6. A Sense of Belonging

Culture, Kinship and Elitism

As previously illustrated, some Franco-Mauritian CEOs argue that they prefer to employ other Franco-Mauritians because they ‘share a culture’ with them and because they are normally acquainted with the employee’s family. In this chapter I will analyse what defines Franco-Mauritian culture and kinship networks - as Shore argued, ‘[s]tudying how elites ensure their survival requires close attention to their kinship structures and networks’ (Shore 2002: 13). In short, what is the impact of their sense of belonging and how is this constructed? This will provide insights into how the Franco-Mauritians organise themselves ‘particularistically’ and how they maintain horizontal loyalties, something which is vital for grasping how Franco-Mauritians face challenges to their position. By analysing the more intimate social life of the Franco-Mauritians, such as marriage patterns, club life and leisure time spent at the seaside, I will show how internal group dynamics facilitate the consolidation of an elite position as well as how the onset of change is potentially a challenge the Franco-Mauritian elite position (coming from within).

6.1 A White Wedding

On a Friday evening in 2006 a young Franco-Mauritian woman married a young white Frenchman in a small Catholic church somewhere in Mauritius. In the church Franco-Mauritian friends and family of the girl occupied many of the benches. The family of the groom and a number of foreign guests were also present. A well-known Franco-Mauritian priest married the couple and during intervals in the service a choir graced the wedding with its singing.

After the wedding ceremony the guests moved to a nearby colonial mansion which today functions as museum and which can be rented for parties and functions. Upon arrival, everyone lined up on a path lined with flickering candles to congratulate the newlyweds – the bride was dressed in a white wedding dress and the groom in a handsome suit. Inside, a band was playing and drinks and snacks were served. Apart from a friend of the groom, a business acquaintance of the father, the staff and the band everyone was of white skin-colour. All the men were dressed in suits – a foreign friend of the bride, who had not brought a suit with him, was wearing a
borrowed jacket so that he would not stand out – and most of the women wore dresses or other outfits suitable for the occasion.\textsuperscript{148}

The wedding seemed to follow the Franco-Mauritian norm of marriage in church followed by a reception, even though the groom was not of Franco-Mauritian origin. Of the respondents to the questionnaire (results shown in Graph 6.1) 76.2 percent opted for another Franco-Mauritian partner. Only 6.6 percent married someone French, while a total of 14.8 percent had a foreign partner – most likely, all white. Judging by the relaxed atmosphere at the wedding and the fact that many of the guests seemed to know each other, the marriage seemed to be widely approved of. Moreover, many of the guests were long time friends of the parents and business partners and acquaintances of the father, who is a CEO in a services company. This shows that the parents approved of the marriage and that the white Frenchman was considered an appropriate choice for their daughter. What constitutes the ‘right’ choice, though? And can the 9 percent of Franco-Mauritians who have a non-white Mauritian partner be considered to have made the ‘wrong’ choice?\textsuperscript{149} What mechanisms and strategies exist to ‘guide’ someone into making the right choice?

\textsuperscript{148} Participant observation: Mauritius, 21 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{149} Nine percent is a higher figure than expected for non-white Mauritian partners and although it could be correct it is important to realise that the term Franco-Mauritian is sometimes also used for Mauritians of all ethnic backgrounds who have both French and Mauritian nationality. Thus, it could be possible that some of the respondents ticked the questionnaire box ‘other Mauritian’ for their white Franco-Mauritian partner in the case that he/she did not have a French passport.
‘Choosing Right’

Endogamous marriage patterns are not exclusively a Franco-Mauritian characteristic but are, in fact, a common feature of all of the communities in Mauritius (see, for example, Eriksen 1998: 60, 61; Nave 2000). Even when a Franco-Mauritian does want to marry another Mauritian, thus, the matter cannot be considered to have a foregone conclusion. Partner choice within the Franco-Mauritian community, however, seems more related to internal practices than to the fear of being rejected by others.

Choosing a Franco-Mauritian as a marriage partner appears to be beneficial. One keeps everything within the family and the community with all the economic advantages that this brings, as illustrated in the previous chapter. These considerations are, however, not only about the practice of transferring assets between generations. Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot show how in the case of the established French elite families the family name itself becomes an ‘asset’ or status symbol in matters of heritage. The carrying of wealth and power through several generations means that, next to the transfer of property, the symbolic aspect of the family name, family status and the family history all influence behaviour relating to inheritance matters (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 331, 334). The fact that many Franco-Mauritian families have a historical involvement in the private sector and public life in Mauritius suggests probable similarities,
something further stressed by a strong tendency within the Franco-Mauritian community to study and cherish family genealogies. This is also a heritage that is strictly associated with white skin-colour – in the end a community that bears the colloquial name blancs has to marry white.

This long tradition of endogamous marriage patterns within a small community has linked many Franco-Mauritian families to each other, especially because families tended to be bigger in the past, with eight children not being very out of the ordinary. The practice of marrying cousins furthermore shows this endogamous tendency, although first cousin marriages seem to occur less frequently now than in the past. Historically, there may also have been class divisions between the Grands Blancs and Petits Blancs preventing marriages between these two groups. Even socialising between the groups was restricted. A Franco-Mauritian said, ‘my parents were very strict about maintaining boundaries between the elite and other whites and excommunicated certain members of the society. They were not let into the house.’

Stories circulate about children who brought friends home who were not allowed into the house by the parents because of their lower social ranking. Today, however, differences are less obvious and certain Franco-Mauritian families have altered their status through financial advancement. One opinion argues that increasing pressure from counter-elites has led to reduced internal Franco-Mauritian competition and made status and class differences less decisive. Nevertheless, some of the older generations have still to come to terms with this. The above-mentioned man’s nephew married a girl who his father considered of lower status. He said, ‘my brother had some problems with his son’s choice, but did eventually accept it.’ This is an indication of how cultural patterns are changing across the generations; however, when it comes to the preference for marrying white, change is very slow.

**Fresh Blood**

The widely accepted marriage between the Franco-Mauritian girl and the French boy shows that marrying a white foreigner is regarded as equally bearing fruit since one will still remain within the community and keep a stake in the island’s richest economic network. One urban myth, also cultivated by some of the foreigners involved, is that the Franco-Mauritian community suffered from inbreeding and needed ‘fresh’ white blood. One foreign white man would always tend to jokingly explain how he and two other white males from abroad had saved the white race in Mauritius. According to this joke the Franco-Mauritian elders had gathered in order to solve the ‘inbreeding problem’ and had decided to send their daughters abroad to study, this being an excuse for meeting white boys. He said, ‘I was a guinea pig, because my wife was one of the first.

150 Interview: Mauritius, February 2005.
151 Ibid.
girls to study abroad.

Notwithstanding the humour of the story, the argument of inbreeding lacks any scientific justification. However, arguments concerning the bringing in of new blood also occur among other insular white elites. For example, the white Jamaican elite refers to this practice as marrying ‘out’ (Douglass 1992: 144) while, talking about the case of Martinique, Vogt writes, ‘[French metropolitan whites] can serve as acceptable marriage partners because they help to keep the group white’ (Vogt 2005: 205).

The acceptance of a white foreign partner shows that ethnicity is not decisive. The symbolic significance of white skin-colour as indicating elite superiority (which will be further elaborated on in Chapter Seven) prevails firstly because the foreign partners visually blend into the community – in the case of the French the language helps as well. Secondly, Franco-Mauritians, unlike for local partners, lack information about the foreign partner’s genealogical background. It seems that the assumption of ‘pure’ whiteness and, specifically, the lack of information proving the contrary are sufficient. Spouses from South Africa, (metropolitan) France, the United Kingdom and other European counties are considered white while, in general, whites from the French neighbouring département d’outre mer of La Réunion are less sought-after, because of the alleged level of métissage, i.e. the mixing of blood within the island’s white population. Interestingly, Franco-Mauritians hardly ever refer to cultural and class differences for the cases of foreign spouses, something which, as will be illustrated in the following sections, they do talk about in the case of other Mauritian partners.

Thirdly, a similar argument as the one Douglass makes was sometimes expressed. She writes, ‘the potential for family rivalry is reduced if the spouse who marries in is foreign’ (Douglass 1992: 145). Yet, complications may loom in these cases, too, because of the combination of Mauritius’ insularity and a strong focus on family life. Again, a parallel can be drawn with Jamaica:

The close physical and social atmosphere of Kingston [Jamaica] requires the in-marrying spouse to be prepared to live closely with his or her in-laws. The family desires to accept the newcomer fully as family, yet adjustment can be difficult for the non-Jamaican. Spouses who have already lived in Jamaica on their own will have less trouble adapting because they already know the dynamics of the Jamaican family and life-style (Douglass 1992: 156).

Adaptation to the Franco-Mauritian lifestyle is, indeed, an issue. A Franco-Mauritian student with two out of three of her sisters married to French said, ‘my sister said that if I meet a French guy

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152 Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
153 Whether in comparative perspective there is equality between the classes is questionable, considering the class positions of the Franco-Mauritians in Mauritius and the large white middle class in Europe and South Africa.
who drinks whiskey on the rocks then he will integrate easily [into the Franco-Mauritian community] — a reference to the somehow masculine lifestyle of Franco-Mauritian men. According to the student, her two brothers-in-law adapted well, especially because they travel a lot. This thinking is related to the often-heard argument that a foreign spouse, in order to deal with the remoteness and small size of the island, should be able to travel frequently. Franco-Mauritians themselves often refer to the possibility of travelling abroad, a privilege not available to the majority of Mauritians. Success, in these examples, thus seems to relate to living a certain lifestyle that fits in with the Franco-Mauritian perception of their culture.

The two French brothers-in-law have, in fact, integrated differently into the Franco-Mauritian community. One of the French spouses did not know many Franco-Mauritians before arrival and actually had many French friends. Compared to the past, contemporary Mauritius now has an expatriate community, something which seems to have facilitated the success of this marriage. The second brother-in-law was more integrated into the community as he mainly had Franco-Mauritian friends, who he had befriended during his studies. Unlike in Jamaica, Franco-Mauritians hardly ever marry foreign spouses who have already lived in Mauritius independently. Franco-Mauritians predominantly meet their foreign partners when studying overseas – the other way around, i.e. falling in love with white tourists or expatriates in Mauritius, hardly ever occurs and, as a young Franco-Mauritian woman told me, was even discouraged by her parents. And as a result of the fact that many Franco-Mauritian students flock together when studying abroad, the respective spouse had not only met his wife but also her social circle early on – apparently the other sister was less embedded within a circle of Franco-Mauritian students. In general, the foreign spouses appear to follow the path of the second brother-in-law and hardly socialise with other expatriates although some do socialise with other Mauritians.

Despite being strongly embedded in the Franco-Mauritian community, a number of foreign spouses argued that this did not make them Franco-Mauritian automatically. They felt that they always, in some senses, remained associated with separate French, English or other overseas identities. A substantial advantage of these marriages, however, is that within the Franco-Mauritian community their children’s position is safeguarded. Sharing a similar upbringing seems to be important in this respect since ‘mixed’ couples’ offspring are considered Franco-Mauritians and are not distinguished from their Franco-Mauritian cousins. They go the same schools and clubs, share the same culture from childhood onwards and many of them eventually marry other Franco-Mauritians.

Dual Nationality

Partly as a result of Franco-Mauritian marriages to overseas spouses, a substantial number of Franco-Mauritians had a second nationality. Graph 6.2 shows how slightly less than half of the questionnaire’s respondents had a second passport (by far the majority of these second passports were French). Most likely, France has less stringent regulations than certain other European states in this respect. Franco-Mauritians can most easily obtain a French passport through birth or by marriage, without having any other relationship with France apart from parents with a French passport or a French spouse – hence, when compared to the number of French partners in Graph 6.1 it appears that most Franco-Mauritians have obtained their French passport via their parents. One young woman, for example, had obtained a passport through her mother although she said, ‘it is a mystery to me how my mother obtained one, since her side of the family is Anglo-Mauritian.’ In another case, a Franco-Mauritian man had French nationality via his wife, who was from La Réunion. He, however, had never lived on French territory nor had he been to mainland France. He said, ‘it may come in handy in case things deteriorate big time in Mauritius.’ For others this security also seems important. Even without any close affinity with or the desire to live in, for instance, France, most Franco-Mauritian parents make sure their children obtain a second passport. This is a feature one also notices among the white Jamaican elite who still remember the government’s threat to act against their interests during the late 1970s. Douglass writes, ‘[i]t is true that even in today’s cooler political climate most upper-class whites still hedge their bets by securing passports and U.S. green cards and by maintaining homes and businesses abroad’ (Douglass 1992: 14).

156 In certain cases Franco-Mauritians have even more than one other overseas passport – the pie chart does not show this because only the first non-Mauritian passport is taken into consideration.
158 Interview: Mauritius, 19 February 2005.
A dual nationality, especially in the case of European passports, seems to represent an assurance of safety in the face of eventual decisive decline. Following a similar logic, Franco-Mauritians also invest in real estate in Paris. These investments have increased since Franco-Mauritians withdrew their investments from South Africa. A Franco-Mauritian residing in Paris said, ‘with the actual situation in Mauritius the number [of investments in real estate] will certainly increase: the Hindus want to eliminate the Franco-Mauritians and, thus, when the situation deteriorates like [with the whites] in Zimbabwe the Franco-Mauritians have some reserves.’ In the case of a European passport, however, this also simply facilitates access to the European Union. Franco-Mauritian students can apply for financial support and scholarships and, after their studies, build up some years of work experience in Europe before returning to Mauritius.

‘Choosing Wrong’

The right choice for a marriage partner is someone with white skin-colour and, as a first preference, a Franco-Mauritian of good standing. But a white foreigner, provided he/she integrates into the community, is almost as good. The right choice obviously also implies a possible wrong choice, however, and how Franco-Mauritians have maintained their elite position appears to rely, to a large extent, on the practice of sanctioning and disqualifying deviant partner

159 Interview: France, 9 October 2006.
choice. This prevents the Franco-Mauritian community from becoming diluted and is thus very important in the maintenance of an elite position. But this feature of organising oneself ‘particularistically’ is not completely entrusted to the offspring since they are sanctioned if they do not make the right choice.

Historically, marrying outside the Franco-Mauritian community has never been well thought of and has often led to disinher titance and effective banishment from the community. In the past, Franco-Mauritians’ skin-colour corresponded with class boundaries and marrying outside the community was considered a misalliance. Any choice other than a white Franco-Mauritian or a white foreigner could seriously jeopardise their privileged position. For the ‘well to do’ Franco-Mauritians, risking disinher titance and exclusion from the community had considerable economic and social consequences. The standard of living, compared to less ‘well to do’ Mauritians, could diminish substantially after disinher titance and exclusion.

Clémence Hanneaux, a Franco-Mauritian woman in her forties, said, ‘we always celebrated 25 December at my grandparents. After lunch my grandfather’s brother, tonton …, always dropped by. He was thrown out of the family because he had children with an Indian … I don’t know if he was still with his wife or married. It wasn’t a topic we talked about. The children are my father’s cousins but we never saw them. When tonton … died, his daughter called us and we went to the funeral.’ This shows the impact that a wrong choice can have for one’s social life. Whether her great-uncle’s choice had a significant impact on his financial situation is more difficult to establish. Clémence Hanneaux said, ‘[my uncle’s children] are less well-off than Franco-Mauritians but they are not in poverty, they are middle class.’

In another case, it took a Franco-Mauritian father twenty years to accept his daughter’s choice of a Muslim husband – she had also, in fact, divorced a Franco-Mauritian prior to this marriage. Her brother, who had never rejected the marriage, said, ‘[although my father had more or less accepted the marriage] when he was giving a cocktail party he didn’t invite my sister. He said that it was not about him, but that [her presence] might embarrass other [Franco-Mauritians] at the cocktail party.’ Apart from time, the arrival of grand-children can also have a tempering effect on initial rejections of a mixed marriage. The parents of a Franco-Mauritian man who, in the 1990s, ‘married down’ to a Hindu woman from an average background, only became more forgiving with the arrival of grandchildren.

The disqualification of mixed marriages shows the impact of social pressure in the matter of partner choice. The Franco-Mauritians constitute a small community and one which demonstrates strong social control. Clémence Hanneaux said, ‘in Mauritius your hands are tied,

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160 Interview: France, 10 October 2006.
161 Interview: Mauritius, 13 April 2006.
you have to live _comme il faut_\(^{162}\) – apart from partner choice, this goes for many other aspects of Franco-Mauritian life as well. The aforementioned brother said, ‘it is the village syndrome which stops you from [marrying outside the community] and my sister didn’t care.’\(^{163}\) From earliest childhood, the importance of proper partner choice is impressed on people through the examples of exclusion that occur and a through discourse that disqualifies mixed marriages and the status stemming from the wrong choice. Stéphane Ruette, a Franco-Mauritian in his thirties living in Cape Town, South Africa, said, ‘in Mauritius you always hear horror stories about mixed marriages.’\(^{164}\) Vogt also refers to a Béké woman in Martinique who had ‘been “brainwashed” by her parents for as long as she could remember that Békés were the only suitable marriage partners for her’ (Vogt 2005: 2).

The rejection of mixed marriages among Franco-Mauritians is closely associated with their discourse about ‘mixed’ blood. A Franco-Mauritian said, ‘my grandmother used to say that if I did not work hard enough at school I would become a mulatto.’\(^{165}\) Gestures involving pointing at the skin and waving ones hand in an expression of doubt can be made when Franco-Mauritians refer to someone who is not purely white. _Méissage_ is perceived as a weakness and marrying a non-white is associated with lacking the capacity to find a white partner. This illustrates how strongly the internal Franco-Mauritian discourse is mingled with negative connotations concerning marrying non-whites. These patterns are, however, not exclusive to the Franco-Mauritian situation.

Sandra Evers demonstrates that similar mechanisms are at work in a setting very different from that of the Franco-Mauritians in Mauritius. In the Southern highlands of Madagascar, a world away from the modern luxuries of Franco-Mauritian life, gossip has a function for the _tompon-tany_, the group highest in the local social hierarchy. They use gossip to enforce compliance within their group while keeping the _andevo_, the group at the lower end of the social hierarchy, in their subordinate position. Evers states:

Gossip about the _andevo_ usually concerns their ‘misdeeds’, but insinuations concerning contacts between ‘pure people’ [i.e. the _tompon-tany_, who perceive themselves as pure] and ‘impure people’ [i.e. the _andevo_ in perception of the _tompon-tany_] also give rise to discussion in the village. Gossip has a double function. Firstly, it is a mechanism of social control within the established group, strengthening its internal cohesion. Secondly, ‘talking bad’ about the _andevo_ serves to confirm their inferior position as ‘outsiders (Evers 2002: 70).

\(^{162}\) Interview: France, 10 October 2006.
\(^{163}\) Interview: Mauritius, 13 April 2006.
\(^{164}\) Interview: South Africa, 13 September 2006.
\(^{165}\) Interview: Mauritius, 13 April 2006.
Evers’ case is also a good illustration of what similar skin-colour and geographic size can do. The large size of Madagascar and the lack of distinctive physical features between the *tompon-tany* and the *andevo* creates a situation in which mixed marriages are sometimes only discovered afterwards – the distances on the island mean that local communities often lack information about the social positions of people coming from elsewhere. The fact that a mixed marriage can be discovered afterwards also fuels accusations of a mixed marriage, even years after the marriage has been consummated (Evers 2002: 62-64). In the Franco-Mauritian case, in contrast, such a situation does not exist. Firstly, owing to skin-colour a mixed marriage is immediately visible in most cases. Secondly, Franco-Mauritian family names, as will be illustrated in greater detail below, have an important function. Owing to the small geographic size of Mauritius, most Franco-Mauritians know all the family names belonging to their community. From someone’s family name they can work out someone’s social status and genealogical background. Information about genealogies is, however, prone to interpretations and, consequently, fuels gossip about whether certain families have non-white ancestors several generations back, a feature that was also present among the Békés in Martinique (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002: 78).166 Among the Franco-Mauritians this kind of gossip can be persistent; its main function, however, is to bring discredit on someone. It does not lead to the discovery of a mixed marriage after the fact. Franco-Mauritians are just too well-informed about other islanders and, contrary to the situation in Madagascar, the small size of Mauritius makes it virtually impossible for any Mauritian to enter the field ‘without a history’.

**Offspring**

The rejection of mixed marriages is widespread among all Mauritian communities and is, in reality, prompted by the widespread (social) consequences these may have and by concerns people have about the offspring’s identity. The importance of ethnic affiliation in Mauritian society does not give much appeal to having a hybrid identity: ‘the most difficult aspect of mixed marriages in this kind of setting – the self-defined plural society with no hegemonic group – may be the identity of the children’ (Eriksen 1998: 125). The Franco-Mauritian discourse confirms this. Many of the counter-arguments against mixed marriages focus on the position of the children. Franco-Mauritians fear a situation in which their children could not become members of the several Franco-Mauritian white-only sport and social clubs (of which the most well-known is the Dodo Club).167

166 Emily Vogt (Vogt 2005) does not make any reference to similar accusations in present-day Martinique.
One case, however, proves that the opposite is sometimes possible. A marriage between a Franco-Mauritian man from a well-established family, the de Montfaucons, and a *gens de couleur* woman was accepted by the man’s mother and, in effect, by the whole Franco-Mauritian family. They had feared the man’s downfall and thought that the woman had a good influence on him. However, one of the man’s nieces did argue that the birth of the couple’s first and only child in the 1980s was importantly focused on whether the baby would have a white skin-colour. The Franco-Mauritian family anxiously awaited the outcome. Firstly, they hoped for a girl because she would, in the future, marry and take her spouse’s name. This would save the white patrimony and status of the family name. Secondly, they hoped for a baby with a fair complexion so it would be hard to notice from the outside that it had a non-white parent. In fact the child turned out to be a girl with a skin complexion suggesting parents with different skin colours. In France, where the girl, Elodie de Montfaucon, now studies about twenty years later, she could easily be seen as native white French since skin complexion displays significant variation between the north and the south of France. And, as she said, ‘my mix wouldn’t be an issue whatsoever in Europe, but it is in Mauritius.’ Although Elodie de Montfaucon always felt like an exception, she was accepted in the Franco-Mauritian community. Most likely, the de Montfaucon pedigree played an important role; it even granted her membership of the Dodo Club. She said, ‘it was difficult to be accepted but my parents thought it was good for me to be a member since all the young children around me were members. ... I only went twice or so. I don’t like a club where my mother can’t become a member.’ Her case shows how, on a small scale, the Franco-Mauritian community can and does incorporate ‘irregularities’. In another exception confirming the rule, one of the daughters of a mixed marriage even married into the wealthiest Franco-Mauritian family. The daughter has since been assimilated into the Franco-Mauritian community to such an extent that it took a while for a Franco-Mauritian informant to remember that she actually had mixed parents.

For a number of reasons, neither case jeopardised whatsoever Franco-Mauritian marriage patterns. The mixed couples and their offspring pulled more towards the Franco-Mauritian community and hardly ever switched between the parents’ communities – Elodie de Montfaucon said, ‘even with my parents it was taboo to discuss their mixed marriage until one year ago …

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167 Other ethnic groups also have clubs restricting membership to their own ethnicities. In all cases this is not officially sanctioned but rather the consequence of unwritten, yet commonly known and accepted, membership policies
168 His father had already passed away.
169 Interview: France, 12 October 2006.
170 Interview: France, 9 October 2006.
171 Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
until recently we saw my mother’s family a lot less [than my father’s].” Hence, the girls from both cases are effectively part and parcel of the Franco-Mauritian community. That it was two Franco-Mauritian men marrying ‘down’ appears to have facilitated the matter as well. Gender has an impact on what is possible, although this seems not to be as strongly pronounced as among the white elite in Jamaica where there is a clear difference between what is accepted for men and what for women:

[T]he pattern is clearly organized by gender: Women marry ‘up’ and men marry ‘down.’ Hence, when a man of colour marries a white Jamaican woman it breaks the rule that a man should ‘marry down’, because in the colour hierarchy white is considered superior (Douglass 1992: 136, 137).

Gender differences are importantly related to economic independence because men, in general, have more control over their own incomes. The two Franco-Mauritian men referred to previously were wealthy men who could decide over their own fate and provide their offspring with a good upbringing. Noteworthy here is that economic arguments are rarely voiced in this discourse, neither for the ‘right’ choice nor for the ‘wrong’ choice – a Franco-Mauritian girl who ‘married down’ with a Creole partner confronted her grandmother, who disapproved of her choice, with emotional arguments, saying, ‘you don’t want me to remain single for the rest of my life, do you?” The discourse and the ‘bad’ examples predominantly focus on the social disadvantages: a mixed marriage jeopardises the social and cultural embedding of the couple and their children in the Franco-Mauritian community. The economic consequences may be taken for granted since social exclusion, especially in the past, would almost automatically have had an economic impact. Franco-Mauritians are, however, no longer the only elite since recent social stratification among all Mauritian communities has now modified this imbalance. To a certain extent this new reality affects Franco-Mauritian marriage patterns; it may even be a potential challenge to their position.

**Facing Reality**

In the Indian film *Dil Jo Bhi Kabey* (2005), with the famous Indian film star Amitabh Bachchan, the storyline tells of the forbidden love between a white Mauritian girl and a Hindu Mauritian boy. They fall in love at hotel school in Sweden but upon their return to Mauritius their love is

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172 Ibid.
173 Compared to the Franco-Mauritian case, getting married to a person of colour is less sanctioned in the Jamaican case described by Douglass, though this still does influence partner choice.
174 Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
denounced by both sets of parents. The white father, in particular, is depicted as a powerful man, forcing the boy’s father out of work. This is an interesting reference to the Franco-Mauritian business networks although the clichés in the film are generally a bit over the top. Under pressure, the white girl and the Hindu boy decide to marry other – ‘right’ – partners. However, their love for each other is so strong that they are inevitably drawn back to each other and, eventually, marry with the approval of their parents. A happy ending, then, as is always the case in this genre of Indian films.

In reality parents’ reactions are more diverse. A frequently heard argument is that it is specifically the older generations that cannot cope with mixed marriages. Yann de Dampierre, a Franco-Mauritian in his early thirties, who made the ‘right’ choice by marrying a white French girl, said, ‘my grandmother can’t understand marrying outside the community. She has racist characteristics, although I don’t consider her to be racist in the sense that she hates others. It’s the colonial upbringing [which is gradually changing, because] my mother can understand a mixed marriage although she wouldn’t approve of it automatically. And I don’t mind.’ And yet in Yann de Dampierre’s partner choice the changing generational mindset has not resulted in a non-white partner. Moreover, he said, ‘I believe a difference in culture, but specifically a difference in the level of education [in the choice of a non-white partner is] a problem. I think education solves most problems. [Education as an unbridgeable gap in partner choice] is not between people of different ethnic backgrounds within my generation, but between the older generations. A mixed marriage would, from my point of view, be difficult with a non-Franco-Mauritian due to the fact that their parents are uneducated.175

This discourse, associating differences with cultural and educational differences, is widely shared among Franco-Mauritians.176 These types of differences are often presented as more important objections than the argument of skin-colour, as Franco-Mauritians are well aware of the racist connotations of this kind of justification for their choices. In a way, it is as Moodley and Adam state, ‘many analysts have noted how biological heredity [in race related discourses] has been replaced by cultural difference’ (Moodley and Adam 2000: 57). Referring to cultural differences seems almost to be an excuse (conscious or unconscious) for a still existing, but not openly pronounced, partner-choice preference based on skin-colour. The existence of class, cultural and educational differences should not be downplayed but class and educational differences between the communities have become undeniably smaller in independent Mauritius.

175 Interview: Mauritius, 16 January 2006.
176 Franco-Mauritian emphasis on (private) quality education, as shown in the previous chapter, is also part and parcel of their ideas about a good upbringing. It is not about safeguarding a position on the labour market only but should be seen in the wider context of their elite culture as well.
Objectivity about differences is, however, not what counts; it is people’s subjective perceptions of differences and social stratification that matters and there history seems to count.

One of a Class

In the last decade (1997-2007), only two Franco-Mauritian men have got married to girls from non-white communities, to a well-established Muslim and a well-established Hindu family, respectively. Both families in these cases are examples of economically powerful families with a history in the private sector barely different from that of the powerful Franco-Mauritian families. Many Franco-Mauritians approved of the marriages because the Hindu and Muslim families were considered to belong to the same class and are not associated with a history of indentured labour.

In both cases, ethnic differences were essentially not referred to as unbridgeable although there was some hesitation at the beginning on both sides. In one of the cases, the Franco-Mauritian colonial background of one of the families was frowned upon by the other. In the other case, the wider acceptance of the marriage was taken into consideration: the non-white father-in-law asked his soon to be Franco-Mauritian son-in-law whether his ‘white’ Franco-Mauritian boss would approve of the marriage. The son-in-law stated that he did not care about what his boss thought.

The widespread acceptance of the last two cases within the community seems to have been facilitated by several aspects other than wealth. Today Mauritians of all different backgrounds can be wealthy and yet many Franco-Mauritians still consider them to have a lower social position. The long tradition and involvement of the respective Hindu and Muslim families in business, however, placed them above the other Mauritians and at the same level as the Franco-Mauritians. As with the French elite, a certain degree of class is conferred on proof of being able to transfer the family patrimony over several generations. Established French families are suspicious of the nouveaux riches because they have not yet proven this capacity to safeguard the patrimony over several generations (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 151). And in Martinique, ‘old’ families can maintain their status even when they have lost their wealth (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002: 72). Hence, we can see that in many situations wealth alone does not define class. The present Franco-Mauritian perceptions of partner choice deem many of the members of the island’s new elites to be of lower social ranking or to be mere nouveaux riches.

One possible explanation for the approval of the two cases may have to do with the fact that the Hindu and Muslim families involved are both exemplary role-models in their respective communities. They are involved in the private sector but there are relatively few Muslim and Hindu families as economically powerful as they are. They are not, therefore, directly part of an

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177 Interview: Mauritius, 31 January 2006.
counter-elite challenging Franco-Mauritian economic power. Moreover, many Franco-Mauritian businessmen are on a friendly footing with members of the two families and it seems that openly objecting to the marriages could have jeopardised these relationships as this reaction could have been interpreted as blatantly racist – data suggests that it is easier to object to marrying down when dealing with less renowned and wealthy families. A high profile marriage between a Franco-Mauritian and the son or daughter of a Hindu politician, on the other hand, would most likely have caused many more frowns and objections because many Franco-Mauritians share the perception that Hindu politicians represent the main challenge to their elite position.

The small number of Mauritian families with a comparable history in the island’s private sector may, therefore, have only a limited effect on Franco-Mauritian marriage preferences, even though the two mixed marriages referred to signify a definite change from the past. Widespread acceptance and acknowledgement of the marriages proves that, in the case of having the right pedigree, marriages with non-whites are no longer a complete taboo. Moreover, the children will most likely have the two sides interwoven into their (elite) identity. The elevated statuses of the Hindus, Muslims and Franco-Mauritians involved are too prominent to ignore and thus the mixed couples will most probably not only pull towards one of the communities. This represents an important difference to the de Montfaucon case where only the Franco-Mauritian family had a prominent role post-marriage. In the above mentioned cases, the mixed couples are also at ease with their choices and identify themselves as mixed marriages having no intention to solely belong to one of the communities. The mixed marriages are not surrounded by taboos and consequently they will raise their children with an awareness of their mixed cultural background. This may be a first step towards establishing an elite without strong ethnic characteristics, even though it may form part of a very slow process.

The Limits of Love

The fact that many Franco-Mauritians have been born and raised with a discourse about the ‘rightness’ of marrying a Franco-Mauritian has had a profound impact on many of them and many Franco-Mauritians remain sceptical about mixed marriages. This is especially the case because economically ‘rewarding’ the right choice still represents the prevalent behaviour, as shown by the attitudes of business networks and the relation of these to employment opportunities in the previous chapter. Hence, to a large extent the historical marriage patterns of the previous generations, who pressured their children (and grandchildren) and sanctioned deviant behaviour, continue to shape the choices of the present generation. ‘You do as your
parents did because that is what you know’ – or you just simply do not want to offend your parents and grandparents. This custom seems to have even suppressed the possibility of imagining marrying and dating other Mauritians. A Franco-Mauritian woman in her mid-forties said, ‘when I was younger they had meetings between the [gens de couleur] Racing Club and the Dodo Club. One guy … was as beautiful as a god, but I never considered marrying him because he wasn’t white.’ Today, her son, who frequently visits the Dodo Club, said, ‘I don’t really fancy black girls. Even when they are beautiful [me and my friends] don’t care.’

Studying abroad, which is partly meant to broaden the Franco-Mauritians’ general viewpoint, hardly seems to affect the absence of interest in non-whites either: a Franco-Mauritian girl studying in France said, ‘psychologically I don’t feel attracted to other colours. Even living in Europe, which is much more open, hasn’t changed this. I’m still influenced by my education and don’t see [me marrying a non-white] happen’. When she went to France for the first time at the age of seventeen she was actually shocked to see mixed relationships.

This seems different from the Jamaican and Martiniquais cases. In Martinique, it was common for male members of the white elite to have their first sexual experience with coloured girls, while the other way around was forbidden. It is also argued that Béké men feel strongly attracted to the coloured girls, even though they eventually marry white girls (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002: 95, 137; Vogt 2005: 197). Franco-Mauritian men were certainly not encouraged to have early relationships with non-white Mauritian girls and, in general, attraction in that direction appears to be limited. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, a number of novels did appear in which Franco-Mauritian authors spoke evocatively of the beauty of the Indian girls (Hookoomsing 2005). Also, extra-marital affairs between whites and non-whites appeared to be less tolerated among Franco-Mauritians than among the Békés in Martinique (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002: 98) and the white elite of Jamaica (Douglass 1992: 169-200). Gaston Trivulce, a Franco-Mauritian man studying family genealogies, recently discovered two (old) cases of extra-marital affairs which were revealing in this respect. In one case, a Franco-Mauritian, who had since died, had fathered a number of illegitimate children with a black woman. After Gaston Trivulce had informed his legal Franco-Mauritian son, this son met with

178 Interview: Mauritius, 16 January 2006.
179 Interview: Mauritius, 16 January 2006.
181 Interference of parents in partner choice, however, tends to be present on the non-white side, too. In Mauritius a mixed marriage can, therefore, be an awkward event, similar to Jamaica where, as Douglass writes, ‘[m]any of the family members of a brown man who married into the white family elite seemed uncomfortable around the young man’s in-laws and tended to avoid social events with them’ (Douglass 1992: 151).
one of his half brothers on friendly terms. In the other case, however, Gaston Trivulce said, ‘[a certain Franco-Mauritian man] will never accept the news that he has black siblings.’

For many Franco-Mauritians, then, their white identity appears to still represent a difficult boundary to cross. As Graph 6.3 shows, when asked whether as a parent a Franco-Mauritian would mind if his/her child were to marry another Mauritian, about sixty percent answered that they would mind. They would either: regret it but leave it to the child; consider the differences too big; fear for the future of the child; or be outright against the marriage. However, the answers also indicated a (gradual) change. Thirty percent of the questionnaire’s respondents said that they would either be happy or consider such a marriage normal these days, while the nine percent stating other reasons gave answers ranging from ‘it depends more on the persons social class than [ethnic] origin’, to ‘I hope that happy person accepts our way of life, [which is] very family minded’, to ‘it works in very few cases’ – hence a variety from positive to more negative.

What the real impact is of more Franco-Mauritians being less negative about mixed marriages and dating non-whites, especially among Franco-Mauritian youngsters, remains to be seen: at present, though, love simply does not easily find its way outside the community. The exclusivity of Franco-Mauritian social life makes it inevitable that many are bound to date, fall in love with

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182 Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
and marry other Franco-Mauritians. With reference to this theme, Douglass says of the white Jamaican elite:

> [E]lites are not required to marry within their social circle, but they usually do. They marry within their circle not because they are restricted by prejudicial beliefs about color and class, but simply because they tend to fall in love with someone like them (Douglass 1992: 270).

### 6.2 Among Kin

For virtually all Franco-Mauritians life is determined by the family and the community, both of which are important for understanding Franco-Mauritian practices adopted in the pursuit of maintaining their elite position. In many stages and areas of Franco-Mauritian life the family plays an important role, something which is not uncommon for elites in general:

_Aussi « les grands ont des grandes familles », écrit Pierre Bourdieu, pour qui ce serait là une « une loi anthropologique générale ». « Ils ont un intérêt spécifique à entretenir des relations de type familial étendues et, à travers ces relations, une forme particulière de concentration du capital. Autrement dit, malgré toutes les forces de fissions qui s'exercent sur elle, la famille reste un des lieux d'accumulation, de conservation et de reproduction de différentes espèces de capital» (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 151). 183_

The importance of family may not be that much different for other social groups but many elites are wealthy and this may be a feature that enhances a strong family life: ‘[m]oney helps to keep family together in a practical sense’ (Douglass 1992: 212). Franco-Mauritians, who highly value their annual Christmas holidays, can more easily pay for tickets for their studying children to return home from their overseas studies (although certainly not all Franco-Mauritian parents can afford two return tickets a year for their offspring studying abroad and some students opt to stay abroad during the Christmas festivities, for example, go skiing instead). Moreover, a long tradition of wealth shapes family life (and marriage patterns) into something different from that found for most other social groups, as Douglass notes for Jamaica:

>To claim that family has special significance for the elite is not to say that other Jamaicans do not share this value or that they are any less family oriented. What may be more strongly stressed among the elite, however, is the intense sentiment that surrounds ‘family’

183 ‘The big ones have big families’, writes Pierre Bourdieu, providing us with ‘a general anthropologic law’. ‘They have a specific interest in maintaining relationships with the extended family and, through these relationships, a specific form of concentration of capital. In other words, in spite of all the divisive forces exercised on it, the family remains one of the places for the accumulation, conservation, and reproduction of different kinds of capital.’
as a name and as an identifiable and cohesive group with common history and heritage that serves as a basis for all business and social activity (Douglass 1992: 2).

In the case of the Franco-Mauritians, not only the family but the whole community is important for establishing this sense of sentiment and, as a matter of fact, for shaping marriage choice—conversely, the Jamaican elite appears to have less community cohesion (Douglass 1992: 38). Franco-Mauritians’ small numbers make them, moreover, easily recognisable which reinforces a cohesive identity and horizontal loyalties.

**Family Names**

A Franco-Mauritian has to be of the ‘white race’ and needs to be recognised by his/her community, argues Boudet (Boudet 2005: 28). The addition of ‘to be recognised by his/her community’ is important because, unlike in other societies, white skin-colour is not, by itself, a sufficient condition for membership (see, among others, Linke 1999; Stoler 1989; Wildman 2006). There are Mauritians with an equally white skin-colour who are nevertheless classified as *gens de couleur* because they (allegedly) have black ancestors. Thus, the definition of a Franco-Mauritian is not only related to the phenotype but also to the ‘absence of non-white genes’—genealogies are used to trace ancestors through time and ‘prove’ the absence of black ancestors.184

Because of this the community’s small size makes establishing the ‘white’ boundary of the community relatively simple: the boundaries can be established through knowledge of family names since these names effectively ‘represent’ genealogical information. Virtually every Franco-Mauritian knows all the other family names belonging to the community and thus directly knows when a name does not belong to the community. To give an example, at a reception a Franco-Mauritian asked a *gens de couleur* woman her maiden name since she was married to a foreigner.185 Later she said, ‘[the Franco-Mauritian] asked my name in order to place me. It is difficult to place me because I’m white but not Franco-Mauritian. If I had been Chinese, [the man] would not have asked my name because he could have easily placed me.’186 This shows how a surname has an additional function in cases where a direct judgement about the ‘whiteness’ of a person is impossible to make. But the same strategy also helps to position someone within the Franco-Mauritian community. As the *gens de couleur* woman said, ‘in the case of Franco-Mauritians themselves, they also ask the name in order to place the relevant person.’ Family names are an

184 Conversely, in Jamaica the white elite tend to have more acknowledged non-black ancestors. Despite the fact that white is the norm, Douglass illustrates how many Jamaican families have black ancestors. A number of them ignore this fact, yet in general they are more open about it (Douglass 1992) than the Franco-Mauritians.
185 Participant observation: Mauritius, date unknown.
186 Interview, Mauritius, 19 June 2006.
indication of one’s social position in the community. Something similar occurs in France where family names of members of the higher social circles are published in order to establish who matters (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 165). Some Franco-Mauritians argue that as a consequence of this they lack an individual identity. A Franco-Mauritian residing in Durban, South Africa, said, ‘I don’t like the mentality in Mauritius. You are not who you are but are always the son, cousin, etc. of someone. In South Africa you are just who you are because they don’t care’ – an additional assumption here is that the white South African community is too big to assess someone’s position from their family name.

The fact that everyone knows you is a reality that is also cherished by many Franco-Mauritians. A Franco-Mauritian student explained that as a Franco-Mauritian you feel mari spéciale, i.e. very special. This is sometimes difficult for outsiders to understand, she argued. Many Franco-Mauritian students in France and South Africa acknowledged the constraints of their community and the pressure being put on it by politicians but they would still like nothing better than return to Mauritius after their studies. As they said, they cherish the warmth and security of Franco-Mauritian social and family life – although the sun and the sea are decisive factors as well. Douglass’ remark about the Jamaican elite should, therefore, not be underestimated: ‘[f]rom the perspective of the Jamaicans I came to know, however, family is not about hierarchy or power at all, but about affinity and love. The elite are consumed by a passionate involvement with family’ (Douglass 1992: 2). Sentiments evolving around family and kinship should also be addressed critically, however. For the case of the Lisbon financial elite, Antónia Pedrosa de Lima has argued that when a family grows into its fourth, fifth and sixth generation it is not only about the family but also much more about the links to the family enterprise:

Being such an important part of the family group identity, the [family] enterprise becomes the raison d’être of the family, since it engenders a sentiment of the family as a group of shared substance. Therefore, shared kinship is not what sustains active kinship relations in this dynastic family (Pedroso de Lima 2000: 36).

In the Franco-Mauritian case being part of the community is also a raison d’être; even when family ties have been weakened by the fifth or sixth generation, they are strengthened again by a sense of belonging and a love for the sea.

188 This is like the case of a young Jamaican – quoted by Douglass – studying in Toronto: ‘I would never live in Canada. [There] I’m nobody. In Jamaica, everyone knows me. In Jamaica they stop me on the street and say “aren’t you Johnny’s nephew?”’ (Douglass 1992: 118).
**Club Life**

One Franco-Mauritian man jokingly and critically said that when you want to know whether you are really white you should apply for membership of the Dodo club, the most well-known and purely Franco-Mauritian of all the clubs – interestingly the Franco-Mauritian in question was not a member. The Dodo Club, situated in Curepipe at the elevated centre of the island, has always been screening new members on the basis of their ‘purity’. Consequently, it has remained a ‘whites-only club’ and a symbol of Franco-Mauritian power. Its inaccessibility has itself reinforced the power of those who have access.

A closer analysis of the Dodo Club and Franco-Mauritian club life helps explain how the Franco-Mauritians have faced challenges of decline, how they have adapted to changes and how membership reinforces community cohesion. Historically, it made sense for there to be white-only clubs because the Franco-Mauritians and the British were virtually the only elite. Changes in the social stratification have, however, put pressure on a number of these clubs to reform. For example, the Turf Club, an elite club in charge of the horse racing in the capital, Port Louis, was the exclusive domain of Franco-Mauritians and British colonial officials – it was, in fact, founded in 1812 to bring the British and Franco-Mauritians closer together. But horse racing is very popular among all Mauritians and with the democratisation of Mauritius the Turf Club has been democratised as well. Today it has (elite) members from all the communities, even though Franco-Mauritians still represent a substantial element of the club, because for people interested in horse racing it is the only appropriate elite club.

Similarly, the Gymkhana Club in Vacoas, near Curepipe on the high plateau, was a meeting ground for British and Franco-Mauritians – it, though, has the oldest golf course in Mauritius. From the late 1960s onwards it gradually opened up its membership. The first non-white Mauritian member of the club was invited to join by the British commander of the navy, who was also the club’s president – prior to that there were only a few black expatriate members. He said, ‘when Gymkhana opened up, Franco-Mauritians went back to the Dodo and opened a golf course there. Very few stayed and I lost some of my friendships with them, because they moved away.’ Nowadays, the club has a diverse selection of members of whom many belong to the island’s newly emerged elites. Considering its substantial membership fees, it is arguably the most elite club of the island. In spite of this reputation not everyone agrees on this; one Franco-

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190 Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
191 Interview: Mauritius, 13 April 2006.
Mauritian said, ‘I heard from a friend [that the Gymkhana] became terrible and a mess because they accepted everyone.’

Another struggle, but one unrelated to the British, has taken place at the Mauritian branch of the Alliance Française, a French institution which propagates the French language, founded in 1884 – the Mauritian branch is the oldest one outside Paris. The book written in honour of a century of existence states: ‘À l’origine, la section port-louisienne donna l’impression d’être un cercle fermé réservé aux seuls Franco-Mauriciens qui y avaient adhéré ou qui comptaient y adhérer?’ (Decotter 1984: 9). From the 1970s onwards it slowly started to change, however. In the beginning the non-Franco-Mauritian presidents, often gens de couleur, were considered to be close allies of the Franco-Mauritians. However, the arrival of the first Hindu nominated president seemed to mark the end of Franco-Mauritian control in the late 1980s. Another non-Franco-Mauritian president said, ‘he was mal vu by the Franco-Mauritians and there was a guerre between him and [the latest Franco-Mauritian president], but he managed well. … The Franco-Mauritians had lost their power.’

An important challenge in this process was implicit in the fact that the nomination of the Hindu president was supported by the French ambassador. The French increasingly viewed the Franco-Mauritian monopoly of French language and culture as problematic, something that will be elaborated on in Chapter Seven. Today, there are still a number of Franco-Mauritian members but they do not stand a chance in the elections: ‘they don’t want a Franco-Mauritian elected. Your capacities in this system don’t count, it is who you represent’, argued a former president.

**Holding On**

After the changes in membership policy of the two clubs and the Alliance Française, the only remaining exclusive Franco-Mauritian clubs were: the Dodo Club, located in Curepipe; a number of yacht clubs; and a game fishing club, located in Grand Baie, Point d’Esnay and Rivière Noire. The membership regulations of these clubs that exclude non-whites are not officially written in the clubs’ articles, however, even though they are common knowledge. Neither do the Franco-Mauritians deny this policy. Noteworthy here, however, is that there are also exclusive clubs for gens de couleur, Sino-Mauritians and Hindus.

These Franco-Mauritians clubs have faced challenges as well but of a different kind to those experienced by the previously mentioned organisations. In contrast to the Turf Club and

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193 Translation: ‘At the start, the Port Louis section gave the impression that it was a closed circle reserved for Franco-Mauritians who had become members or who counted on becoming members.’
195 Ibid.
Gymkhana, the Dodo Club had a lot fewer British members and had always been more of a Franco-Mauritian bastion, even though a little inconsistency is not uncommon with the Franco-Mauritians. As is demonstrated by the case of Elodie de Montfaucon, some Franco-Mauritians who are known to have (distant) black ancestors are accepted because of their socio-economic position in Mauritian society. So far, this does not appear to have jeopardised the Franco-Mauritian character of the club because these are exceptions to the rule and with their (almost) white skin they fit into the club just as if they were Franco-Mauritians. And as far as could be gathered these exceptions are little known about by the majority of Mauritians.

Challenges to the Dodo Club as a Franco-Mauritian stronghold have been diverse. Membership fees at the Dodo Club are relatively low. One member said, ‘at the Dodo Club the membership is awfully cheap and because of the expensive maintenance of the premises we often have to do some fundraising to “tie the knots”’. The traditional annual Bal du Dodo held on 31 December was scrapped a few years ago as well. The president of the club said, ‘the costs were becoming too expensive because everything, like labour costs, is more expensive on the 31st of December. The first reason [that the ball ended] were the costs. The second was that people like to do something else on the 31st [because, in contrast to the past, there are now more special events in hotels and restaurants].’ Apart from the economic reasons, a major challenge has, thus, to do with the fact that enthusiasm among the Franco-Mauritians themselves is declining although, according to the president, the club still has 2,000 members of whom 250 to 300 are actively involved in club activities. The remaining members often keep up their membership for sentimental reasons or so that their children can play sport there. For young teenagers it is a place to meet with their peers without direct parental control, while the parents feel reassured because it is a safe Franco-Mauritian stronghold. But even this group may not be able to turn the tide since the biggest threat actually appears to come from the geographic relocation of the community.

The president said, ‘many of the members used to live in Curepipe, but when the campements started to have electricity [in the 1980s] many moved to the seaside.’ Many Franco-Mauritians cancelled their membership, children are not introduced to the club anymore and gusto in the club’s activities is declining among the Franco-Mauritians because they consider it to be too far away. There are now, consequently, discussions about opening up the club’s membership. The president said, ‘as a Franco-Mauritian-only club, the club is too closed. [When we cannot assess someone’s eligibility by his/her Franco-Mauritian affiliation in the case of opening up] we will decide whether someone is good in terms of behaviour. We want the Dodo

to remain a socially decent club and many of the rich in Mauritius aren’t specially decent.” They have to balance a dilemma between the consolidation of elite status and the continued existence of the club, even though until now the membership has hardly opened up and at the present time many Franco-Mauritians are ambivalent about this idea. The most commonly heard argument against opening up is that other ethnic groups have clubs with exclusive membership rules as well but that it is only in the Franco-Mauritian case that this is seen as racist. In a sense, the Franco-Mauritian perception of being victims stops them from opening up. Yet there also seems to be genuine anxiety about becoming a minority in their own club, as happened in the Alliance Française.

What influences the maintenance of the membership regulations is, furthermore, the virtual absence of criticism from the wider Franco-Mauritian community. Numerous Franco-Mauritians have never been a member of the club, for reasons ranging from living too far away from the club, their parents never having been members, a dislike for sports, indifference, or their loathing of the membership regulations. They, however, hardly ever publicly criticise the clubs while the Franco-Mauritian members disapproving of the clubs’ policies most often withdraw from the clubs instead of challenging the clubs from the inside. In some of these cases, Franco-Mauritians simply rejected the exclusion of non-whites, an attitude that they had not realised they had when they were younger. One Franco-Mauritian woman who was a member of the Dodo Club and the Grand Bay Yacht Club (GBYC) said, ‘when I was fifteen it was quite painful, because my [Muslim] friends didn’t have the right to come to the parties. I think it must have hurt them, because as youngsters we could only go to one of these clubs for parties. There was nothing else or parents only allowed us to go to these clubs because they thought we were too young for the night clubs. Nowadays you can invite non-whites at the [GBYC], but its membership is still selective.’ However, in the end, only a few appear to have cancelled their memberships of these clubs because of disagreeing with racist policy. One Franco-Mauritian highly critical about the selection process for entry into the community maintained his membership at GBYC in order for his children ‘to have access to the sea’.

199 The British elite in Portugal, for that matter, makes an interesting point for comparison: ‘[g]iven the exclusionary habits in the [British] enclave, it might seem surprising that Portuguese families are allowed in the School and the Club at all. But without participation of the Portuguese members, neither institution could survive financially. So there is polite toleration along with visible exclusion by the British [because the Portuguese do not have, for example, the same privileges at the club]’ (Lave 2000: 187).
200 Interview: Mauritius, 2 February 2006.
201 Interview: Mauritius, 31 January 2006.
Leisure Time

Challenges to club life thus come from ‘within’ as lifestyles are changing. It is argued that the younger generations are less club-minded and that they have more alternative leisure activities now. These range from golfing at hotel courses, dining at restaurants, drinking in bars and shopping. Recently a number of high-end sport clubs have also been opened in the coastal regions and these have filled a gap because these regions lacked clubs other than nautical clubs before and because new clubs exclusively for one ethnic community are not established anymore. Franco-Mauritians are, for example, now being pulled towards the mixed River Club on the west coast. It is an elite sports club with membership fees. Although at present it lacks the social component that the other clubs have, this may gradually change.

The exclusivity of Franco-Mauritian leisure activities should, however, not be underestimated. The Mauritian national rugby team, for example, is a striking example demonstrating how it is more than just membership policies that exclude non-whites. In December 2005, the international match between Mauritius and Burkina Faso was probably one of the largest gatherings of Franco-Mauritians in the island’s contemporary history. Up until now the Franco-Mauritians have been about the only Mauritians interested in rugby. The fact that it was played at their exclusive clubs made it, like in South Africa, a ‘white’ sport. Accordingly, the Mauritian national team was almost exclusively a Franco-Mauritian affair. About two thirds of the supporters were also Franco-Mauritians\(^\text{202}\) – football is far more popular than rugby among Mauritians in general, with rugby representing a specialist niche interest. The small size of the community and the long history of endogamous marriage patterns meant that almost every Franco-Mauritian knew either a player or someone who knew or was related to a player on the team.

In much the same way the exclusivity of the fishing and yacht clubs is also partly related to the leisure habits of Mauritians. The president of Le Morne Angler’s Club (MAC) on the west coast said, ‘[to become a member of MAC] you need to be nominated [by other members]. But we can’t accept too many members because of the infrastructure of the club. There is restricted space. The \textit{fils de membre} have a preference. … And long ago the maximum number of members was fixed at 400. We have never refused someone because he has another name [i.e. belongs to another community]. But it is a club for fishermen and other communities hardly fish […]. At parties people from other communities are welcome [when they are brought by member friends]. It is not a closed and sectarian club.’\(^\text{203}\) Game-fishing and boating are, indeed, typically Franco-Mauritian activities. Consequently, this limits the membership. Nevertheless, Franco-Mauritians

\(^{202}\) Participant observation: Mauritius, 10 December 2005.
\(^{203}\) Interview: Mauritius, 6 June 2006.
and foreign whites do appear to be favoured. The president said, ‘if you have four hundred members then it’s obvious that some like fishing and some don’t’ – hence, it has in an important sense become a social club as well. He argued that the club does not accept people who want to become members of the social club only and this, indeed, seemed the case when they belonged to a community other than the Franco-Mauritian one. At the GBYC, the argument that there is just restricted space for so many boats is used in a similar way. The club does have, however, a substantial number of white South African members.

Hunting, like game-fishing and yachting, is a leisure activity strongly associated with the Franco-Mauritian community – in fact around the world it is an activity more often than not associated with elites (Douglass 1992; Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998). Traditionally hunting has been a Franco-Mauritian affair which explains the continuing interest coming from within their community and the limited interest from other communities; it also remains a rather expensive leisure activity and only small numbers of other Mauritians hunt. Many of the Franco-Mauritian men joined their fathers hunting when they were young and today they take their own children on the hunts. Moreover, exclusivity comes from the fact that hunting cannot be practiced all over the island and that hunting reserves are essential. In this sense, Franco-Mauritian landed property provides an advantage as many sugar estates, for example, have reserves – a number of reserves are also found on land leased from the government.

A hunt really shows how exclusive Franco-Mauritian clubs and leisure activities reinforce a sense of belonging and particularly bonding among Franco-Mauritian men. In July 2006, around twenty to thirty Franco-Mauritians, among them a number of members of the economically most powerful families, gathered at daybreak in the clubhouse of a reserve. Subsequently, teams were organised and dropped off at wooden towers spread over the fenced reserve. Beaters, who were all non-white, together with packs of dogs drove the deer out of the thick forest on to the plains. When this happened the white Franco-Mauritians could shoot the deer. After a couple of hours of this everyone returned to the clubhouse where the drinking, joking and socialising started. This was rounded off with an extensive Creole-style lunch. The part after the actual shooting showed how everyone was familiar with each other and really at ease.

One advantage the Franco-Mauritians have with respect to maintaining the distinguishing characteristics of these activities is that there is little external pressure to open them up. Other Mauritians are not particularly interested because they have never taken part in certain leisure activities specific to the Franco-Mauritian community. As has been mentioned, other

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204 Ibid.
205 Participant observation: Mauritius, 1 July 2006.
communities also have their own clubs. Franco-Mauritians thus take advantage of the absence of external pressure, something that, in general, they have of late not been exempted from in their love for the sea.

Photo 6.1: former colonial mansion converted into museum, the high plateau (photo by Tijo Salverda).

Photo 6.2: Campement site, east coast (photo by Tijo Salverda).
Campements

One of Franco-Mauritians’ most prominent social and leisure activities is related to the sea and the island’s renowned pristine beaches. Historically, the Franco-Mauritians were more or less the only ones interested in spending leisure time at the seaside and were, as a matter of fact, as an elite, also almost the only ones in a position to enjoy leisure time at all. This explains why nautical activities, such as those involving yachting and game-fishing clubs, are an important aspect of Franco-Mauritian elite culture. It also explains Franco-Mauritian feelings with regard to their campements.

As a consequence of malaria, and especially the serious malaria epidemic of 1866 which hit Port Louis in particular, the wealthy Franco-Mauritians abandoned the capital and other lower-lying districts for the higher plateau in the centre of the island. Here the wealthiest built large houses, leading to a pattern of residential segregation. In these new residential districts the climate was cooler and the inhabitants were, therefore, less affected by malaria (Benedict 1965: 23; North-Coombes 2000: 40, 41). To enjoy the luxury of the seaside, however, many Franco-Mauritians established second houses at the seaside, probably in similar tradition as elites in Europe. Deauville, on the coast of Normandy in France, became a sought-after destination for the French elite in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century – the improvement of travel conditions and increasing leisure time for non-elites later made them leave Deauville for other seaside destinations (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 284-312).

Contrary to elites found in other locations around the world, the Franco-Mauritians do not have private beaches and, actually, apart from a few exceptions, do not own the land that their seaside bungalows are on. As with the hotels, Franco-Mauritians need to lease this land from the government; the British colonial government did not sell the pas géométrique land after it became irrelevant for military patrols but it was eager to lease it to the Franco-Mauritians and the small number of other (non-Franco-Mauritian) interested parties. In the twentieth century many of these people built simple huts or used old railway carriages to create a place at the seaside where they could spend weekends and the winter months, when the temperature drops on the high plateau.

The eradication of malaria around 1950, together with improved infrastructure and electricity in the following decades, made the coastal zones more attractive. Gradually a number of coastal villages developed and this increased Franco-Mauritian permanent residence there as many opted for making their campements their prime residence. Other facilities also improved – as

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206 Surprisingly, the literature on the Békés and the white elite in Jamaica makes little of the elites’ seaside activities.
previously mentioned, Franco-Mauritians opened a French-curriculum school in the north in the 1980s and have recently opened a primary school in the west. Nowadays, many Franco-Mauritians live permanently in their campements or other, fully-owned, properties in these coastal villages – the latter are not on state land. About three quarters of the questionnaire’s respondents either own or have a family member who owns a campement. The historical pattern of campements makes them a feature primarily identified with the Franco-Mauritian community and their elite culture. Although there are a number of individuals from other communities owning campements as well, this is by no means characteristic of their respective communities in general.

Problems on the Horizon

The campement and seaside life are a very significant aspect of Franco-Mauritian elite culture. At the front the bungalows have open access to the sea and at the back, facing inland, life is hidden from view by big stone walls. Like with the clubs, it is the almost exclusive control over space that signifies power. Many Franco-Mauritians consider these places as one of their last resorts, a place where there is a relaxed atmosphere and where they can retreat from hectic everyday life. In most cases there are opportunities for the children to swim, sail and participate in other aquatic activities. The adults spend their time relaxing, fishing and sunbathing. Relatives are often to be found next door because certain families have traditionally settled in specific regions. Besides, many of the original leases nowadays contain a number of campements in order to provide accommodation for all the children. Put briefly, life is rather carefree here because of the sea, the sun and the beaches and because of the pampering by nannies and servants who look after the children and take care of a number of daily chores. ‘[At our home] we do the formal entertainment, dinners with a set table. At the seaside it’s more informal with barbeques, bare feet. It is a bit like a holiday atmosphere, every weekend’, said one Franco-Mauritian.\footnote{Interview: Mauritius, 1 March 2006.} Many of the Franco-Mauritians have fond memories of their relaxed life at the seaside, with lunches taken care of and family friends and relatives coming over for visits. At one lunch with occasional foreign guests it was obvious that the latter had not expected the informal dress code.\footnote{Participant observation: Mauritius, 12 February 2006.} Formal dinners with other Mauritians are rarely organised in the campements. Life here revolves more around other Franco-Mauritians who know the informal codes, who are familiar with fishing and sailing and with whom the occupants feel at ease. The campement is, therefore, a Franco-Mauritian affair, both an expression of and a means for perpetuating their culture and their affection for Mauritius.

\footnote{Interview: Mauritius, 1 March 2006.}
\footnote{Participant observation: Mauritius, 12 February 2006.}
Contrary to in the past, many more Mauritians are nowadays attracted to the beachfront. This is a challenge to their privileges because, as with the hotels, most Franco-Mauritians do not own the land there but rather lease it. This fact has been known from the start, yet in the third and last term of the lease it has become a constant factor of insecurity concerning the future of the *campements*. Nobody knew what the government would decide when the final lease term expired. In 2006, government plans were presented and the Franco-Mauritian community went up in arms since these plans threatened to jeopardise the continuation of this important element of their culture.

The government proposed the following: the leaseholders could either opt for a substantial increase in the rent paid for the lease or keep the rent as it was. Accepting the new lease terms would entitle the leaseholders to extend the lease for another sixty years, however, while the government said it would definitely not renew the lease of those leaseholders who remained with the terms of the old lease – and thus retake the land after the leases expired around 2020. The government proposed new terms for the leasehold because it considered the rent to be far below market price. The rent, it was argued, had not increased in correlation with the value of the beachfront land. Compared to the 1960s, times have changed, because the number of hotels, tourists and Mauritians interested in seaside leisure activities has increased since then. Public beaches, however, only amount to 12% of the shoreline; the economically valuable hotels count for 15.8%; and the *campements* for 16% (*Le Mauricien*, 24 May 2007) – the remaining shorelines consist of cliffs, pastures and roads. There are only 1,288 different leaseholders for the *campements* (*L’Express*, 18 June 2007) although these cater for a large number of people because, as mentioned, one lease often contains extra bungalows that have been built for offspring. This fuels the perception that the white Franco-Mauritians have access to more prime beaches than the almost 1.2 million Mauritians. Many Mauritian sunbathers, who are themselves more or less obliged to visit the public beaches (in the summer these can get pretty crowded), are confronted by the image of Franco-Mauritians occupying luxurious bungalows lined along some of the most beautiful beaches on the island.

The issue shows how Franco-Mauritians faced up to the challenge via discursive practices – revealing a great deal about how an elite (re)acts according to their own perceptions. ‘The government needs money [this explaining why they are raising the leasehold]’, a Franco-Mauritian student said. Franco-Mauritians argued that the increase in the lease price was exorbitant and that especially old Franco-Mauritian pensioners, for whom the *campement* was their prime

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209 Briefly put, in the 1960s most leases were set with a three times twenty year extension clause, which means that most leases will expire around 2020. A number of the reserves in the woods and mountains are also on leaseholds and, as a consequence, have the same potential problems as the *campement* leases.

210 Interview: France, 16 October 2006.
residence, could not afford this rise. Under the old terms it was affordable for Franco-Mauritians without a huge income to share the costs of a campement and enjoy the luxury of living there. In line with this, one Franco-Mauritian said, ‘[many] Franco-Mauritians are good at living in a wealthy manner, while they are not specially rich: they share a campement, they manage to go hunting, etcetera.’ The government proposal jeopardised this aspect of Franco-Mauritian life. As said, the discourse of many Franco-Mauritians was that back in the days nobody wanted that land, and that they had developed the coastal zones. Now that it had become popular the government wanted to get rid of them and cash in on the land’s value.

An analysis of these perceptions and Franco-Mauritian discourse brings to light a number of interesting aspects. Franco-Mauritians often referred to the fact that nobody wanted the land in the past and that the government now wanted to cash in. The costs of the leasehold should remain as they were, they said, and yet when the compensation scheme was mentioned the figure should increase according to the market value. In the original contract one clause stated that the government would pay Rs 20,000 for a building on the leased land if the contract ended. The Franco-Mauritians, however, wanted more compensation than this because their accommodation had changed from being simple huts and carriages in the beginning to more luxurious dwellings now which had increased their value substantially. Many Franco-Mauritians shared the perception that the government proposal was targeting them as whites. The government had been elected in a campaign dominated by anti-white rhetoric. Besides, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight, the government was also discussing ‘democratising’ the economy while at the same time battling with the sugar industry, both of which were perceived by many as anti-white moves. In general, the strongest critiques were confined to the Franco-Mauritian community. A Franco-Mauritian student, for example, said he never discussed the matter with a Hindu friend because he did not know this person’s point of view. Only occasionally was the government openly accused of being anti-white. In one instance, though, in a letter to the editor, Le Cernéen’s Jean-Pierre Lenoir compared the government to Zimbabwe’s Mugabe (Le Mauricien, 12 July 2007).

Community Dynamics

Important for understanding Franco-Mauritian community dynamics is the fact that only a small number of Franco-Mauritians approved the government’s proposal. These people argued that with the new terms their property would be safeguarded for future generations — they would not have to live with the background anxiety concerning what would happen when their lease expired.

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211 Interview: Mauritius, 9 October 2007.
212 Ibid.
around 2020 anymore. One Franco-Mauritian critically remarked, ‘Franco-Mauritians don’t want to accept that they have to pay for their first class location.’\textsuperscript{213} However, it was only a minority that expressed their support for the scheme, both within and outside the community. When a Franco-Mauritian CEO openly said in a newspaper that he would accept the new conditions and pay, he was criticised straight away. The Franco-Mauritian politician Eric Guimbeau, another exception to the rule that Franco-Mauritians abstain from politics, accused the government of introducing an anti-white policy and said it was easy for the CEO to say he would accept because he was CEO of one of the largest business groups (\textit{Week-End}, 9 July 2007). This appeared to be a touchy subject within the Franco-Mauritian community in general. For example, Jacques Gougeard, who was willing to accept the new conditions said, ‘a number of friends, who can easily afford the increase, are of a different opinion to me. But we just do not discuss the matter.’\textsuperscript{214} The atmosphere in the Franco-Mauritian community seems to have created a situation in which the government’s proposal has been labelled as anti-white and cannot therefore be supported. Internal group dynamics, thus, appear to prevent thinking outside the box as well as reinforcing horizontal loyalties and contributing to the facing of challenges to the Franco-Mauritian elite position.

Franco-Mauritian opposition to the government proposal initially triumphed because the Association of Campement Owners and Users (ACOU) brought the case before a court which ruled for a renegotiation of the conditions. However, the case was brought before the court a second time and ACOU lost this round. The \textit{campement} owners either had to accept the new conditions for the lease or return their lands to the state when the original lease expired. According to the newspaper \textit{Le Mauricien}, three quarters of the leases were renewed while those in financial difficulties ended up not knowing what to do (\textit{Le Mauricien}, 23 May 2008). Assuming that this figure reflects reality, many Franco-Mauritians will, then, be able to continue their cherished life at the seaside and consolidate an important element of their elite culture.

\textbf{A Sense of Belonging}

The high walls that hide the \textit{campements} from view – and the hedges, in the case of Franco-Mauritian houses on the high plateau (Curepipe and surroundings) – can in a way be considered symbolic of Franco-Mauritian life. On the island, they lead social lives that are somehow separated from those of other Mauritians (elite families in France also like to live life strictly among themselves (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998: 115)). The \textit{campements}, the hunting, the clubs and other exclusive activities appear to be the Franco-Mauritian equivalent of Cohen’s

\textsuperscript{213} Informal conversation: Mauritius, date unknown.
\textsuperscript{214} Interview: Mauritius, 10 October 2007.
‘inner networks of primary relationships’ which link the members of the group together: ‘[i]t is this inner, highly exclusive, network which provides the real basis of identity and serves as a system of channels for collaboration in developing and maintaining the interests of its members’ (Cohen 1981: 60, 61). From early childhood Franco-Mauritians grow up in an environment enclosed by their community. They spend their weekends and holidays at the seaside with their cousins and other Franco-Mauritians. The majority of Franco-Mauritian children attend a small number of French private schools which, moreover, have been founded by or in close cooperation with members of their community. Despite English being the country’s official school language, many other Mauritians also attend these schools because they are known for providing a quality education. This separates them from the majority of Mauritian pupils who attend the state school system because the latter follow the southern calendar while the French private schools follow the European calendar. Hence, Franco-Mauritians have their long holidays in the Mauritian winter when most Mauritians are at school.

Private school fees are substantial and thus only Mauritians from wealthy backgrounds can attend them. There is potential for more intermingling between them and the Franco-Mauritians but from a young age the exclusive sport clubs attended by many Franco-Mauritians after school hours disrupt this possibility. Franco-Mauritians do have friends from other communities but these tend to be just a few within large groups of Franco-Mauritians – and almost all their closest friends are Franco-Mauritians whom they have known for years. Theoretically open gatherings can still, in effect, become predominantly Franco-Mauritian in character. Zanzibar, a nightclub in the north, organises nights catering almost exclusively to Franco-Mauritians. This exclusivity is facilitated (as a Franco-Mauritian girl explained) by lower class Creoles, for example, being kept out with the excuse that they are not members. At the same time, Franco-Mauritians’ non-white friends, often attending the same schools as the Franco-Mauritians, are allowed in. Within the context of the overwhelming presence of Franco-Mauritians they are, however, a tiny minority. Increasing pressure on these exclusive domains, however, can have a significant impact as the case of the Macanese, the Portuguese elite in Macau, shows:

[The stigma of exclusivity] explains how there has been a reduction bordering on total disappearance in the Macanese arenas of community, by which I mean the public spaces and occasions where community belonging was openly staged before non-community members and where community members openly performed their own internal hierarchies of prestige. The clubs, private beaches, theatre performances, café meetings, religious

215 Interview: France, 26 October 2006.
ceremonies, brotherhoods and kermesses that played such a central role during the first half of the [twentieth] century progressively vanished (Pina-Cabral 2000: 213).

Franco-Mauritians’ exclusive socialisation patterns, the structure of social life and, as will be shown in the next chapter, an elite status also ascribed to them by other Mauritians inculcates Franco-Mauritians with a sense of superiority, a number of Franco-Mauritians critically remarked. A Franco-Mauritian student in France, who highly disliked what he saw as the racist connotations of his community, said, ‘Franco-Mauritians are very proud. They are the meilleur and the best.’

In reality there is more diversity than this as not all Franco-Mauritians are alike. They have different interests and move around in their own separate circles of friends. For example, not all Franco-Mauritians love hunting and many, especially younger, Franco-Mauritians ridicule hunting – a stereotype they apply for a Franco-Mauritian man is someone who goes hunting in winter, game-fishing in summer and who drives a pick-up truck. At the hunt one could also notice differences between a group of friends and family who had known each other for a long time and a group of ‘poorer’ whites who had come with their dogs. Certain Franco-Mauritian circles, especially those of younger Franco-Mauritians, are definitely more ethnically diverse as they include Mauritians coming from other communities. Among Franco-Mauritian friends, you can also get different attitudes. A Franco-Mauritian girl studying in Paris said, ‘two good friends who stayed [behind] in Mauritius told me that they would never bring a métisse to their house. I thought they were open [minded]! I was shocked by their mentality.’ It is expected, however, that groups of friends will later in life become more mono-ethnic again. When they settle down and have children, many Franco-Mauritians start to predominantly move within a smaller circle of Franco-Mauritian family and close Franco-Mauritian friends whom they have often known since childhood.

What seems to distinguish Franco-Mauritians from other counter-elites is that even though Franco-Mauritians socialise in different circles there still appears to be a strong overriding sense of belonging – only a few seem to resent this sense of belonging and this cannot be taken to indicate that the rest necessarily have a sense of superiority. They all appear to have been prone to having similar experiences throughout their lives. From earliest childhood there is a strong sense of social control within the community and it is not appreciated to behave outside the framework of what is expected. Many Franco-Mauritian students mentioned the constraints of the community but almost all indicated that they wanted to return to Mauritius. According to

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217 Participant observation: Mauritius, 1 July 2006.
218 Interview: France, 11 October 2006.
Franco-Mauritian women born and raised in Mauritius but familiar with living in France, other Mauritians are much more likely than Franco-Mauritians to stay abroad. Her perception was that, ‘especially [Franco-Mauritian] boys tend to go back to Mauritius. The Franco-Mauritian society is a macho society which may influence the choice of women to stay abroad. This said, male-female relationships differ from generation to generation: my generation and group of friends was quite mixed, while it is a lot less like that with my older sisters [who don’t work].’ She considered life in Mauritius too restrictive because, according to her, ‘your family are also your friends and you also work with them. It’s too much the same and all around the family. ... You only socialise within the Franco-Mauritian group. It is rather closed and they are only one to two percent of the total population. Making [life] so limited.’ The element of space really has an impact here because the limits of the small island of Mauritius emphasise the bounded entity that is the Franco-Mauritian community.

6.4 Conclusion
Franco-Mauritian historical marriage patterns have shaped a community that is closely interlinked. Many Franco-Mauritians are to a certain degree related and when they are not related they often know each other personally or by family name, this being something facilitated by the small size of the community. This pattern is reinforced by and difficult to separate from (historical) patterns of exclusive leisure activities and the structure of Franco-Mauritian social life.

Within the micro-cosmos of the Franco-Mauritian community this (historical) pattern of family and social relations has facilitated particularistic self-organisation. There is a legacy of the traditional correlation between symbolic elite superiority of white skin-colour, class position and elite culture. These aspects are nowadays further stressed by ethnicity even though white skin-colour still seems very important, as is shown by the practice of marrying overseas spouses. Marrying ‘white’, sport clubs, campements and leisure activities from earliest childhood, all these have a substantial impact, creating a strong and multidimensional sense of belonging. The way in which Franco-Mauritians cherish a lifestyle distinct from that of other Mauritians, in this sense, is comparable to Douglass’ argument about the power of sentiment. For the Jamaican case, she argues that when a person ‘loves’ or ‘believes’ someone or something, it almost becomes a choice that is beyond question, analysis or criticism. In that sense, she continues, emotion is a powerful part of the way power and ideology work to maintain and justify the status quo. Hence, emotions and a sense of belonging also facilitate the weathering of change.

219 Franco-Mauritians frequently referred to dinners where at a certain point the women are at one end of the table and the men at the other.
220 Interview: France, 12 October 2006.
221 Personal communication: Lisa Douglass, 21 July 2008.

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In my opinion, social stratification among other Mauritian communities and the emergence of counter-elites has further consolidated a sense of belonging among Franco-Mauritians as they now look less at what divides them internally. This seems comparable to Martinique where relationships between whites of different social positions were easier and better tolerated than relationships between whites and non-whites of the same social positions (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002: 168). The combination of the Franco-Mauritians’ long tradition as an elite, their cohesive identity and their assets and privileges reinforces horizontal loyalties and group dynamics is thus useful in facing challenges to their position.

The passing down of a strong sense of belonging appears to be a great asset when it comes to facing challenges to an elite position. In particular this prevents the Franco-Mauritian community from becoming ‘diluted’, although increasing acceptance of mixed marriages may (gradually) undermine this. Their exclusivity, moreover, explains the greater co-operation that exists among Franco-Mauritians in the private sector compared to the counter-elites. Due to the continuity of exclusive social networks, Franco-Mauritian businessmen are more easily drawn to each other, leaving other Mauritians outside, as illustrated in the previous chapter. As Cohen argued, ‘[c]losure is most effectively attained through the operation of a network of amity which knits the members of the elite together. Such networks are developed to coordinate corporate action informally through mutual trust and cooperation’ (Cohen 1981: 222).

Internal group dynamics in the case of the campements, moreover, show what can be considered the room for manoeuvre within the Franco-Mauritian community. The perception that the Franco-Mauritian community is being oppressed and that it is the victim of the Hindu politicians appears to ‘suppress’ recalcitrant opinions within the Franco-Mauritian community. This shows to what extent an elite acts according to its perceptions: the people who perceive themselves to be relatively powerless (i.e. ‘the government wants to get rid of us’) do, in this case, objectively have more power than they assume. One example of this is provided by their financial capacity to pay for the new conditions of the leasehold, even though this is in contradiction to their strong opposition to the government when it announced its new policy.

A Franco-Mauritian born and bred in South Africa argued, however, that the campement issue demonstrates how Franco-Mauritians have to a great extent lost their position of power: the uncertainty about what would happen made it clear that they were no longer close to the political power, because otherwise they would have known which sites the state wanted to reclaim. Indeed, Franco-Mauritian social and cultural practices in general essentially represent a sequence of lost battles. They have to accept new realities, as the example of the Alliance Française given above shows. Thus I would argue that the Franco-Mauritian lifestyle is challenged because their

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elite culture is associated with economic privileges even though Franco-Mauritians are still able to maintain their (socio-economic) elite position through their horizontal loyalties and elite culture. At the same time, however, it needs to be said that they are also able to consolidate a certain lifestyle because of structural phenomena and because their position is attributed to them by others, as will be illustrated in the next chapter.