect issues of network origins and change (Kilduff and Tsai 2003: 87). The pilot research showed that the transnational networks connecting Franco-Mauritians in Mauritius and, especially, Durban were still very active in terms of the family but less so in terms of business. The functioning of the networks prior to

10 Travel grants to conduct research in Mauritius, South Africa and France were made available by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Society for the Advancement of Research in the Tropics (Treub-Maatschappij).
Mauritian independence, when Franco-Mauritians feared a downturn in an independent Mauritius led by the majority descendants of the Indian indentured labourers, and during the first decades of independence (this coincided with the Apartheid regime), had been different. Yet, even then, the transnational networks contributed only to a limited extent to the prosperity of the Franco-Mauritian community in Mauritius. This demonstrated that their position was substantially more related to the local Mauritian context than to the transnational one. Apart from this practical justification for the change of emphasis, studying efforts to maintain an elite position simply proved much more interesting than studying transnational networks.

The modified research design meant that I conducted research for nine months in Mauritius (November 2005 – July 2006), six weeks in South Africa (Durban and Cape Town), and four weeks in France (Paris, Montpellier and Toulouse). I focused predominantly on Franco-Mauritian students in South Africa and France in order to get their opinions about the Mauritian situation and their future. This proved very useful. As for the previous research design, this also benefited from the freedom it gave me to explore untapped resources and approach the issue in question with an open mind. In my opinion this approach was vital to enhance my understanding of the Franco-Mauritian position and the patterns, processes and power relationships involved. This freedom, however, could be time-consuming and always held the danger of following leads that might lead nowhere and that certainly might not end up in the thesis – at least not visibly.

Following a lead that turns out to be a cul-de-sac (in the sense that it does not directly end up in the analysis) is not something specific to ethnographies of elites. However, ethnographies of elites do bear some distinguishing characteristics. I will now deal with these characteristics before going on to elaborate on the kind of sources I used to answer the research questions. Finally, I will reflect upon my own role in the gathering and analysing of the data.

11 In October 2007, I visited Mauritius for another ten days to conduct some additional research.
12 For example, I closely followed the criminal case relating to the death of Vanessa Lagesse, a young Franco-Mauritian woman belonging to one of the island’s richest families. She was found murdered in her house in 2001. The investigation into the murder was characterised by successive police blunders, accusations of police brutality and a constant parade of changing suspects. Eventually, all charges against the main Franco-Mauritian suspect were dropped in 2008 – this happened some time after the police superintendent in charge of the investigation team, who had been accused of police brutality, had died. Interestingly, it was argued that the whole investigation and the style of police involvement represented a break from the past – allegedly, Franco-Mauritians prefer to try to solve issues within their community. Moreover, it became a highly mediatic case; the media attention was considered to be fuelled by the interest of the Mauritian public in the lives of the Franco-Mauritians, their wealthy fellow islanders, of whom they knew little. However, in Mauritius, like in many countries, excessive attention is given to such cases and thus it was questionable whether the Vanessa Lagesse case really revealed much about the Franco-Mauritian situation and whether it could, therefore, help to answer any of the research questions.
The Ethnography of Elites

‘Many have noted that academics more readily study minorities—for example, the poor and the powerless—than they do the rich and the powerful—the elite’ (Hunter 1993: 55). Rosanna Hertz and Jonathan B. Imber write that one explanation for the lack of elite research is that elites are by their very nature difficult to penetrate since they establish barriers that set their members apart from the rest of society (Hertz and Imber 1993: 3). Robert J. Thomas argues that important people in big companies can be difficult to interview—they are visible but not accessible. Businessmen tend to be very busy or to act busy. Thomas, consequently, writes, ‘[a]s a top executive once told me, “I’m not paid $2 million a year to answer the phone.” Besides, most businesses, no matter how small, have gatekeepers who keep an eye on the comings and goings of strangers’ (Thomas 1993: 81, 82). Thus, the ethnographer has to do his/her absolute best to somehow become a welcomed guest—a position that normally comes with invitations but which, in the case of most ethnographers, often starts with inviting oneself.

Contrary to Thomas and Hertz and Imber, Susan A. Ostrander states, ‘[m]y experience suggests that the difficulties of gaining access and establishing the rapport necessary have been exaggerated.’ According to her, ‘[w]ell-thought-out strategies for access and rapport are often useful or necessary. However, luck and a willingness to take advantage of opportunities are just as valuable’ (Ostrander 1993: 9). For my research it was actually relatively easy to gain access to an elite known for its privacy; some luck contributed to this, however. Prior to conducting pilot research in Mauritius and South Africa in February and March 2005, I attempted to establish contacts via the internet. I contacted a number of large Franco-Mauritian companies directly. None of them replied except one. But indirectly I came into contact with a Franco-Mauritian businessman who did reply and who said he could bring me into contact with relevant community leaders. Excellent, I thought, they even have community leaders. This turned out not to be the case, however. When I met the businessman face to face he told me that he sometimes called the community’s most important businessmen ‘community leaders’. But, whatever they should be called, he brought me into contact with all the CEOs of the companies that had initially not reacted. As Thomas rightly argued: access to businessmen does not come automatically (Thomas 1993: 81, 82), but as Fetterman writes, ‘[a]n introduction by a member is the ethnographer’s best ticket into the community’ (Fetterman 1998: 33).

Once primary contacts had been established, I was easily able to establish new contacts—most interviewees agreed to schedule an interview when I mentioned that so and so had referred me to them. Importantly, there seems to have been a genuine curiosity about a researcher from
the Netherlands studying the Franco-Mauritians and many of the Franco-Mauritians and Mauritians were willing to tell their story and share their opinions – I think it should not be underestimated when studying elites that people just like to express their opinions. In the case of some businessmen, however, their curiosity was also short-lived. Follow up interviews during my second and more extended stay were more difficult (and often impossible) to accomplish.

Also important and in my favour was being referred to people by someone these people knew was important. It implied that I was to be trusted.

Trust

‘Ethnographers need the trust of the people they work with to complete their task’ (Fetterman 1998: 140) – this goes for ethnographers studying elites and other communities alike. When we met for the first time, the aforementioned businessman treated me to lunch so that we could discuss what my intentions were. I explained the project and said that I was not predisposed to criticise the community. He was probably convinced by this explanation which helped to establish trust. Other Franco-Mauritians questioned me about whether my research was for the local Mauritian press. As will be shown throughout the rest of the thesis, they had their reasons for fearing too much exposure. Lisa Douglass, who studied the white elite of Jamaica, also noted, ‘[p]eople in positions of power may fear that information about them might be used against them by their critics’ (Douglass 1992: 37). This point provides, in fact, an indirect reference to one of my arguments stating that elites often do not have ultimate power.

In line with Fetterman I believe that ‘[a]s long as ethnographers demonstrate that they deserve the group’s trust, they will probably do well’ (Fetterman 1998: 34). In this respect, my research proceeded well. I cannot, however, put my finger on exactly how I earned their trust so completely. Ostrander argues that to establish trust one should avoid creating expectations that the researcher is unable to meet (Ostrander 1993: 12). In more practical terms, trust was additionally established by offering to use pseudonyms. As Fetterman writes, ‘[t]he use of pseudonyms is a simple way to disguise the identity of individuals and protect them from potential harm. Disguising the name of the village or program can also prevent the curious from descending on the community and disrupting the social fabric of its members’ lives’ (Fetterman 1998: 142, 143). I would argue that for most cases it is not useful to expose the name of anyone. In a small-scale setting like Mauritius and within the even smaller Franco-Mauritian community it can even be actively harmful not to offer to use pseudonyms. However, in any case, I always explained that using pseudonyms could not completely disguise respondents. To a certain extent you have to mention, for example, professional positions – it can be relevant whether it is a
businessman or a priest making a statement – and family composition. This, nevertheless, could expose individuals or at least limit the number of possible identities. Franco-Mauritians and Mauritians knew this but even so I have taken into account the case’s sensitivity and tried to keep the descriptions as abstract as possible while still tackling the research questions. I also opted to refer to the tiny number of Anglo-Mauritians as Franco-Mauritians as by not doing so I would have almost directly revealed who I was talking about. Besides this, the differences have become negligible since the departure of the British; even before then numerous originally British families had already effectively become Franco-Mauritian. The few remaining Anglo-Mauritian families are, therefore, (historically speaking) socially and culturally close and have the same skin colour. Pseudonyms will, however, never fully protect a Franco-Mauritian identity. Here lies a potential danger: many Mauritian politicians know the real names of the most powerful Franco-Mauritians, but when they publicly criticise the Franco-Mauritians they tend to use an abstract terminology talking about, for example, ‘the five families’ or the people who ‘benefited from slavery’. Names, then, are not a prerequisite for criticising Franco-Mauritians.

Sources
Ethnographies are known for their use of multiple methods and sources – normally, at the very least, participant observation and interviewing are included in the methodology. Answering the research question, in my case, is, furthermore, based on network analysis, a questionnaire and written sources.

Interviews
I interviewed about sixty Franco-Mauritians in Mauritius, forty in South Africa and twenty-five in France and talked to numerous others – i.e. in non-interview settings, for example, during informal conversations and when doing participant observation. I interviewed about thirty other Mauritians (and a few expatriates) and talked to many more about the research (whenever I could I mentioned my research and tried to get their opinions) and about a dozen South Africans and French. The interviews were conducted in English and French and the interviewees’ backgrounds included CEOs, other businessmen, clergy, politicians, students, school children, retirees and so forth. I tried to talk to Franco-Mauritians from all walks of life as ignoring certain groups would inevitably lead to a poor ethnography (Dahles 2004: 34). I had a number of key informants. They helped me with making contacts and setting up questionnaires but by talking to them I also gathered a lot of information directly. In general, I did not officially interview these key informants. I considered it somehow a bit strange to ‘officially’ discuss their personal lives. It
could have jeopardised further co-operation or trust. As Fetterman writes, ‘[k]ey actors and ethnographers must share a bond of trust. Respect on both sides is earned slowly. The ethnographer must take the time to search out and spend time with these articulate individuals’ (Fetterman 1998: 50). I had never realised that, as happened in France, key informants could consider their story not worthy of my interest – my explanation that it had nothing to do with their story but more with their positions vis-à-vis me proved acceptable for them.

Interviewing elites, some researchers argue, is to a certain extent different from interviewing non-elites. According to A. Cochrane it can be the opposite of researching the less powerful where the agenda may effectively be set by the researcher (Cochrane 1998: 2123). Ostrander also refers to class differences between upper-class elites and lower-status interviewers although she argues that the latter can still ‘control the interview’ (Ostrander 1993: 18). I did not experience problems with controlling the interview; at least not to a greater extent than one might encounter when interviewing in general. Open-ended questions (the most used interview technique in the research), for example, are prone to having interviewees wander off in less relevant directions. Trying to maintain control over the interview is, therefore, something not restricted to interviewing elites. Nor did I perceive class differences as constraining. None of the interviewees acted in a superior manner towards me. Interestingly, they did often refer to Europeans in Mauritius who were of a lower class (this is a kind of defence mechanism, as will be shown further on in the thesis, even though there was normally some truth to these types of statements). They never gave the impression that they considered me to belong to a lower class, however.

Regarding the use of interviews, I have to note a few other important points. First of all, I am aware of the shortcomings and also the advantages (of which there are some, luckily) involved in the use of interviews – discussed in, for example, William H. Foddy (Foddy 1993). Secondly, the interviews were mainly of an open-ended character since the research had a qualitative approach and focused on how the participants thought about the world (van Maanen 1983: 80). I was, thus, very much interested in the elite’s emic point of view (Fetterman 1998: 20). The elites’ perceptions, anxieties and other opinions are, in my opinion, important for understanding their behaviour and their relationships with other social groups. For example, one may argue that because of their position elites have nothing to complain about or fear and yet, from their point of view, this may not be the case at all. Thirdly, most of the information from the interviews concerned the present situation since it would have been more difficult to check the veracity of past events: people are known for having subjective memories, especially when talking about the past (Foddy 1993; Yow 1994).
Participant Observation

‘[Participant observation] involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives’, states H. Russell Bernard (Bernard 2002: 322). Interviewing Franco-Mauritians in their offices and at home produced interesting data regarding, for example, the location of their offices and the organisation of the work floor – at least the work floor close to their executive positions. Yet, for a sound ethnography, participant observation needs to go beyond the interview settings. M. Woods writes, ‘[t]hus identifying and studying the places in which elite interaction takes place—from Rotary Club meetings to Whitehall pubs to aristocratic breakfast tables to City of London restaurants to discrete drinks in gentleman’s clubs to professorial early morning coffee in university common rooms—is an important part of understanding how elites are formed and how they work’ (Woods 1998: 2117). Albert Hunter, moreover, argues, ‘[t]he ability to penetrate to the more exclusive backstage, where intimate, informal behavior, sometimes “deviant” to public demeanor, takes place, is often taken by ethnographers as a sign that they are now able to fulfill the ironic, debunking mission of research’ (Hunter 1993: 38, 39).

In the case of the Franco-Mauritians, participant observation proved very rewarding in terms of studying their networks, behaviour and other relevant features. I did have access to the exclusive backstage, yet not to the extent that I had wished for. Boardroom meetings and other business settings remained behind closed doors – Franco-Mauritian participation in the Free Masonry, a supposed meeting point for Franco-Mauritians and Hindu politicians (the present prime minister is a Free Mason himself) was also impossible to study. To a large extent obtaining information about secret wheeling and dealing was off-limits. Yet, participant observation was not only about this. Everyday settings (publicly accessible as well as exclusive backstage spaces) and special occasions were very useful for providing an understanding of cultural patterns, the sense of belonging and the value of networks – I attended a wedding, visited Franco-Mauritians in their private seaside bungalows, partied and dined with them, went on a hunt and even shared an apartment with a young Franco-Mauritian woman.

Network Analysis

The research focused less on network analysis (see, for example, Kadushin 2002, Kilduff and Tsai 2003) than was initially intended because of changing the focus from the study of transnational networks to the study of elites. Studying networks has, however, still remained as part of the research. I looked especially at the impact of culture on the elites’ social networks and vice versa.
This may enhance our understanding of how an elite tries to maintain its position in the face of change. Steven Vertovec has argued that the advantage of a social network perspective lies in its ability to allow us to abstract aspects of interpersonal relations which cut across institutions and boundaries of aggregated concepts such as neighbourhood, workplace, kinship or class. According to him, the network perspective fosters empirical research ‘as a way of revealing de facto active networks rather than a priori assumptions of community solidarity’ (Vertovec 2001: 6).

In the case of the Franco-Mauritians, the aggregated concepts of kinship and class are, however, very strong and add to the given explanations for the resilience of the networks. This seems to correspond with Wayne E. Baker and Robert R. Faulkner’s argument that economic actors often rely on pre-existing social ties to reduce risk and uncertainty by transacting with someone they know or with someone referred by someone they know (Baker and Faulkner 2004: 92). In the Franco-Mauritian case, this is especially relevant as can be seen from the graphic illustrations of the interlocking directorships of the top one hundred companies on the island (see Chapter Five). The illustrations show the strong connections existing between Franco-Mauritians and their strength (especially compared to other Mauritians) in the private sector. However, only by studying Franco-Mauritians, their history and the structure of the networks more thoroughly can the interlocking directorships be fully understood.

Questionnaire
A questionnaire was devised and distributed among the Franco-Mauritians to obtain more general information concerning a number of variables. The questionnaire consisted of structured questions and left room to elaborate on the answers if so desired. The questions were of a descriptive kind – for example, what income group they belonged to, where they lived and whether they had a second passport. The answers the respondents could give were, in general, standardised. Typically, the respondents could tick one of four different boxes indicating different answers – e.g. monthly income: less than Mauritian Rupee (Rs) 15,000; between Rs 15,000 and 40,000; between Rs 40,000 and 80,000; and more than Rs 80,000.13 Besides giving the opportunity to make more general statements, self-administered questionnaires have the advantage of being able to ask: a whole list of questions considered too boring to ask in a systematic way during a face-to-face interview; more susceptible questions; and questions that demand anonymity (the respondents thereby having a sense of security when answering) (Bernard 2002: 244, 245). Conversely, the distance between interviewer and respondent can also be a pitfall. Fetterman writes, ‘[k]nowing whether the researcher and the respondent are on the

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13 In the international money markets the symbol for the Mauritian Rupee is variously referred to as Mau Rs or MUR. In this thesis, however, I will use the Mauritian symbol which is Rs.
same wavelength, sharing common assumptions and understandings about the questions, is
difficult—perhaps impossible. Misinterpretations and misrepresentations are common with
questionnaires’ (Fetterman 1998: 54).

In contrast to open-ended interviews, questionnaires are easier to quantify with computer
software – I used the software SPSS to process the questionnaires. This gave me the opportunity
to translate the data into statistical information that could be compared to the information
coming from other sources. In general, the respondents’ answers confirmed the information that
I had already gathered during the preceding period. As Fetterman argues, ‘[a]nthropologists
usually develop questionnaires to explore a specific concern after they have a good grasp of how
the larger pieces of the puzzle fit together’ (Fetterman 1998: 54). This was the case for me; I set
up the questionnaire towards the end of my fieldwork in Mauritius and it was mainly aimed at
facilitating the possibility of making more general statements than would have otherwise been
possible. With some help from Franco-Mauritians I constructed questions that would allow
respondents to answer them without feeling offended – ‘[t]he ethnographer … must establish the
relevance of a particular questionnaire to the target culture or subculture before administering it’
(Fetterman 1998: 54). When all the questionnaires had been processed, only a few things
surprised me. Firstly, only one respondent had a South African passport. Considering the strong
ties existing with South Africa I would have expected this figure to be higher. Secondly, and more
a reminder of the facts than a particular surprise, was the sheer number of Franco-Mauritians
marrying other Franco-Mauritians (76 percent) rather than white foreigners (15 percent).

To what extent the answers to questionnaires can, subsequently, be generalised depends
on how the respondents were sampled. The Franco-Mauritians were the sample population and
yet it was impossible to randomly sample them since Mauritius does not have registers that state
name and ethnicity – even if they had it would have been impossible because Franco-
Mauritians are not officially classified as an ethnic group. The closest option to a random sample
was to send the questionnaire by post to Franco-Mauritian parents of children attending a few
private schools (with the help of two Franco-Mauritians I sent it to almost all the parents) – in
addition some questionnaires were also sent to a small number of elderly Franco-Mauritians and
young adults who did not have links with the schools. The great advantage of the list of parents
was that it represented a pre-existing list and was, thus, much more random than if I had (with
the help of Franco-Mauritians) decided who was to be on it. Besides, most Franco-Mauritian

14 A Franco-Mauritian, for example, suggested that I ask about racism without directly asking whether the
respondents considered themselves racists since that would not have been appreciated by the respondents.
According to him asking whether they would mind their child marrying a non-Franco-Mauritian would be a way to
gather information about racism. Nevertheless, I think that to understand racism one has to look beyond the
respondents’ opinions about what partner they consider best for their children, even though this may be based on
‘racist’ assumptions.
children attend these schools nowadays. All in all, the strategy yielded a good result as 144 out of about four hundred questionnaires were returned. And as Graph 1.1 shows the sex balance of the respondents was almost equal: 77 men and 67 women.

![Graph 1.1: Year and birth and sex of questionnaire respondents (Source: Field Questionnaire 2006).]

However, sampling via the list of parents did inevitably lead to some sample bias. The few Franco-Mauritian children who do not attend these schools tend either to have parents who lack the financial means to afford the school fees or to require special education. The questionnaire thus favoured the inclusion of more wealthy Franco-Mauritians. I would argue that this bias is negligible because of the small number of Franco-Mauritian children outside the private school system, however. There is also a sample bias in favour of including Franco-Mauritians with children as they are, obviously, overrepresented. Among Franco-Mauritians, however, the common pattern is still to be married with children. The strongest sample bias remains to be discussed: as Graph 1.1 shows, people born between 1955 and 1970 are overrepresented. Considering that sampling via the schools was the closest I could get to a random sample, I had to accept this. This sample bias should not have a major effect on generalisations made on the basis of the questionnaire, however.
Written Sources

Secondary literature and primary written sources have been used in the research. The historical framework of the thesis relies mostly on secondary literature, as Mauritian history has been extensively researched by numerous renowned scholars. Mauritian history, however, is also hotly contested, and some studies tend to be quite biased and over-represent opinions of certain (ethnic) groups. In the past, Franco-Mauritians were often ‘favoured’ as many of the first Mauritian historians were of a Franco-Mauritian or white European background while nowadays the reverse sometimes occurs. I tried to focus on studies that have been widely acclaimed as thorough (and unbiased) studies but, if need be, I will critically evaluate the secondary literature.

The wide availability of studies on Mauritian history made me decide to use these for the thesis’ historical framework, while I could focus on the much less covered current situation during my fieldwork. As mentioned, there are few historical studies which deal with Franco-Mauritians as their main subject, but I am nevertheless confident that literature about Mauritian history - general and more specialised studies that only indirectly focus on Franco-Mauritians - helped me to sketch a picture of their historical position and, for example, of the way they became an elite.

Secondary literature has also played a prominent role in providing cases for comparing the Franco-Mauritian case to other cases. But it was not always easy to find relevant literature, as ethnographies about elites are limited or not directly identifiable as elite studies. I knew, for example, that the Békés (of Martinique) and other white Carribean elites would make interesting comparisons. My search for literature about the current conditions of these groups, however, suggested that they were little covered by academic literature. The contemporary situation of white Carribean elites appears only to be discussed in the work of Emily Vogt (2005) and Lisa Douglass (1992), which are two of the most relevant cases for comparison. Other studies that were brought to my attention, such as the one on the sugar elite in the Philippines by Michael S. Billig (2003), may at first sight present a case differing a lot from the Mauritian case. In my opinion, however, the elites in these various cases display certain characteristics or have experienced changes of a similar kind that justify comparison (even though many other aspects are not identical).

Primary written sources consist of newspapers and documents such as annual reports, official government (statistical) reports and genealogies, which have been critically evaluated in line with (historical) methods (e.g., Prevenier 1992). I focused on just a few newspapers – all in French. Thanks to their online editions I could also keep up to date on the socio-economic and political situation after I had returned from fieldwork. The first newspaper I used as a source was
Le Cernéen. It displays a strong partiality in favour of the Franco-Mauritian community – very telling for the case study. Most of the contemporary data comes from two other newspapers, L’Express and Le Mauricien (with their respective Sunday papers, L’Express Dimanche and Week-End) – these represent the two largest Mauritian newspapers. L’Express and Le Mauricien are considered relatively neutral. It is, however, argued that the gens de couleur (the Creole upper-class) control them – the journalists, however, come from all sorts of backgrounds. The Government occasionally accuses the two newspapers of being biased and of being anti-government. In my opinion the bias is not that significant though, as for all media, their opinions should always be critically evaluated. Overall, these papers sometimes oppose Franco-Mauritians and sometimes stand up for them. Contrary to Le Cernéen, however, they cannot be considered as mouthpieces for the Franco-Mauritians. Apart from these papers, I also used the Mauritius Times which, despite its name, features many articles in French, though it tends to be more bilingual than L’Express and Le Mauricien. Le Matinal and 5-Plus Dimanche. The Mauritius Times and Le Matinal in particular are considered more pro-Labour Party (the core of the present government) than the other papers.

For all of the above cases, the newspaper’s point of view is not always relevant. I have often used them as sources when they quote politicians. In these cases the material extracted is about the politician’s comments and not about the newspaper’s opinion. In other cases, it was relevant to quote the newspapers’ opinions since in the case of the dailies one should normally take their views seriously; even though these opinions might be a bit biased they reflect sentiments coming from certain segments of Mauritian society.

Triangulation
‘Triangulation is basic in ethnographic research. It is at the heart of ethnographic validity ... testing one source of information against another to strip away alternative explanations and prove a hypothesis’, argues Fetterman (1998: 93). As has been shown above, I used various different sources and methods. I was not, however, in a position to interview all Franco-Mauritians and Mauritians and to attend all relevant events, and therefore I needed to compare my data with other sources. Moreover, the Franco-Mauritians find themselves in a rather sensitive position and sometimes give ‘socially acceptable’ answers. In this respect, as Fetterman writes, ‘self-contained triangulation, in which an individual’s own statements support or undermine his or her stated position, is a useful measure of internal consistency’ (Fetterman 1998: 96). In other cases, such statements need to be compared with observations of actual behaviour, community structure, and cultural and business patterns – for example, Franco-Mauritians could argue that they are
open to Mauritians of all kinds; yet this might be undermined by the observation of their rather exclusive social life.

I am satisfied that the different sources and methods I employed will be sufficient to answer the questions posed in this thesis. In my opinion this underlines once more the value of a qualitative approach – gathering much of the very interesting data, that relevant for the case study and the study of elites in general, would never have been possible without such an approach. For example, without attending certain events, observing behaviour and listening to small-talk with Franco-Mauritians I would have never fully grasped the nuances, complexity and structure of the Franco-Mauritian community and the processes involved in facing up to the challenges presented by (creeping) decline in order to consolidate an elite position. Nevertheless, right up until the moment of completing my thesis a feeling of doing not enough credit to the complex and nuanced situation of Mauritius and the Franco-Mauritians has been latently present.

**Self-image**

A potential conflict arises from the fact that often elites do not consider themselves as an elite, and neither are they always visible (Parry 1998: 2148-2151). Nor do they necessarily have boundaries that easily distinguish them from others – in one family you could, for example, have members with commanding positions identified with an elite, and others with no such positions. This not only makes it difficult to define elites but also to make out who defines the elite (Cochrane 1998: 2127) – in the next chapter on theory this will be elaborated on. In the case of the Franco-Mauritians it was easy to establish the boundaries, because the Franco-Mauritians are marked by their white skin-colour and family names. In the strongly ethnicised context of Mauritius they are to a large extent classified as an ethnic group – both by themselves and by others. Franco-Mauritians often considered the term elite as something not applicable to them; they denied being an elite by referring to other wealthy Mauritians and/or other elites. Consequently, I suspect that my using of the term elite will be their single most important objection to the thesis. However, I do believe that it is justified to analyse them in terms of an elite for several reasons. Firstly, during the colonial period the Franco-Mauritians (of all social backgrounds) certainly stood at the top of the island’s socio-economic hierarchy. For a long time they were in control of the island’s political and economic affairs, this giving them many privileges that others did not have – a fact few Franco-Mauritians would cast doubt on. Classifying the Franco-Mauritians as an elite is therefore justified in terms of studying how their historical elite position developed in the transition from the colonial period up to the present. Secondly, Franco-Mauritians often referred to themselves as being of higher class. Thus, although
they may consider the term ‘elite’ too emotionally charged, the Franco-Mauritians do largely perceive themselves to be at the top of the island’s socio-economic hierarchy.

Risk
Discussing the Franco-Mauritians’ position of power could, according to Ostrander, present a potential risk. She published her book about an elite-related topic only after a number of years had passed and after she had left the city in question. She argues, ‘[r]esearchers interested in studying elites need to be aware of this kind of risk that would not occur in studies of the less powerful. … To my mind, this risk is just part of studying elite’ (Ostrander 1993: 15). Only at the beginning was I once warned about a Franco-Mauritian who intended to grill me. But when I interviewed the Franco-Mauritian in question he was, in fact, co-operative and not once did his behaviour live up to his supposed intentions. In general, the Franco-Mauritians were quite willing to co-operate. Yet, it still remains somewhat puzzling to me as to what exactly determined successful access, and the continuation of this, over a long period of fieldwork. One Franco-Mauritian said that no-one else could have done what I had done – what he exactly meant by this remained unclear to me, apart from approaching my conversation partners politely, non-judgmentally and with respect. But this should be important in all research settings since informants, interviewees and others involved devote time to the ethnographer and deserve such respectful treatment.

On a slightly different issue, a long-term involvement with a research group always bears one particular significant risk: gossip. Hunter writes, ‘I have often found that elites are particularly interested in knowing “who else you have talked to?” and are not likely to be put off easily by some general noncommittal response. Again, one can use this to advantage, first by offering specific names and then by noting their reactions and responses and how they position themselves with respect to others’ (Hunter 1993: 48). Apart from with Franco-Mauritian students, I did not, in fact, encounter a huge amount of curiosity about who else I had spoken to. Yet, in many cases I had to find a balance with respect to how much information I would share about others. To establish a certain authority and to try to unravel family ties I did sometimes refer to others I had spoken to – indeed, a number of Franco-Mauritian students were surprised to encounter a non-Franco-Mauritian who knew so much about their community. In line with Hunter, I also referred to certain names and comments in order to note the interviewees’ reactions. I used my own judgement to decide whether a comment qualified for anonymous use or whether it made more sense to mention the name of the person involved. This, I realised, represented a fine line between trying to establish authority and encouraging a reaction, on the
one hand, and gossiping, on the other. This made me realise that I had to be careful and as far as I can see I seem to have succeeded in avoiding breaching anyone’s confidentiality. Obviously, the moment of truth, as Ostrander found out, will only come when the (Franco-)Mauritians read my analysis, however.

*My White Skin-Colour*

‘I doubt if we tell our students enough about how the positions they occupy within the host society will affect the outcome of their research far more than a theoretical approach adopted in the insularity of the classroom’, writes Keith Hart (Hart 2002: 26). This is an interesting remark when examined with regard to the success of conducting research among Franco-Mauritians because I shared with them the distinguishing feature of having a white skin-colour. This facilitated access, although not so much because Franco-Mauritians were convinced that I had a similar understanding of white skin-colour to theirs – even those Franco-Mauritians who do have racist ideologies are careful not share them with Europeans because the latter are perceived as being critical of whites in the former colonies. The main advantage of my white skin-colour was simply that I did not have a different skin-colour. In the case of a non-white researcher, Franco-Mauritians would certainly have been a lot more suspicious. The assumption would have been that the researcher was only in it to confirm his or her prejudices. To a lesser extent white French people would also have had this problem. There is substantial French influence on the island and Franco-Mauritians often have the feeling that the French consider them to be still living in colonial times (from what I gathered, many French do, indeed, have this opinion). As a Dutch researcher I was in a way neutral and remained free from the (sometimes) tense relationship existing between the French and the Franco-Mauritians. I also had the advantage of the surprise effect of a Dutch researcher being interested in them. In my opinion this facilitated the research as I was considered as an individual and not as a representative of a (prejudiced) nation and/or ideology.

One thing that was uncomfortable in my research, and especially during my fieldwork in South Africa, was the way I started to think too much in terms of black/white oppositions. I did not adopt ‘racist’ views but there was the constant reminder of (perceived) differences between black and whites – this has been the main negative side-effect of the research for me. Conversely, I did not have the impression that non-white Mauritians distrusted me or did not want to talk to me because I was white and studying white Franco-Mauritians. Only once did I receive an e-mail (during my fieldwork) in which the Mauritian author stated that expatriates who socialise too much with Franco-Mauritians start to think like them, i.e. to look down upon other Mauritians.
like Franco-Mauritians do. I did not agree with him but unfortunately I never heard from him again. However, it is true that I developed some sympathy for many Franco-Mauritians – I only perceived a few of the Franco-Mauritians I interviewed as disagreeable. Hence, A Cochrane writes, ‘the research logic is clear: we want to sell “our” elites to everybody else, both because we have grown to know and understand them, and because getting others to recognise their importance legitimates and confirms our own. So there is a danger of proving what you want to prove and developing continuing sympathy’ (Cochrane 1998: 2125).

I find it difficult to judge for myself whether I developed ‘too much’ sympathy. I know that I do not ‘agree’ with all of their behaviour, cultural patterns and their unequal share of the island’s wealth; however, in my opinion, and this is why I promote an anthropological perspective to the studying of elites, there are often two sides to the same coin. For example, the individual elite member tends also to be subjected to the structure of the community and society he/she lives in. I would say that you cannot blame him/her for that. One could, however, argue that it is in that person’s interest not to challenge the existing system. Still, I think you cannot a priori blame someone for not challenging the status quo; an elite member might well, for example, lose his/her social bedrock by challenging the status quo. Thus, I believe it is going one step too far to, as Adrianna Kezar promotes, try and change the perceptions of the elite to create a more equal world (Kezar 2003). That would feel too much like imposing my own ideologies on the subject studied – moreover, in my opinion, those researchers who are more guided by their ideologies than by their desire to carry out ‘objective’ research tend to jeopardise good analyses of social situations.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the thesis is made up of seven chapters. With these chapters I hope to have framed a coherent structure to answer the research question; however, the inextricable logic of many aspects and phenomena have made this a difficult task. The following chapter, Chapter Two, Who Stays at the Top? Towards a Theoretical Understanding of Practices of Elite Consolidation in the Face of Change, is a reflection on the theory contained in this thesis. It sets out the framework for the analysis of the data. Chapter Three, Unexplored Territory: a Historical Survey of the Franco-Mauritian Elite Position, gives a historical introduction to the case study and explains how the Franco-Mauritians became established as a hegemonic elite. This is especially important because in present day Mauritius the past is never far away – historical events and structures often function as symbols for power struggles between Mauritians. The historical survey will cover the entire colonial period until around the 1930s and 1940s, when the
Franco-Mauritians' position started, for the first time in history, to be seriously challenged. It also provides the groundwork for exploring how the Franco-Mauritians dealt with challenges in a substantially different setting (postcolonial Mauritius) – the subject of the following five chapters.

Chapter Four, *The End of an Era: the Impact of Decolonisation on Franco-Mauritian Political Power*, mainly deals with the decline of Franco-Mauritian political power and the relationship Franco-Mauritians have with the new political elite(s), who initiated the decline of Franco-Mauritian political power. This helps to explain via which practices Franco-Mauritians tried to deal with the major challenges facing them. Subsequently, Chapter Five, *Land, Textiles and Tourists: Franco-Mauritian Maintenance of Economic Power in a Diversifying Economy*, focuses on Franco-Mauritian economic power and resources that have remained constant. It explains the role of land ownership and the sugar industry with regard to the successful investments in other areas of the economy to sustain Franco-Mauritian privileges, such as in the textile and hotel industry. Franco-Mauritian economic privileges are, moreover, explained by looking at their business practices and how they have faced up to the increasing involvement of other (elite) groups in the local economy.

In Chapter Six, *A Sense of Belonging: Culture, Kinship and Elitism*, I analyse Franco-Mauritians’ socio-cultural life and practices. This is not only relevant for a better understanding of their business practices, it is also relevant for understanding what the influence of socio-cultural practices is with regard to the consolidation of an elite position. Chapter Seven, *Distinction and the Other: Ethnicity, Exclusivity and Universalistic Tendencies*, focuses on structural phenomena influencing the Franco-Mauritian elite position, especially in relation to the process of elite distinction. Moreover, since an elite only exists in relation to other groups, this chapter analyses Franco-Mauritian relations with other groups in Mauritian society and how the Franco-Mauritian (socio-economic) elite position is attributed to them by these other groups as well as Franco-Mauritians actively pursuing acceptance of their own position. This will also examine in greater depth previously discussed elements, such as the continuity of economic privileges and the Franco-Mauritian sense of belonging, and help to better understand Chapter Eight, *When Powers Meet: the Complexity and Persistence of Challenges to the Franco-Mauritian Elite Position*. In this last chapter I analyse what concrete challenges of decline (with regard to their position) Franco-Mauritians face in present day Mauritius. I specifically look at the impact of the changing balance of (political and economic) power on the island, as relationships between the Franco-Mauritians and the newly emerged (counter-)elites are highly paradoxical: both sides co-operate extensively but also challenge each other. Understanding the changing balance of power is thus very relevant for understanding via which practices (for example, *realpolitik*) elites handle the challenges to their
position. Finally, Chapter Nine presents the conclusion in which I explicitly answer the research question, explain the results and present theoretical reflections.