

The Mauritian Diaspora in Toronto, Canada:
Identity and Transnational Processes

by

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that 3000 Mauritian immigrants live in the Canadian province of Ontario, yet despite this relatively small number they are culturally distinct in the city of Toronto. Using ethnographic methods, this dissertation examines immigrants' changing identities, engagement in transnational politics, and transnational relationships with family members still in Mauritius. Mauritian immigrants in Toronto tend to conceptualize of a unified Mauritian community, created out of a sense of pride that Mauritians are doing well economically, as well as through shared cultural practices like speaking the Mauritian kreol language. However, there are also divisions within the diaspora along ethnic and religious lines, mirroring those in Mauritius. Immigrants also identify as Canadian to a degree, even though what it means to be Canadian varies. Mauritian immigrants' engagement with Canadian governance influences their likelihood of engaging in transnational politics, even though this is further mediated by the context of migration. Those who migrated as adults with a fully established social network are more likely to try and actively engage in transnational politics compared to those who migrated as young adults to pursue higher education. The latter tend to show an aspiration to engage in transnational politics or a complete lack of engagement from the Mauritian state. Finally, family relationships, including transnational family ties, are an important factor in migration decisions, both in choosing to migrate and choosing to return home. The decision to migrate to Canada is not taken simply at the individual level but is made with input from other family members, or for the children's welfare. Immigrants retain transnational ties to other kin through internet technologies, frequent visits back to Mauritius, and the sending of remittances. Immigrants are ambivalent about returning

home because they do not wish to leave behind their children or grandchildren who have an established life in Canada. This dissertation contributes to the immigration literature by showing that there are generational factors in how immigrants identify and engage in transnational relationships. It also provides policy implications both for the Mauritian government and receiving countries concerned with culturally distinct diasporic populations.

DEDICATION

For all the people who believed in me and made my own migration journey possible.

To Marc and Mike, who have kept me going through 2020 and supported me through the long weeks of writing. Thank you for everything.

To Lily A. Villa. Thank you for being my person.

To Mahshid. Thank you for all the times remembered and all the times to come.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Some migrant groups are highly visible due to the prominence of the sending country on the global stage or the number of people who are migrating. Others, such as Mauritian immigrants, are much less visible. They come from a small African island in the Indian Ocean and migrate in very small numbers compared to other sending countries. Yet, despite their relatively small numbers, Mauritian immigrants have managed to retain their cultural distinctiveness and have become culturally visible in localities where they have settled. For instance, the City of Toronto proclaimed March 12, 2019 as “Mauritius Cultural Day,” celebrating the contributions of the Mauritian community to the city, as well as acknowledging Mauritius’ unique culture (City of Toronto, 2018). This recognition is noteworthy given that there are only around 3000 Mauritian immigrants currently residing in the province of Ontario, where Toronto is located. They have managed to remain culturally visible while also becoming economically and socially successful.

In this dissertation, I examine the experiences of Mauritian immigrants to Toronto and the ties they retain to the homeland. This was done through ethnographic field work including participant observation at a Mauritian flag raising ceremony in Toronto, 30 semi-structured interviews, and an analysis of social media posts by the members of Mauritian diaspora. In this introduction, I outline these research objectives and provide a background to Mauritian society and immigration.

Firstly, my dissertation looks at the ways that Mauritian identity changes and is maintained after the experience of migration to Toronto. Given the small size of the

Mauritian diaspora in Toronto and their distinctive culture, I found that there is a strong sense of a unified Mauritian community, articulated around pride felt to be Mauritian. This sense of unity in the Mauritian community has some tangible benefits to new immigrants, as a Mauritian network exists to help newly-landed immigrants find employment, a place to live, and other Mauritians to interact with. However, there are still divisions along ethnic and religious lines within the Mauritian diaspora. Much like in Mauritius, these divisions are not easily discussed, but cause some Mauritians not to socialize with Mauritians from other communities, or exclude certain members of the community from cultural celebrations. At the same time, these Mauritian immigrants start feeling “Canadian” due to their length of time residing in Canada. As identity is contextual and comprises both internal beliefs about oneself and external societal structures, Mauritian immigrants in Toronto navigate multiple spaces which highlight multiple aspects of their identity. While some fully embrace being Canadian and reject their former Mauritian identity, the majority find that they feel both Canadian and Mauritian to various degree.

Secondly, I use Tsuda’s (2012) framework of transnational simultaneity to assess the degree to which diasporic Mauritians in Toronto engage in transnational politics. Transnational politics refers to the ability and willingness of immigrants to influence politics and civic engagement in the sending country while living in the receiving country. This can be done through formal avenues afforded by the sending country (such as extending the right to vote to citizens abroad) or informally by individual immigrants using their own resources to enact changes in the sending country. While Mauritian governance is generally seen as democratic and peaceful by international agencies, it is

also characterized by cronyism and the perception of a high level of corruption amongst local Mauritians. Diasporic Mauritians also feel negatively about the state of Mauritian politics, and this influences their degree of engagement in transnational politics. For some, however, their engagement with Canadian governance provides an impetus to try and engage in transnational politics, especially for those who have some contacts in the Mauritian government that they can try to leverage for such changes. For others, seeing the difference between Canadian and Mauritian governance makes them less likely to want to engage with Mauritian politics, preferring to become completely disengaged. However, even those who are actively wanting to engage in transnational politics have so far not been successful, due to the inefficiencies of the Mauritian government.

Thirdly, I look at the importance of family in making migration decisions for members of the Mauritian diaspora. In this context, “family” can be classified as either the nuclear family (parents and children) or as other kin (extended family, in-laws, symbolic kin). The nuclear family is influential in the decision to migrate, although there is a generational component to this. Younger immigrants who are primarily migrating for education typically migrate alone, but with the emotional and (sometimes) financial support of their parents. More established immigrants generally migrate with their spouses and children (if they have any), and generally take into consideration the future opportunities of the children when making the decision to migrate. In the majority of cases, parents of the younger immigrants, as well as other kin, remain in Mauritius. These leads to the creation of long term transnational family relationships, as the immigrant plans to be gone for a long period of time without permanent reunification with the other family members. New family ties are also created in Canada, either through the

immigrant's marriage or the immigrant children's marriage, further complicating a future return to the homeland.

Mauritian Identity and Citizenship

Lacking an indigenous population, Mauritius was first colonized by the Dutch in 1598, although they found it difficult to establish a permanent settlement due to weather and famine and abandoned the island in 1710 (Moree, 1998). The French then colonized the island in 1715, until the British conquered the island in 1814. Mauritius remained a British colony until independence in 1968 (Fokeer, 1922). The island was mainly developed throughout the French period (Toussaint, 1973). Slaves were extensively used for this development, from working in various plantations to building the infrastructure, as well as performing domestic tasks for their French masters (Fokeer, 1922). Slaves were originally brought in from Madagascar, but were later taken from Eastern Africa, especially Mozambique (Allen, 1999; Fokeer, 1922). When the British took over the island, they did not institute much change: life in Mauritius was allowed to go on much as it had under the French, including the importation of slaves until slavery was abolished within the British empire. The British did intensify the production of sugar, importing indentured laborers from India after slavery was abolished in order to work in the sugar-cane fields. Mauritius remains an export-oriented economy, focusing on sugar, tourism, textiles and apparel, financial services, and has expanded into fish processing, information and communications technology, and hospitality and property development (CIA Factbook, 2021).

Beyond this historical interconnection with the global economy, Mauritian identity itself is rooted in the global, through the continued fostering of links to the

"ancestral homeland" encouraged by the Mauritian government. Mauritian identity is based on divisions along both ethnic and religious lines. The concept of "race" is not used locally, unlike other places such as the United States, although a "white" category exists that encompasses Mauritians of European descent (Salverda, 2015), who are mostly French, but more recently white South Africans. There is no opposing "black" category. The term "community" is often used when referring to various segments of the population. Beyond "white," the other ethnic categories tend to correlate with countries of origin, for instance Sino-Mauritians for Mauritians of Chinese descent, Indo-Mauritians for Mauritians of Indian descent, and Creoles for the segment of the population descended from slaves and mixed with other communities. There used to be different categories to further differentiate Creoles based on the lightness of their skin, but these terms are not in use anymore (Allen, 1999). Indo-Mauritians are further subdivided according to religion, broadly Hinduism and Islam. These two groups are considered to be distinct communities and little intermarriage occurs across group boundaries (Nave, 2000; Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2013). Whites and Creoles are generally assumed to be Catholic, while Sino-Mauritians can be either Catholic or Buddhist. Therefore, group belonging in Mauritius is predicated both on what country one's ancestors come from, as well as what religion one follows.

The basis of Mauritian national identity is that religiosity will create morally-upstanding citizens, even if they maintain the culture and religion of the country of origin ("ancestral homeland" in local discourse), and will then be able to coexist peacefully with each other (Boswell, 2006; Eisenlohr, 2006). This tactic of encouraging national belonging by maintaining strong ties to the ancestral homeland has been styled "unity

through diversity.” The government enacts this in a few ways: by recognizing different religious celebrations as national holidays, providing monetary subsidies to religious organizations, and teaching ancestral languages in schools. The state does not seek to impose one single and homogeneous Mauritian identity, but encourages its citizens to keep ties, whether symbolic or real, with their countries of origin. Unlike other sovereign states which try to homogenize their population, the Mauritian states attempts to acknowledge the various “communities” making up the island, and (in theory) views them as all equal.

The Mauritian basis for identity, then, is built around how the individual fits within the narrative of pre-existing groups that are officially recognized by the state. Both the country of origin and the religion practiced are means of affirming group identity, but are also important elements of nation building. While not overtly anti-colonial, the government’s emphasis on maintaining and celebrating ties to non-European countries and religions is a reaction to the colonial practice of labeling the culturally different Indo-Mauritians, particularly the Hindus, as “savages” (Eisenlohr, 2006). The main religions practiced (Hinduism, Christianity and Islam) are not only protected by the constitution, they are also seen as the main vector through which to uphold the public order and the ideal way to be a model Mauritian citizen. National identity and citizenship are linked in Mauritius: retaining symbolic ties to the ancestral homeland is part of national identity, but also how the state confers rights to native-born citizens. So-called “cultural” organizations (organizations based on ethnic group belonging or religion) have lobbying power with the government, and also receive government subsidies to better serve their members. This is a multicultural citizenship notion that there are different ethnic groups

with different origins in Mauritius, but they are all seen as legitimate members of the nation-state as long as they keep symbolic ties to their ancestral homelands. They are conferred lobbying power to the government through these symbolic ties. This continued and reified division of the Mauritian population, including in politics through an ethnoreligious representation system, has led to some tensions among the population. The most violent were in 1999 when the Creoles rioted against the Hindu-majority government following the death of a Creole singer and political leader in prison (Dobson, 2005), while another occurred in 2015 when a Hindu temple was vandalized, prompting retaliation by Hindus against various mosques (L'Express.mu, 2015).

This conception of citizenship articulated around country of origin and religion works particularly well for the Hindus, as Hinduism is specifically tied to India. Eisenlohr's choice to title his ethnography of Mauritian Hindus, *Little India* is an indication of the prominence of the religion in Mauritian daily life (Eisenlohr, 2006). Other groups find that the equivalence of country of origin and religion to ideal citizenship is problematic: Creoles, for instance, do not have knowledge of a specific "ancestral homeland" because of the experience of slavery, leading to what has been called the *Malaise Creole* by local leaders and academics alike: the systematic exclusion of Creoles in political life, as well as their exclusion from increasing economic capital and educational gains (Boswell, 2006). Creoles are thus second-class citizens in Mauritius, as they are excluded from the mainstream view of what it means to be a citizen due to their lack of symbolic ties to a homeland. Catholicism, as a colonial religion and one that is not tied to a particular country or region, does not perform the same lobbying function as other religions in Mauritius (Boswell, 2006). This is not an

explicit exclusion by the government, but a structural effect of the way that citizenship is framed in Mauritius. Creoles are excluded from full citizenship in Mauritius because they do not have specific religious organizations that can lobby the government and receive government subsidies.

The historical disparities between ethnoreligious communities in Mauritius were a contributing factor to Mauritian emigration in the 1960s and 1970s, during the turbulent time period surrounding independence. However, economic factors were also in play to push Mauritians out of Mauritius.

Mauritian Emigration

While there is limited research on Mauritian migration, available data show that Mauritians mostly migrate to Australia, England, France and Canada (Dinan, 1985; Harmon & Karghoo, 2015; IOM, 2013). This distribution makes sense if one looks at Mauritius' colonial history (England and France), as well as which countries had more open borders in the 1960s when Mauritian migration reached its peak (Australia and Canada). The 1960s and early 1970s are an important time in Mauritian migration, as Mauritius became an independent country in 1968. This led some segments of the population to seek their fortune elsewhere, as it was unclear whether independent Mauritius would be able to provide enough jobs as well as guarantee freedom of religion as it had under colonial rule (Dinan, 1985; Duyker, 1988; Mannick, 1987). The fear of the lack of jobs stemmed from the lack of natural resources coupled with the loss of colonial capital and the expanding population in a small geographic area (Duyker, 1988). Indeed, there was a period of high unemployment after independence and before Mauritius was able to create a booming manufacturing industry (Auty, 2017).

Additionally, there were fears that the Hindu majority of the island would impose their religion on the rest of the population (Eisenlohr, 2006). The locations of the receiving countries of Mauritian immigrants around the world illustrates that mere geographic proximity does not lead to emigration from Mauritius, but rather that more complex factors such as colonial history and immigration policies influence where migrants decide to go. These factors and the continued movement of Mauritians to the same group of receiving countries led to the formation of the Mauritian diaspora. According to Dinan (1985), the initial draw of Canada for Mauritian emigrants was that its borders were open in a time of high unemployment in Mauritius while previous countries of colonization, such as France and England, tightened their borders and restricted immigration.

It is interesting to note that Mauritians have not migrated to their “ancestral homelands.” As shown previously, Mauritian citizenship is based on upholding traditions such as religion and language linked to one’s country of origin: by so doing, citizens are considered moral and deemed worthy of inclusion and rights from the state. Yet Mauritians are not return migrating in large numbers and settling in their ethnic homelands of India, Pakistan, China or Africa despite fostering a cultural connection to them through Mauritian national belonging. Some are migrating to former colonial powers, such as England (Mannick, 1987) and France, but there is of date no systematic study of the reasons why they are going to these countries and not others. One reason could be that the previous colonial ties are stronger than the symbolic ties to the homeland maintained by Mauritian citizens. Another could be the ease of migrating to these countries, as countries with more open immigration policies might have more success recruiting labor from Mauritius than others. Finally, the main countries of

emigration are all more economically developed, creating fewer incentives for migration there.

Sovereign states have a vested interest in keeping track of their citizens abroad. As an example, remittances sent back home from migrants become an integral part of poorer countries' income, and become a valuable channel for continued economic growth (Massey et al., 2003). Grewal (1999) illustrates how the diaspora can be used by both state and global capitalist forces to further the goals of global capitalism and promote economic growth. In this case study, overseas Indian citizens were given incentives to invest in India, and the Mattel corporation used them and their cosmopolitan reach to create a market for Barbie dolls in India. Grewal does not go into detail about where exactly these overseas Indian citizens reside, but the assumption is clearly that they have money and can invest in the economic prosperity of the country. The Mauritian state has likewise tried to keep track of its diaspora in order to further the tourism industry, encouraging Mauritians abroad to visit Mauritius and therefore contribute to its economy, as well as to encourage investment in the island. The creation of the Mauritian Diaspora Scheme aims to provide incentives for Mauritians to invest monetarily into the country and potentially move back (Economic Development Board, n.d.). In this case, the Mauritian state explicitly values its diaspora for the economic advantages it can bring to the country. Privileges conferred to members of the diaspora take the form of discounts or special pricing for touristic activities on the island, such as hotel stays. In 2019, around 1.3 million tourists (primarily from Europe, but increasingly from Asia) visited the island (Statistics Mauritius, 2019), making tourism an important pillar of the Mauritian economy. The Mauritian state has a strong interest in continuing to attract tourists to the

island to further economic growth, and the Mauritian diaspora is an ideal group to encourage to visit Mauritius. The state's appeal to its diaspora is therefore in line with a policy of economic growth that relies on foreign investments and tourism. However, the Mauritian Diaspora Scheme has not been successfully deployed, as evidenced by a survey of the global Mauritian diaspora (Jahangeer-Chojoo, 2018) and confirmed by ethnographic work in this dissertation (see Chapter 4).

The Mauritian state's failure in instituting an organization for its diaspora does not mean that such organizations do not exist. Local Mauritian diasporic communities have created grassroots organizations that bring together Mauritian families to promote Mauritian culture and interests as well as provide community activities. One such organization is Heritage Mauritius, a Toronto-based association which now has satellite organizations in other cities and provinces across Canada. Heritage Mauritius primarily organizes social events and cultural celebrations around Mauritian holidays, as well as promotes Mauritian culture in Canada. The work of Heritage Mauritius and other such groups in Canada is interesting because it is a grassroots movement, instead of stemming from the state. This is an example of transnationalism from below, where the Mauritians are staking a claim on the Canadian state to recognize them as a distinct group with a widening cultural impact on Canada, with the long-term plan of fostering a better relationship between the two countries.

It is important to note that the Mauritian diasporic population in Canada is not particularly marginalized. They are incorporated within Canadian society, are generally successful economically, and can openly use the governmental system of Canada to further their own interests. They are not, on the whole, a marginalized population, but

rather one that is trying to incorporate within the country while maintaining their own cultural traditions, using the country's existing multicultural framework (Biles, 2014).

Dissertation format and organization

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In this first introductory chapter, I provide background to Mauritius and Mauritian migration, and outline the research objectives of this dissertation. Chapters 2-4 are independent articles investigating a different aspect of the Mauritian migration experience. Chapter 2 is targeted for submission in an edited volume, and chapters 3 and 4 are targeted for peer-reviewed academic journals. Chapter 5 contains a summary of findings from the previous 3 chapters, their theoretical implications, and directions for further research. Because this dissertation takes the form of three independent research articles, the relevant literature and methodological discussions are embedded within each paper.

Chapter Summaries

The objective of this dissertation is to understand the experiences of Mauritian immigrants to Canada and the ties they retain to the homeland. This includes (1) exploring how Mauritian identity – and a Mauritian community - is created through the experience of migration; (2) analyzing how some members of the Mauritian diaspora attempt to engage in transnational politics in Mauritius while simultaneously engaging with Canadian civic life; and (3) showing that familial ties are central both for Mauritians' decision to migrate and for the prospect of return. The research questions tied to these objectives are (1) How do Mauritians self-identify in Canada? Do they perceive this to be different from their self-identification when they lived in Mauritius?; (2) How

are Mauritian in Toronto engaging in transnational politics and civic engagement?; and
(3) How do family and kinship ties influence Mauritian's migration decisions?

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 explores how Mauritian immigrants in Canada create a unified Mauritian community while simultaneously reifying differences along ethnic and religious lines that existed in Mauritius. The literature about Mauritius widely agrees that Mauritian identity is based on a local discourse of the country of origin stemming from colonization. Since identity is contextual, it was expected that Mauritian identity would change through immigration, which places individuals in a new context with different understandings of ethnic group hierarchies. New markers of identity do indeed become prominent among the Mauritian diaspora, especially the more widespread use of the Mauritian kreol language which is unique to the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto. Diasporic Mauritians also report feeling pride at being Mauritian, due in part to Mauritians generally working hard and becoming successful in the receiving country. However, despite talking about a unified Mauritian community, there are still divisions within the community mirroring those present in mainland Mauritius. Specifically, Mauritian communalism is still prevalent among the Mauritian diaspora, with members of certain ethnicities excluded from certain gatherings or celebrations depending on who is organizing the event. At the same time, this type of exclusion goes against what most see as Canadian values of inclusion and tolerance.

Chapter 3

The creation of Mauritian cultural groups and subsequent recognition of Mauritian culture by the City of Toronto suggests that Mauritians in the diaspora are

active in engaging with the Canadian state in order to claim rights of both belonging and cultural specificity. Individuals in these organizations also have the potential to engage transnationally with the Mauritian state as well, leading to a simultaneous relationship between political engagement in Canada and Mauritius at the same time. So far, they have not been successful. Depending on the context of migration, diasporic Mauritians show differing willingness to engage with the Mauritian state, all stemming from a widespread negative view of the Mauritian government. Those who have social connections to people in prominent positions in the government continually try to enact changes in Mauritius, although they have so far not been successful. Those who do not have such connections are currently not even trying to engage. They are either completely disengaged from Mauritius, preferring instead to focus on the contributions they can make to Canada, or they aspire to one day contribute once the situation in Mauritius changes. For this latter group, the cronyism and perceived high levels of corruption within the government are obstacles to any positive contribution that they may make, even though they hope to engage in transnational politics at some point in the future. This chapter also covers the ineffectual Mauritian Diaspora Scheme, which is the Mauritian government's only attempt to offer formal channels of communication with the diaspora. The Scheme is purely economic and not political, leaving diasporic Mauritians who wish to engage in transnational politics to do so using their own resources, outside of formal channels.

Chapter 4

The literature on immigration documents the myriad reasons why immigrants choose to migrate, and the possible reasons and context for their return to the sending

country. Kinship ties are particularly important for the Mauritian diaspora, and influence both the decision to migrate and the decision to return to Mauritius. For younger immigrants who primarily migrate to Canada for higher education, the influence comes from their parents, who encourage them to immigrate and provide emotional and sometimes financial support. For more established immigrants, the future prospects of the children, including access to and quality of education, is a primary concern. Interestingly, there is little chain migration within the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto, with immigrants maintaining transnational family ties with members outside their nuclear family (defined here as spouse and children). When chain migration does occur, it is because one person migrated first and later sent for their spouse and any children. This leads to sustained, long-term transnational family relationships between the immigrants and the other kin left behind in Mauritius. These relationships are maintained through internet technologies such as group messages and video calls, through visits back to Mauritius, and through the sending of gifts and remittances. Family influences the reluctance of many to return to Mauritius because, while immigrants do miss their kin who are still in Mauritius, they have also created new family relationships in Canada that they do not want to leave behind.

Chapter 5

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the theoretical findings of chapters 2-4, synthesize their theoretical implications, and outline future avenues of research. Recent events in Mauritius, including the Wakashio oil spill and subsequent anti-government protests, may create a renewed diaspora consciousness which leads to more ways for the diaspora to engage with Mauritius, for example through the right to vote by citizens

abroad. This new development also may impact Mauritian identity, as Mauritian communalism is explicitly condemned during these protests. This dissertation raises further questions regarding the role of ethnicity for first generation Mauritian immigrants, especially since Mauritian Muslims were underrepresented in the interview sample.

Researcher positionality and fieldwork

I am female Mauritian immigrant who left Mauritius in 2010 and is currently residing in the U.S. Through my first name and family's religion I am Creole, although my last name and appearance make me difficult to easily place within the Mauritian *communauté* system. I also speak three of the main languages spoken in Mauritius, namely English, French, and Mauritian kreol. I therefore share some similarities with the respondents of this study, which had both advantages and disadvantages. Difficulties I had with recruiting respondents for my research may have to do with my positionality as a Mauritian perceived as being from a different community, and therefore someone who could not be fully trusted. My lack of success in recruiting more Mauritian Muslim interviewees, for instance, may have to do with a lack of trust towards me because of my identity and ethno-religious belonging in Mauritius as a Creole woman. Haitian scholar Baptiste (2010) faced a similar obstacle during her fieldwork in Mauritius because she was similar in appearance to Mauritian Creole women, while Salverda (2015) managed to leverage his outsider status as a Dutch scholar to gain privileged access to the Franco-Mauritian *communauté*. Outsider or insider status does have an impact in anthropological fieldwork (Ergun & Erdemir, 2010; Narayan, 1993; Pustulka et al., 2019; Tsuda, 2015). In this case, my insider status as a fellow Mauritian immigrant helped me to build rapport with interviewees, especially since I was able to communicate in Mauritian kreol and

share memories of Mauritius with them. On the other hand, some interviewees were curious about my religion and my relatives. Since particular families or surnames are associated with particular family groups, this was done to classify me in a particular ethnoreligious community based on Mauritian societal divisions. Once they had ascertained my identity as a Creole woman, some interviewees visibly relaxed and were more willing to talk about divisions within the Mauritian diaspora. These tended to be interviewees who shared a similarity of religion and ethnic background with me, although there were some exceptions. Others became more reserved and did not want to talk about divisions at all. This could partly be because talking about Mauritian communalism and issues of ethnicity and religion is taboo in Mauritius, and compounded by the fact that I was perceived as someone from a different group.

This research received institutional review board approval through Arizona State University, study number STUDY00009788. It adhered to all research ethics requirements and guidelines surrounding research with human subjects. To further protect the identity of study participants, different pseudonyms were used in all chapters of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 2

“DEEP INSIDE ME, I AM STILL MAURITIAN”: IDENTITY AND BELONGING AMONG FIRST-GENERATION MAURITIAN IMMIGRANTS TO TORONTO.

It is still a cold winter morning on March 17, 2019 in Toronto, Canada. Snow is on the ground, a vast difference to the tropical climate of Mauritius, a small island in the Indian Ocean. Yet we are here to celebrate the 51st Mauritian Independence Day at the Toronto City Hall, commemorating Mauritius’ break from the British empire on March 12 1968. Ice skaters are enjoying the sunshine in front of city hall, as my key informant Jacques, his wife and I make our way from the parking garage toward the venue. Jacques excitedly points to the Canadian flag flying near the ice skating rink, and tells me to go with him to get a picture. His wife walks onto the rink, dodging curious skaters, to get a picture of Jacques and me. His grin is as bright as the sun beating down on the snowy plaza, and he beams with pride at the flag of his country of adoption. Later, he will hold the Mauritian flag aloft as the Mauritian ambassador to the U.S. delivers a speech to the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto, and he will sing the Mauritian national anthem with tears in his eyes.

Jacques is just one of around 3000 Mauritian immigrants in Toronto, Canada. Despite their small numbers, Mauritians in Toronto are making efforts to become culturally visible in the city and maintain their distinct cultural identity. In fact, 2019 marked the first time that the mayor of Toronto proclaimed March 12 as Mauritius Cultural Day, with the goal of “[celebrating] the rich culture and heritage of the Mauritian people and [acknowledging] their accomplishments and contributions to the city of Toronto” (City of Toronto n.d). The mayoral proclamation talks of Mauritian

culture and heritage as homogenous, yet Mauritian culture is far from it. Due to its unique history, there is no distinct Mauritian culture, but rather multiple cultural identities. In mainland Mauritius, national identity does not exist per se, but is segmented along ethnic and religious lines, creating distinct groups or *communautés* (ethnoreligious groups that affect multiple aspects of Mauritian social life). In this paper, I examine how the experience of migration affects the way Mauritians in Toronto conceptualize of their self-identity, contrasting it with how Mauritian identity is created “at home.” By experiencing Canadian-style multiculturalism, Mauritians in Toronto tend to conceptualize a unified Mauritian community (in opposition to mainstream Canadians) while also becoming critical of the system of *communautés* in Mauritius. They feel dual allegiance to both Canada and Mauritius, aided by the fact that multiculturalism is encouraged in Canada. However, I argue that the experience of migration also cements differences along ethnic and religious lines of the Mauritians of Toronto, even as they simultaneously become more critical of the system back home. Migration thus both creates a pan-ethnic Mauritian community and encourages the continuation of *communautés* in their new country.

Diaspora, Identity, and Migration

The Mauritian community in Toronto is part of the Mauritian diaspora. There is debate within the literature as to what exactly constitutes a diaspora, with opinions ranging from a strict list of criteria that need to be met, to simply any migrant group that retains transnational ties to their homeland. Safran (cited in Clifford, 1994) provides a list of 10 criteria for an expatriate minority community to be a diaspora, including an orientation to the homeland and marginalization from the host society. Cohen (1997) and

Brubaker (2005) propose different criteria, but both authors include a boundary between the diasporic society and the host society as a defining feature of diasporas. However, simply checking off a list of criteria in order to decide whether a community is a diaspora or not is not analytically useful. In this paper, I define a diaspora as an immigrant community which has migrated to two or more countries and which retains an orientation to the homeland. Additionally, these communities maintain a level of cultural distinctiveness from the host society. However, maintaining a distinct cultural identity and a boundary from the host society does not mean that a diasporic group is marginalized. It is possible for them to be economically successfully and to be incorporated into the civic life of their host community while retaining an orientation to the homeland (Cohen, 1997). Mauritians in Toronto are thus part of the Mauritian diaspora, and I will be referring to them as such throughout this paper.

There has been debate in the field about the exact definition of the concept of identity as well, as it is a fluid and changeable concept that can be hard to define (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In fact, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue for not using the term at all, because it is too wide and covers too much ground. They found that it could refer to five different aspects: (1) a basis for political action; (2) a specifically collective phenomenon; (3) a core aspect of “selfhood” or a fundamental condition of social being, whether individual or collective; (4) a product of political or social action; (5) to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary “self.” However, separating “identity” in these multiple mutually exclusive categories does not allow for “identity” to refer to two or more of these aspects simultaneously. Therefore, throughout this paper, I will continue to use the term “identity,” in order to remain in

conversation with other scholars who use the term, to acknowledge the multiple roles identity plays in my respondents' lives, and to use the term in the same manner as my interviewees. Identities take different forms based on an individual's affiliation with different social groups, including groups based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion. For instance, interviewees talk about their personal identities as they relate to their religious practice, cultural visibility when they partake in Mauritian celebrations, and feeling of being Canadian when they travel outside Canada.

In the case of immigrant communities, Vertovec (2001) argues that identity is particularly analytically important when talking about migration. This is because "identities are seen to be generated in, and constructed through, a kind of internal (self-attributed) and external (other-ascribed) dialectic conditioned within specific social worlds. This holds for both personal and collective identities, which should be understood as always closely entangled with each other" (Vertovec, 2001, p. 57). Looking specifically at multi-ethnic societies, Pupilampu and Tetey (2005, p. 28) define identity as "how several ascribed and socially determined factors interact to define people's sense of self and their treatment, or place, in the larger society. Two significant factors in the definition of identity are ethnicity and citizenship." Identity is thus dependent contextually on those factors that are given importance in society. This is illustrated in Mary Waters' (1999) seminal work *Black Identities*. Waters looks at how West Indian first-generation immigrants define themselves in terms of race and identity, and how the second generation, who is born in the United States and does not have the same cultural frames of reference as the first generation, does not identify in the same way as their first-generation parents. In the case of first generation immigrants, the U.S. racial hierarchy,

along with its stereotypes, is a change from their home countries where blacks are not a minority. As these immigrants perceive the negative stereotypes attached to African Americans (external contextual factors), they seek to distance themselves from black Americans by reaffirming their West Indian ethnic identity (internal self attribution). This is made easier because of their accented speech and ways of dressing that is different from the native-born U.S. black population. The second generation, however, is more nuanced in how it chooses to identify itself. Some members of the second generation embrace their ethnic identity as West Indians and still seek to distance themselves from black Americans, while others fully embrace being black American, refusing to see their identity as a separate ethnic group. This paper focuses on first-generation Mauritian immigrant, but what the literature on second-generation immigrants shows is that identity is contextual upon immigrants' personal histories. Identity is not fixed, but changes based on different contexts.

The contextual nature of identity means that immigrants can choose which aspects of their identity to highlight to their advantage. In a study of the Peruvian diaspora in three cities in the United states, Paerregaard (2005) found that immigrants selectively promoted a pan-Hispanic identity or a Peruvian identity depending on the context they found themselves in. Especially politically, it was more advantageous for them to claim a pan-Hispanic identity. However, within the broad Hispanic identity, they were more likely to differentiate themselves from other Hispanic groups (usually Mexican) by emphasizing their indigenous traditions and customs. Mary Waters further makes the argument that identity is not just a conception of the self as belonging to one group, but is also determined by the views of society at large, or the majority group. For instance,

West Indians “discovered” that they were black upon arriving to the United States because of ascribed perceptions by mainstreamed society, and Waters states that “learning that they were black according to American racial schemes and learning how to fill out the various questions on race, ethnicity, and nationality were important parts of the immigrant adjustment experience” (Waters 1999: 54). Identity is thus based on the interplay of individual group belonging and ascribed perceptions following the logic of mainstream society.

It is important to note that the contextual nature of identity can also cause strife within immigrant communities. Waters (1999) highlights the generational strife within the West Indian community, as the second-generation sometimes chooses to identify as something different from their parents. In the case of the Peruvian diaspora in the United States (Paerregaard, 2005), the strife within the Peruvian community mirrors divisions seen in Peru. As Paerregaard summarizes, “the association of indigenous culture with national identity causes tensions between migrants from different social classes and ethnic groups over who is entitled to define and represent Andean culture, and what exactly the idea of a timeless Inca cultural tradition implies” (Paerregaard, 2005, p. 83). However, unlike the Peruvian immigrants, there is no indigenous culture in Mauritius that can be conflated with national identity. Rather, Mauritian immigrants have differing ideas about national identity which is based on their own ethnicity and religion, which is how national identity is conceptualized in Mauritius.

Identity in Mauritius

Lacking an indigenous population, Mauritius was first colonized by the Dutch in 1598, although they found it difficult to establish a permanent settlement due to weather

and famine, and abandoned the island in 1710 (Moree, 1998). The French took over in 1715, until the British conquered the island in 1814 during the Napoleonic Wars. Mauritius remained a British colony until independence in 1968 (Fokeer, 1922). The island was mainly developed throughout the French period, under Frenchmen such as Mahé de Labourdonnais and Pierre Poivre (Toussaint, 1973). Slaves were extensively used for this development, from working in various plantations to building the infrastructure, as well as performing domestic tasks for their French masters (Fokeer 1922). Slaves were originally brought in from Madagascar, but were later taken from Eastern Africa, especially Mozambique (Allen, 1999; Fokeer, 1922). When the British took over the island, they did not institute much change: life in Mauritius was allowed to go on much as it had under the French, including the importation of slaves until slavery was abolished within the British empire in 1833. The British, however, intensified the production of sugar, importing indentured laborers from India after slavery was abolished in order to work in the sugar-cane fields. This practice occurred until 1910.

Beyond this historical interconnection with the global economy, Mauritian national identity itself is rooted in the global, through the continued fostering of links to the “ancestral homeland” encouraged by the Mauritian government. Mauritian identity is based on divisions along both ethnic and religious lines. The concept of “race” is not used locally, unlike other places such as the United States, although a “white” category exists that encompasses Mauritians of European descent (Salverda 2015) - mostly French, but more recently white South Africans. There is no opposing “black” category. Beyond “white,” the other ethnic categories tend to correlate with countries of origin, for instance Sino-Mauritians for Mauritians of Chinese descent, Indo-Mauritians for Mauritians of

Indian descent, and Creoles for the segment of the population descended from slaves and mixed with Europeans. There used to be different categories to further differentiate Creoles based on the lightness of their skin, but these terms are not in use anymore (Allen 1999). Indo-Mauritians are further sub-divided according to religion, broadly Hinduism and Islam. These two groups are considered to be distinct communities and little intermarriage occurs across group boundaries (Nave, 2000; Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2013). Therefore, group belonging in Mauritius is predicated both on what country one comes from, as well as what religion one follows. Whites and Creoles are generally assumed to be Catholic, while Sino-Mauritians can be either Catholic or Buddhist. The result is a collection of *communautés* which integrate both ethnic origin and religion in order to create distinct groups. The *communautés*, distinct from the corresponding English word “community,” transcend binary categories of ethnicity or religion, and its structure has implications across all areas of life. As Mauritian scholar Nikhita Obeegadoo (2020) states:

It exists in forms both explicit - the reserved allotment of certain seats in Parliament - and implicit - the careful curation of suitability in terms of marriage partners. Based on context and perception, it changes garb from a necessity to preserve minority representation in a multicultural country, to an insidious evil standing as an obstacle on the path to veritable national unity.

Therefore, I will use the word *communauté* in this paper to refer to the different groups in Mauritius broadly based on ethnic and religious lines.

Methods

This paper is based on the analysis of my field notes from participant observation, 30 interviews with members of the Mauritian diaspora (conducted March 2019 – June

2020), and a textual analysis of the most active Facebook group for members of the Mauritian diaspora specific to Toronto, spanning March 2019 to June 2020.

I collected data using a mixture of virtual and in-person modalities. I first started building relationships with members of the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto over social media, particularly through Facebook groups geared towards Mauritian immigrants in Canada. These groups are public and anyone is allowed to join. I conducted participant observation in the context of the Mauritian flag raising ceremony at the Toronto City Hall in March 2019, and took the opportunity to meet my contacts in person, build rapport with them, as well as meet other members of the Mauritian community. I took note of how many people attended the event, what was the general message the organizers aimed to convey, how citizenship and transnational connections were articulated within the event, and whether there was visible cultural exchange between Mauritians and Canadians. My presence at the event also allowed me to recruit interviewees. I conducted 30 interviews remotely using video calling software. The COVID-19 pandemic precluded me from returning to the field in March 2020; however, by this point, I had enough contacts in the field to enable me to finish interviewing remotely.

I used semi-structured interview methods. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to a little over two hours. I conducted the interviews in English, French, and Mauritian Creole depending on the comfort level of my interviewees. I transcribed all interviews and translated them to English where needed. As part of the transcribing process, I assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees. For this paper, I focused on the analysis on interview questions dealing with personal identification, both in Canada and in Mauritius. Of the 30 people I interviewed, 13 identified as male and 17 as female.

They ranged in age from 26 to 63, with an average age of 43.4 years old. They were all first-generation legal immigrants, with a length of stay in Canada ranging between 5 and 30 years, with a 12-year average. 16 respondents had migrated to Canada for higher education, while the rest migrated to pursue career opportunities or support their spouse in doing so. 20 respondents had formal Canadian citizenship, and the others were in various stages in the process (waiting to be eligible or had started the paperwork). Respondents were not directly asked about their *communautés*, since I wanted to understand their self-identification without imposing a framework on their responses. Thus, I only know their religion or *communauté* if they brought it up while responding to questions about their identity.

I also identified a Facebook group to study. In this Facebook group, I conducted netnography, that is, online participant observation (Kozinets, 2015). Specifically, I observed the kinds of posts that members made to the group, the responses they received, and how members interacted around these postings. The data collected from this group were primarily textual data, with the main post and the associated comments constituting the unit of analysis.

Field notes, interview transcripts, and textual information from the Facebook group were all analyzed using the qualitative software MaxQDA. The codebook was a mix of deductive and inductive themes. The former were informed by the existing literature about immigrants and diaspora, where the latter emerged from the interviews and participant observation. These codes were hierarchically organized into code trees in order to identify broad themes as well as more detailed themes (Bernard et al., 2017). The textual data from the Facebook group were organized into categories based on the main

purpose of the post. Salient themes (from most to least mentioned) included requests for help for new immigrants, requests for help for relocating within Canada, announcements for Mauritian cultural events, and requests to help Mauritian family members still in Mauritius.

Creation of a unified community after migration to Canada

Conceptualizing a unified Mauritian identity

Despite the fragmentation in identity endemic to Mauritius, most Mauritians in Toronto conceptualize the diaspora as a unified community, at least superficially. This holds true especially for labor migrants, as opposed to those who came to Canada as students. Many respondents described feeling pride at being Mauritian, especially because Mauritians are very successful in Canada. Indeed, after an initial period of adjustment, the majority of Mauritians seem to find lucrative jobs in their chosen field (instead of simply entry level jobs or so-called unskilled labor). Sandeep, a 28 year-old Mauritian who moved to Toronto for higher education and who has now started his career, pointed out that “Muritians in general do well abroad overall. I’m proud of that. We are a bit above average in terms of hard working abilities, or motivation.” This concept of Mauritian pride is one that is echoed among other respondents, and unifies the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto.

An important contributor to this success is a Mauritian social network of solidarity that enable newly landed Mauritians to find their bearings and enter the job market. This network is largely informal and operates through word-of-mouth, although coordinated by Facebook groups. The presence of these networks, extended to any Mauritian immigrant who asks, provides newly-landed immigrants with broader

Mauritian connections that transcend identity differences and belonging in different *communautés*.

Three of my respondents took pride in being known throughout the Mauritian diaspora in Canada as reliable people for new Mauritian immigrants to contact. Having been through the hardships of immigration themselves, they felt qualified – and willing – to guide other Mauritians upon their arrival to Canada. Indeed, according to interviewees, the majority of Mauritians who immigrate to Canada experience culture shock. Broadly, this takes the form of difficulty adjusting to the harsh cold weather of Canada, as well as the much bigger scale of the country. This feeling of culture shock is in most cases mitigated by Mauritian networks of solidarity. Savita’s recollection of her first days as an immigrant is illustrative of the Mauritian experience of migration, especially those who migrate for work or to accompany their spouse. An immigrant in her 40s, Savita said that she and her husband migrated on the recommendation of one of her husband’s friends, who had been living in Canada already for some time:

His friend welcomed us here. We didn’t stay at his place, he had already looked for a basement for us. He brought us there. The landlords were also Mauritians. First day we were there, they really welcomed us. They made lunch for us. We were half dead from traveling. It’s very far. We only had our luggage, we didn’t have any food. We had cash, yes, but we didn’t know anything about the country yet.

This willingness to help others is visible in Facebook groups for the Mauritian diaspora as well. In my analysis of Facebook posts for one of the most active groups for the Mauritian diaspora, I found that 80% of the posts between March 2019 and June 2020 were concerned with securing help for other Mauritian immigrants, especially those who were new to the country. The kind of help offered is to secure lodging (55% of cases), job assistance (30% of cases), warm clothing for the winter (10%) and other things such as

finding Mauritian fellowship to ease culture shock. This feeling was echoed by Reshma, a self-described community organizer in her late 50s, who asserted that

if they are looking to rent an apartment or basement, so definitely if they're looking for lodging, we try to look because in our team we do have people from the real estate market who may help in that. We do have people in the finance industry, we have people in laws, in anything. Even if not in our team, we do have contacts, so definitely we just refer them to those people, or we just put an advert on our site "this is what we're looking," because we do have over 2500 people on our website.

On the surface, the existence of an ethnic Mauritian community based on a unified national immigrant identity with strong inner connections in Toronto is not surprising. Scholars of migration have long studied the presence and functions of ethnic enclaves. Portes and Shafer (2007) examine the multiple ways that ethnic enclaves have been described in the literature. Defined as "the spatial concentration of immigrants who organize a variety of enterprises to serve their own market as well as the general population," (Portes and Shafer 2007: 161) ethnic enclaves were found to be positive drivers of employment and entrepreneurship among immigrant communities. The authors argue that studies which have found the opposite have not been rigorous enough in their operationalization of the term. Also useful here is the concept of immigrant social networks. Studies have found that immigrant social networks are instrumental not only to decide where to migrate (Massey et al., 2003), but also to help ease the financial burden of resettlement and secure employment (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Menjívar, 2000; Rosales, 2014).

However, it is important to note two peculiarities of the Mauritian case. The first is that there is a feeling of national immigrant unity and "Mauritianness" without as many

references to the identity division of the *communautés* as one might see in Mauritius itself. The second is that this network of solidarity does not occur within a geographically bounded and segregated immigrant community, but rather in virtual space through websites and social media. Therefore, the Mauritian community is not an ethnic enclave geographically. Rather, the use of social media and other internet technologies enable Mauritian social networks to expand beyond individuals who have met in person, or are connected through a “friend of a friend,” and instead offers help to a broader group of Mauritians. Noteworthy as well is that these networks do not rely on a real-life connections: Mauritians already established in Canada tend to be willing to help Mauritians they do not know, solely because they come from the same country.

However, such experiences are different for Mauritians who migrate to pursue higher education. These immigrants tend to find support provided by the university and do not need to rely on existing Mauritian social networks. For instance, Elizabeth fondly reminisces about her university program and how she avoided culture shock and homesickness, despite being the only Mauritian on campus:

They paired you up with a Canadian or with an international student who has been in Canada for a long time, so that you have somebody to go to, who can become a friend and guide you, not only through the campus but also through adjusting to the Canadian culture. Knowing that I was the only Mauritian student, it could have been a lonely experience, but that program really helped me.

Mauritian immigrants who primarily came to Canada for higher education were also the ones more likely to be disconnected from the broader Mauritian community and thus identify less as Mauritian. They may still conceptualize of the community as unified when talking about it, but admit not being part of it for a variety reasons. These reasons

range from simply not making the effort to find other Mauritians to actively avoiding meeting Mauritians. While the latter end of the spectrum was relatively rare among my interviewees (5 people), the reasons cited for doing so revolved around the idea that Mauritians tend to ask too many favors of other Mauritians. As students, these immigrants wanted to have the student experience in Canada and did not want the responsibilities of helping other Mauritians:

To be honest, I didn't want to stick around other Mauritians, actually. Mostly because I had an impression that – and it is the case in some ways – that once they know you are Mauritian they'll just stick around with you, they'll ask you for everything and anything they need. (Dinesh, late 20s).

Language Use and Mauritian Identity

In Mauritian schools, French and English are both taught, but these languages are not used as the everyday language of communication for the majority of Mauritians. Rather, Mauritian kreol is spoken by 70% of the Mauritian population as a first language (Mooneeram, 2009). Kreol is now taught as an elective language in primary and secondary education (Pyndiah, 2016), although this is a recent development that has not affected the respondents in this study, who all finished their schooling before this happened. Knowledge and proficiency in these languages are important for Mauritians in Toronto both as a marker of Mauritian identity and to provide economic opportunities. The ability of Mauritians to speak both French and English is a valuable skill in Toronto. Even though Toronto is not part of the officially French-speaking province of Quebec, having a workforce capable of interacting with people and businesses in Quebec provides a valuable employment edge (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002). While unilingual French speakers earn less than unilingual English speakers, English-French bilinguals in Canada

were found to earn more than unilingual speakers (Pendakur and Pendakur, 2002; Shapiro and Stelcner, 1997). Virtually all of my respondents mentioned that their language ability was instrumental for them to secure a job, and is a major factor in how Mauritians can network to give jobs within their own community. Harold, who has been at the same company for 30 years, told me that he has facilitated the hiring of many Mauritians there: “I have many friends who ask me for help in hiring their daughter or son at [the company]. I always ask what their level of French is. If they don’t have it, I can’t hire them. Impossible. They absolutely need to be bilingual for multiple Canadian companies.” Other respondents mention that employment agencies have often told them to highlight their French ability on their resume, and reported increased success in employment after doing so.

The reliance of Mauritian immigrants on French and English bilingualism to be successful in Toronto merits further analysis. In Mauritius, French and English are indeed both taught in the public school system (Cyparsade et al., 2013), but are not languages that are tied to Mauritian national identity. As Eisenlohr (2006) notes, ancestral languages such as Hindi and Mandarin are key (see also: Mooneegadoo 2018) in the discourse of ancestral homelands as necessary precursors for Mauritian national identity. French is often seen as a language of privilege and prestige (Baggioni, 1992) while simultaneously being unattainable to certain segments of the Mauritian population (Mooneeram 2009). Indeed, Tirvassen (2011) and Cyparsade et al. (2013) argue that using French and English as languages of instruction in Mauritius create (or reinforce) disparities among students, since many do not understand enough English or French to understand other topics, such as mathematics or science, that are taught in those languages. French bilingualism, then,

does not necessarily come easily to all Mauritians, but is something that they have cultivated in order to get a competitive edge in Canada. In Mauritius, better educational outcomes are achieved with the use of kreol, the language spoken at home to some degree by virtually all Mauritians (Miles 2000). Kreol is, therefore, much more strongly tied to Mauritian national identity than the colonial languages French and English.

Therefore, despite its importance for Mauritian economic success in Toronto, French is not considered a language that ties someone to Mauritius. Respondents speak of French as a skill that enables them to be successful in their new country, but when it comes to defining what it means to be Mauritian, they use Mauritian kreol as a reference. The status of kreol as a “real” language, or one that is worthy of inclusion in school curricula, has for decades been a topic of contention in Mauritius. In the Canadian context, however, kreol becomes an identifier and signifier of Mauritian identity and belonging. Sanya, in her 50s, is currently applying for Canadian citizenship, but is clear that she is not completely Canadian because of her language ability: “I am still Mauritian. I am born Mauritian and I will stay Mauritian, yeah. I still speak my kreol with my family, I’m still the same.”

Retaining the ability to speak Mauritian kreol thus becomes tied to national identity and remaining true to oneself. On one end of the spectrum, some respondents who have Canadian-born children emphasized that their children spoke kreol and therefore were Mauritian.

“I still speak kreol and my kids, even though they were born here, they speak. They speak kreol.” (Milkis, 40s). On the other end of the spectrum, some respondents indicated feeling sadness when encountering a Mauritian who had “lost” the kreol, even passed

negative judgment on them: “One of the women that I know, she’s been here for like 30 years, a bit old. She’s started to lose the kreol. That makes me a little bit sad. Like OK, fine, you decide to stay here, you’re married to a Canadian, but when I hear her accent, *ugh*. That’s a little scary to be honest.” (Sunil, 20s). Sunil here mentions feeling “scared” of losing such an important tie to the Mauritian culture, as the ability to speak Mauritian kreol is a unifying factor in the Mauritian community.

The importance of kreol as an important signifier of Mauritian identity was further confirmed by participant observation at the March 17, 2019 flag raising celebration. Despite being open to Canadians at large – and indeed hosting a Canadian member of parliament and some dignitaries from Ghana as guests of honor – some of the speeches from the organizers to the assembled crowd were in kreol, reinforcing kreol as the language of Mauritians everywhere. This was also confirmed by my experiences interviewing respondents, whereby they became a lot more relaxed after we had spoken in kreol for a while. Throughout the interviews, about half of them would easily switch between kreol and English, but only 10 spoke any French at all, and those who came to Canada to pursue educational opportunities were not more (or less) likely to speak French than others. This confirms that, while French is an important skill that helps Mauritian success in Toronto, it is not a language that is intricately tied to Mauritian identity. Additionally, because Toronto is not a francophone city, English is the language spoken by all my interviewees outside of work. Nonetheless, the ability to speak and retain kreol is what unifies the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto, and is also a test to gauge someone’s degree of “belonging” to the group. Goodchild (2013) found a similar pattern among Mauritians in the UK, where Mauritian Creole use was a marker of Mauritian

identification: “many participants claimed that they used [kreol] as a marker of group identification; that is, they could identify other Mauritians in public through their use of [kreol]” (Goodchild, 2013, p. 123). Thus, kreol helps maintain their tie to the homeland, their national identity as Mauritians, and the conception of a unified Mauritian community. Other “ancestral” languages such as Hindi or Mandarin, which are a prominent part of identity in the *communautés* back in Mauritius, do not appear to play a role for Mauritian immigrants in Toronto.

Maintaining identity differences among groups

The widespread use of Mauritian networks of solidarity, the pan-Mauritius use of the kreol language, and pride in Mauritian success in Canada all contribute to the emic conception of Mauritians as a unified national identity as part of a homogenous community. There are however still identity differences along ethnic and religious lines, that is, among the different *communautés*. These differences are visible both when attending events in the Mauritian community, as well as in interviews. Unsurprisingly, Mauritians exhibit some reticence about speaking of these differences, especially because they go counter to the prevailing idea that Mauritius is a truly integrated multicultural society. This is a taboo subject even in Mauritius itself, where those who speak about the different *communautés* are regularly accused of creating divisions within society (L’Express.mu, 2020; Sivaramen, 2020).

It is useful here to bring in and expound upon the concept of *communalism*, which is in regular use in Mauritian public discourse. While each Mauritian belongs to a *communauté*, communalism is the system through which the *communautés* remain in tension against each other. Van der Veer (2015, p. abstract) characterizes communalism

as “the articulation of religious communities into mutually antagonistic, social, political, and economic groups. It emerges within the context of the colonial modernization of Indian society, in which the Indian population was classified, counted, and measured in terms of community.” Communalism is not limited to India, but seems to be more widespread in Asiatic countries, which use it as a counter to (and purport that it is better than) Western-style democracy (Rosefelde, 2013).

In Mauritius, communalism is part and parcel of public discourse. Ramtohl (2015) explains that communalism inheres in the way that the political structure of the island is maintained, additionally perpetuating gender inequalities by mixing traditionally male-dominated religious institutions and politics. Likewise, Claveyrolas (2012) identifies communalism as the reason state projects of unification end up failing. In this case, through the analysis of two UNESCO world heritage sites located in Mauritius, Claveyrolas shows how the logic of communalism politicizes these heritage sites and cast historical memory in terms of ethno-religious difference. Specifically, both UNESCO sites are understood due to their importance for specific *communautés* and not for Mauritius as a whole. Communalism, then, is how the *communautés* remain divided and at odds with each other, with each group refusing to mix.

Some Mauritians do not mince their words when it comes to talking about ongoing communalism within the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto. It is an example of how personal identities within the context of Mauritius are still important after migration to Canada. For instance, Davesh told me that “Mauritians are more fanatical [about their own *communautés*] here than they are in Mauritius. That is the real, on the field feeling.” By “on the field,” Davesh is referring to his personal experience as a community

organizer, working alongside other Mauritians to create events for the Mauritian diaspora. Other interviewees heavily relied on my status as an insider to hint about such divisions without having to outright say negative things about other Mauritians, owing to the taboo nature of communalism. This usually took the form of being told “you know how Mauritians are” with a knowing nod. Indeed, growing up in Mauritius means being immersed in a complicated network of keeping track of one’s own positionality in relation to others, all while outwardly celebrating cultural differences between the communautés (Obeegadoo 2020). The tension between admitting that there is indeed continuing separation within the Mauritian community and maintaining the façade of Mauritius as a multicultural rainbow nation is exemplified in the following exchange from an interview with Geeta, a 36 year old residing in Canada for 5 years.

I think Mauritian people, they are a little bit... good people, I’m not saying they are bad people, but kind of very... not reserved, kind of a little bit snobbish. Like they will say “oh, I’m not talking to *you*.” Or stuff like that. Actually, when we came at first, we used to go to the Divali night or end of year party almost every year. But then we’ve been seeing kind of discrimination there. I’m not saying that in a bad way, but it’s kind of obvious. Nothing to do with the country or the city, it’s just the – I think it’s the Mauritian culture. But not everybody is like that, but I think it’s really due to the Mauritian culture. Sorry to say.

Geeta simultaneously does not want to paint Mauritians as “bad people” who discriminate against each other, but acknowledges that there is obvious discrimination. In this case, the discrimination is against her based on her religion, as she was made to feel unwelcome at a religious ceremony. She and her family are Mauritian Muslims, and were therefore not welcome to a primarily Hindu celebration like Divali. Her emphasis on “you” is loaded, and is meant to indicate “people like you” or “people in your

communauté.” Her reference to Mauritian culture points to how deeply engrained divisions on ethnic and religious lines are in the home country.

Geeta’s example is unusual, as it seems that Mauritian Muslims tend to keep to themselves more than other groups, although segregation happens to some extent to all the *communautés*. My respondents who touched upon this issue were themselves not Muslim, but had Muslim friends whom they tried to convince to reach out to the broader Mauritian diaspora when hosting events. I did not manage to interview a large proportion of Muslims during the course of my fieldwork, and those interviewed denied segregating from the rest of the Mauritian immigrant community. However, it is important to note that these were immigrants who had pursued higher education in Canada, tended to be younger, and had not migrated with their family. These immigrants also mentioned relying on support from the university at least in equal measure as on support from the broader Mauritian community in Toronto.

In fact, there is a generational difference in the degree of connection to the broader Mauritian community and the challenges of attendant communalism that goes with it due to *communauté* identities in Mauritius. The younger respondents (under 40) had all come to Canada to pursue higher education; they were, as a group, less connected to other Mauritians and more likely to form strong friendships or romantic relationships with Canadians or other immigrants. Being more integrated in mainstream Canadian society, they were less likely to engage in communalist practices among other Mauritians. On the other hand, older respondents had migrated to Canada to pursue job opportunities or support their spouses in such. They generally were already married at the time of migration, and migrated with their nuclear family. This older generation tended to both

be more involved in Mauritian cultural activities in Toronto, as well as highlight the cleavages they still saw among members of different *communautés*.

Overall, the experience of migration does not remove the divisions based on ethno-religious lines (i.e. *communautés*) deeply-engrained by Mauritian communalism. Even though this is not as pronounced in younger immigrants who moved to Canada as young adults to pursue higher education, existing differences between the *communautés* are perpetrated by the older generations, even those who migrated as young adults to continue their education in Canada. This is despite presenting a unified front to outsiders and conceptualizing of a “Mauritian community” as a whole.

What it means to be Canadian

Along with identifying with the Mauritian community as a whole, all of my interviewees reported feeling some level of “being Canadian.” This was separate from the practical advantages of having Canadian citizenship, which many simply equated to greater freedom of travel instead of as a marker of identity. For instance, Robert noted that “compared to traveling with a Mauritian passport, and a Canadian passport to certain destinations, you would not require entry visas and all.” Likewise, Jacques stated that he applied for Canadian citizenship as soon as he could because he “. . . wanted to travel. With a Mauritian passport, going to the United States or elsewhere would always be a hassle. I still have my Mauritian passport that I can always renew one day if I want. But as years go by, the Canadian passport takes me everywhere so I haven’t renewed my Mauritian passport.”

Rather than using formal citizenship as a way of identifying as Canadian, Mauritians identify with the open-mindedness and multiculturalism generally prevalent in

Canadian society. Multiculturalism is one of the defining features of Canadian immigration and cultural integration. For the purposes of this paper, I use multiculturalism as the prevailing public attitude that views the acceptance and integration of multiple cultures within Canadian society as an integral part of what it means to be Canadian. Multiculturalism, in this sense, recognizes and allows the maintenance of ethnic and cultural diversity while still allowing individuals to be fully part of Canadian civic life. In the literature, the concept of “multiculturalism” is nebulous because it can refer to a myriad of different things. For instance, multiculturalism can refer to (1) an ideology, (2) the condition of ethnic diversity, (3) a government policy, (4) practices that reflect vague notions of diversity, (5) social practices, or (6) a character attribute (Fleras & Elliot, 2002; Ryan, 2010).

The effect of multiculturalism policy (passed into law in 1971) on public opinion is far-reaching. Biles coined the term “Canadian Inclusion Reflex” (Biles, 2014, p. 13) to describe the popular support of Canadians for multiculturalism. According to him, the policy has led to a national desire to (1) create a framework for an inclusive national identity, (2) ensure full participation in social, cultural, and civic facets of life, and (3) commit to reduce systemic barriers and discrimination. The diffuse nature of the Canadian Inclusion Reflex as a form of social support instead of actual policy actions led to multiculturalism becoming a *de facto* part of national identity in Canada. This is illustrated by Amarasingam et al.’s (2016) analysis of Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants to Canada. The authors show that while Tamil immigrants feel more welcome in Canada due to the notion of Canada as a “nation of immigrants,” they are still critical of official multiculturalism. They etically also see a difference between the official government

policy and the popular support for the ideology behind the policy. The authors do not see this dichotomy as paradoxical, as they state that "[b]ecause multiculturalism, however flawed, is taken as a given for most if not all of our respondents, it serves as a kind of invisible glue that also produces a dimension of Canadian national identity. While multiculturalism means many things to many people, and is flawed and criticized by many, it provides a big tent for social cohesion" (Amarasingam et al. 2016: 137).

Members of the Mauritian diaspora view the "Canadian Inclusion Reflex" in opposition to the more conservative Mauritian society back home. This is most visible when they return to Mauritius to visit relatives, and find themselves struggling with being back home. The experience was shared by all 30 interviewees, who had returned to Mauritius at least once since they migrated and found it difficult to reconnect with compatriots who never left Mauritius. Studies of returnees show that they experience difficulty fitting in their home country. This is often due to the new habits, customs, and cultural orientation they have adopted in the host country. For instance, Ruth et al. (2019) found that DACA recipients who returned to Mexico for a visit felt ambivalence at being "home." Their accents, demeanor, and consumer habits marked them as different from Mexicans who had not left Mexico. Likewise, Stefansson's (2004) study of returnees in Sarajevo following the end of the war showed that they "painfully discover that in their period of absence the homeland communities and their own identities have undergone transformation, and these ruptures and changes have serious implications for their ability to reclaim a sense of home upon homecoming" (Stefansson 2004: 60). Huseby-Darvas (2004) attributes such difficulties to misunderstandings between returnees and those who never left. In a study of Hungarian returnees, she found that "instead of the warm

homecoming imagined by the émigrés, they often descended into an abyss of mutual misunderstanding with their Hungarian counterparts” (Huseby-Darvas 2004: 80).

However, this is not always the case. Sussman (2011) found that Hong Kongese returnees do not experience the same negative feelings upon return as other returnees to North America, Europe, or South America. Sussman finds that this is partly because Hong Kongese returnees do not try to resume the exact lifestyle they had before leaving, but rather settle in different communities, usually of other returnees, and are able to reconcile their new customs with their old homes. Nonetheless, the majority of the literature on returnees point to at least some degree of difficulty. The negative experiences of returnees are due to misunderstandings between returnees and those left behind, resulting from a period of absence where the home country changed politically, culturally and economically, whereas those who left retain a memory of the homeland as being frozen in place. The disjunctive feelings are not just felt by those who return permanently, but also by those who simply go to visit. Thus, this framework is useful to better contextualize similar feelings expressed by interviewees in this research project, as they share their experiences when visiting Mauritius while still living in Canada.

In the case of Mauritians in Canada, they become used to accepting and respecting individuals of different religions, racial groups, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Going back to Mauritius and witnessing first-hand the communalist divisions in society left many of my respondents with negative memories and a feeling of discomfort. Divesh for instance states that “[the Mauritian diaspora] cannot make the Mauritian people accept – no, that’s not our job. We encourage and motivate people to be more Mauritian, but less as Malbar, Lascar, whatever you want to call that. But it’s a

difficult game.” Here, again, my status as an insider is leveraged as Divesh assumes that I know what he means by “Malbar” and “Lascar.” These are somewhat pejorative terms that refer to the Hindu and Muslim *communautés* respectively. Divesh means that he wishes Mauritians in Mauritius would stop being divided by communalism and show more national unity, but he does feel powerless to change their views. As a temporary returnee, he acknowledges that he cannot force Mauritians to change, but still wants to encourage them to move beyond communalism in a way that he has seen in Canada. Due to the engrained nature of communalism in Mauritian society, this is not an easy feat. Geeta summarized it simply: “I wasn’t used to [communalism] anymore. After three weeks, I just wanted to go home to Canada.” Canada thus becomes synonymous with multiculturalism and inclusion in a way that Mauritius does not; continuing communalism in Mauritius creates pronounced differences in the social fabric, which immigrants do not view as acceptable anymore. They identify with Canadian multiculturalism and inclusiveness, and are proud to be part of it.

Despite feeling pride at their adopted country, and indeed adopting Canadian values themselves, most of the respondents I talked to still identified as, and deeply felt, Mauritian. As has been well-documented in the literature, self-identity changes contextually (Paerregaard, 2005; Tettey & Puplampu, 2005; Vertovec, 2001; Waters, 1999). Virtually all respondents reported feeling Mauritian at least some of the time. For some, it was a constant part of who they are, as with Jacque who stated: “Mauritian-Canadian, yea. Because I am proud of Canada, I am proud of the country we are, I am proud of many things that Canada represents. But I haven’t lost my Mauritian pride. I haven’t lost my connections to Mauritius.” Others had a more nuanced take on the matter.

For instance, Marie said that when she is at work (in a primarily white-Canadian private business), she feels more Mauritian; however, when she travels to the United States, she feels more Canadian. Likewise, Bashir stated: “If I go somewhere else like and they ask me, yeah, I’m Canadian. But deep inside me, I am still Mauritian.” It is clear that the ability to maintain and contextually switch between identities is a central part of being Canadian for the respondents, based on a foundation of tolerance and open-mindedness that they feel is lacking in Mauritius.

Conclusion

Muritians identify a unified group in Toronto, both in the way they speak about themselves and the way they work as a group to remain culturally distinct – and become culturally visible – in their city of adoption. Mauritius’ history as a former French colony, and the resultant knowledge of the French language that persists in the country to this day, is an important advantage that Mauritians leverage in the Canadian job market, even if it is not part and parcel of the Mauritian identity. However, the experience of migration does not lead to a more unified Mauritian community in actuality, as Mauritians tend to keep within their own *communautés*. This is despite the fact that Canada’s overall more liberal values, including those of supporting minorities and pushing for inclusion, lead to Mauritians being more critical of Mauritian societal values and praxis back home. Their self-identity is still closely tied to their *communautés*, especially for older immigrants who spent much of their formative years in Mauritius and migrated with their family. However, this is still true for older immigrants who came to Canada for higher education. This study illustrates the fluid nature of identity, and further demonstrates the disjunctures between emic conceptualizations of community and how community is

enacted in practice: Mauritians in Toronto simultaneously identify as “Mauritian” and part of a unified community, while also reifying differences between the *communautés*. Potential avenues of future research include a focus on the second generation, to investigate to what degree the Mauritian system of *communautés* still persists among Canadian-born members of the Mauritian diaspora, especially as pertains to Mauritian Muslims who were not well represented in this study.

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CHAPTER 3
TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE MAURITIAN
DIASPORA

Sebastien's wife laughed heartily when I asked him whether he was involved in politics. Even though I was not interviewing her, she sometimes chimed in to supplement his answers. This time, she told me "I don't know how to make him stop." Sebastien elaborated by saying he had been highly active in Canadian politics for close to a decade, but he had not tried to keep track of Mauritian politics with nearly as much interest. This was in contrast to my interview with Theresa the week prior, where she had passionately told me about her plan to use her experience as a high-level human relations manager to help make the Mauritian government more efficient. She mentioned that, in her view, "the Mauritian government is so inefficient, it's like a joke. They have to be very efficient here [in Canada], and my company trained me, so maybe I can help." These immigrants represent two ends of the spectrum of the Mauritian diaspora's engagement in politics and governance in Mauritius.

As immigration continues to increase globally, research amongst immigrants show that they do not completely cut ties with their former homes (Basch et al., 1994; Schiller & Fouron, 1998; Vertovec, 2001). To varying degrees, immigrants retain a multiplicity of ties across national borders, which range from maintaining family relationships to supporting specific political parties and ideologies. The nature of these transnational processes can change from individual to individual and fluctuate over time, but taken together they create a transnational space where immigrants who are well established in the receiving country continue to influence the sending country.

Additionally, immigrants engaging with the receiving country may simultaneously increase or decrease their engagement with the sending country. Transnational politics, and the ways it is shaped by the simultaneous engagement of migrants in the sending and receiving countries, is a particularly fruitful area of inquiry as it shows the ways immigrants can influence and change their home country.

In this paper, I use interviews supplemented with participant observation to explore the ways that the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto attempt to engage in transnational politics – that is, how they attempt to engage with Mauritius politically and civically while residing in Canada and simultaneously involved in Canadian politics and civic engagement. I show that, in general, the Mauritian diaspora is frustrated by the Mauritian government’s perceived failures, which include inefficiency, cronyism, and corruption. This cynical view of the Mauritian government is contrasted with an extremely positive view of Canadian governance, leading to a disengagement from the Mauritian government for the majority of people interviewed. This is compounded by the lack of engagement from the Mauritian government towards its diaspora. Additionally, I show that individual immigrants’ level of engagement in transnational politics vary on the context of migration. Specifically, immigrants who migrated after starting their careers and building social capital within the Mauritian government were more likely to engage in transnational politics than those who migrated as students in early adulthood.

Background: Mauritian immigration to Canada

Mauritius is a small island in the Indian Ocean, located approximately 500 miles east of Madagascar. Mauritius had no indigenous population and was peopled entirely through waves of colonization, and its current inhabitants are the descendants of French

and British colonists, African slaves, Indian indentured laborers and Chinese traders. It currently has a population of roughly 1.3 million (Mauritius Census 2011). There is also a sizable Mauritian diaspora outside of Mauritius. The Mauritian government has not kept track of emigration (IOM 2013), but there are an estimated 250,000 Mauritians living in the diaspora (Jahangeer-Chojoo 2018). While there is limited research on Mauritian migration, available data shows that Mauritians mostly migrate to Australia, England, France and Canada (Dinan, 1985; IOM, 2013). This distribution reflects former colonial countries, as well as which countries had more open immigration policies in the 1960s. The 1960s and early 1970s are an important time in Mauritian migration, as Mauritius became an independent country in 1968. This led some segments of the population to seek their fortune elsewhere, as it was unclear whether independent Mauritius would be able to provide enough jobs as well as guarantee freedom of religion for everyone (Dinan, 1985; Duyker, 1988; Mannick, 1987). The fear of the lack of jobs stems from the lack of natural resources coupled with the loss of colonial capital and the expanding population in a small geographic area (Duyker 1988). Additionally, there were fears that the Hindu majority of the island would impose their religion on the rest of the population (Eisenlohr, 2006), although research from Harmon and Karghoo (2015) argues that it was primarily the lack of employment opportunities, rather than fears of a Hindu majority, that drove outmigration in the 1960s. The locations of the receiving countries of Mauritian immigrants around the world illustrates that mere geographic proximity does not lead to emigration from Mauritius, but rather that more complex factors influence where migrants decide to go, such as historical/colonial ties, family ties, and economic

opportunities. These factors and the continued movement of Mauritians to the same receiving countries led to the formation of the Mauritian diaspora.

Diasporas and Transnational Politics

The Mauritian community in Toronto is part of the Mauritian diaspora. There are many conceptions of what constitutes a diaspora, with multiple authors constructing elaborate criteria to define and classify them (see, for instance: Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Brubaker 2005). Most definitions refer to a diaspora as a migrant group that retains an orientation to the homeland and some level of marginalization from the host society. In this paper, I do not attempt to assess whether Mauritians in Toronto meet various criteria, and use the definition of a diaspora as an immigrant community which has migrated to two or more countries and which retains an orientation to the homeland. Additionally, it is possible for diasporas to maintain a distinct cultural identity and a boundary from the host society without becoming marginalized. That is, it is possible for them to be economically and socially successful in their host community while retaining an orientation to the homeland, including sustained transnational connections (Cohen, 1997).

“Transnationalism” refers to the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Schiller and Blanc, 1994, p. 7). Geographically dispersed diasporic communities continue to maintain ties to the homeland through transnational practices such as sending remittances, using various technologies to maintain social relationships, and pushing for political change in the home country while residing abroad. Given that most immigrants do not simply cut off all their ties to their home country once they have migrated (Glick

Schiller et al., 1995; Faist, 2000), transnational theory has better explanatory power than earlier concepts of assimilation and ethnic pluralism to understand the ways that immigrants maintain ties to the home country.

Particular attention has been paid to transnational politics, that is, how immigrants engage in the politics of their homeland across borders (Itzigsohn, 2000; Lafleur, 2013). In this paper, I follow Guarnizo et al.'s (2003) definition of "broad" transnational politics, which is not limited to engagement in party politics, but also includes civic engagement. Much of the literature focuses on transnational politics among immigrants settled in the United States who engage in politics in the sending country located in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the case of Haiti, which has shown both high engagement from the diaspora and formal recognition from the state (Mooney, 2009; Schiller & Fouron, 1998). However, the process of transnational politics is not limited to these countries (Gamlen, 2006). The most visible form of transnational politics is through external voting rights, whereby immigrants are allowed to vote in their country of origin, provided they meet certain criteria (Lafleur, 2013). The existence of external voting rights is a recognition that immigrants still have an interest in the governance of the sending country, although some have argued that these voting rights should be terminated after a period of time to protect against outside influences that could threaten the sovereignty of the nation-state (López-Guerra, 2005). Transnational political practices have grown exponentially during this century, in part due to the increase in overall transnational migration and a realization by sending countries that their overseas diasporas can significantly contribute to their economic and political development. In India, for instance, the state has leveraged its overseas Indian citizens to return to India for visits, providing an influx of currency due

to their high spending (Grewal, 1999). Informally, other transnational political practices do exist, such as immigrants using their own personal connections to influence politics in the home country (Guarnizo et al., 2003). These are informal because they do not use established mechanisms from the state, but are up to the discretion of individual immigrants.

Transnational practices, such as the sending of material support back to the home country, can be enhanced by resources available to immigrants in the host country, and transnational politics are no exception. However, it can be challenging to conceptualize the transnational political space, as by its very nature it spans more than one nation-state. Tsuda (2012) provides a useful framework of transnational simultaneity by outlining four ways to conceive of the relationship between migrants' engagement with home and host countries. The first is the zero-sum model, which assumes that the more immigrants are engaged in one country, the less they will be engaged in the other. This is the basis of classic assimilation, whereby as immigrants assimilate into the host country, they renounce ties with the home country (Warner & Srole, 1945). The second is that engagement in the home country and engagement in the host country have no influence on each other. Immigrants may fluctuate in their engagement within the host country without it affecting their engagement on the home country, or vice-versa. The third is that the relationship is positively reinforcing, in a mutually constitutive cycle. As migrants engage with the host country, they may gain more resources to allow them to engage in the home country, or vice versa. The final model of engagement is that of a negatively reinforcing relationship, where a migrant's diminishing engagement in one country

mutually constitutes diminishing engagement in the other, although this is highly unlikely to happen under natural circumstances.

Mauritian politics are based on a Westminster-style parliamentary system, but the specificities of Mauritian multiculturalism and history create “a bewildering kaleidoscope of parties, one that is amazing in its complexity” (Srebrnik, 2002, p. 279). Mauritian politics is also characterized by a perceived high degree of corruption and ineffective mechanisms to prosecute and punish offenders, and a general lack of transparency in decision-making (Peerthum et al., 2020). Despite, this, Mauritius often ranks among the most democratic countries in Africa, and has a long history of free, fair, and generally peaceful elections (Eriksen, 1998; Srebrnik, 2002). However, strong party ideology is non-existent, and members of different parties regularly switch allegiances (termed *transfuges*, or turncoats), while political alliances break and re-form depending on personality clashes. In an analysis of language policy in Mauritius, Miles (2000, p. 220) states that “in the microcosmic maelstrom of Mauritian politics personality, ideology, and ethnicity erratically converge within a vibrant democratic system to fashion counterintuitive alliances and bring about unexpected electoral outcomes.” Despite some evidence that Mauritius has a robust system for multi-ethnic representation (Eriksen, 1998; Srebrnik, 2002), scholars have argued that the political system of Mauritius favors the Hindu ethnic majority (Laville, 2000; Prabhu, 2005) as well as men more generally (Ramtohl, 2015). There was no strong evidence of this in this study, however: the interviewees who had completely disconnected from Mauritius and were not planning on engaging transnationally with the Mauritian state at all were indeed not Hindus (being instead of the Chinese, Creole, and Muslim ethnicities). However, there were only 7

respondents who had completely disengaged from the state, and it is therefore difficult to draw clear conclusions.

Methods

The data from this analysis comes from field notes (field work conducted in March 2019) and semi-structured interviews with 30 Mauritian immigrants. The interviews were conducted following fieldwork and were concluded in June 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I could only carry out one period of participant observation for the Mauritian national day celebration in March. Interviews primarily took place using virtual video calling software such as Skype, Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp.

Prior to fieldwork in 2019, I approached members of the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto over social media, particularly through public Facebook groups geared towards Mauritian immigrants in Canada. The public nature of these groups meant that anyone is allowed to join, post, and participate in conversations. In March 2019, I attended the Mauritian flag raising ceremony took place at the Toronto City Hall, and was able to meet my contacts in person to continue building rapport. I also met other members of the Mauritian community and gave them a brief overview of my research project. Outside of building relationships to recruit interviewees, I used the fieldwork to estimate how many people attended the event and to listen to the speeches given by the organizers and their overarching message. I also took notes about how politics, civic engagement and transnational connections were articulated within the event.

The 30 Mauritian immigrants recruited for interviews were all first-generation, legal immigrants to Canada who has been living in Toronto for at least one year. 13 identified as male and 17 as female. They ranged in age from 26 to 63, with an average

age of 43.4 years old. They had a length of stay in Canada ranging between 5 and 30 years, with a 12-year average. These immigrants were interviewed using structured interview methods (Bernard et al., 2017). The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to a little over two hours and were conducted in English, French and Mauritian Kreol depending on the comfort level of my interviewees. Questions were generally asked in English, but interviewees sometimes answered in French or Mauritian Kreol. Following their lead, I provided clarifications to questions or follow-up questions in Kreol or French. I transcribed all interviews, assigned pseudonyms to interviewees, and translated the text to English where needed. For this paper, I focused on the analysis of interview questions dealing with experience with the formal Mauritian state, the extent to which respondents were engaging with politics and governance in Mauritius, and their reasons for doing so.

I used both inductive and deductive analysis on the field notes and interview transcripts, using the qualitative software MaxQDA. The inductive themes arose from the specifically-Mauritian experiences of my interviewees, while the deductive themes were informed by the literature on transnational politics, including whether transnational practices were enabled through formal channels from the state or whether they were carried out through the individual's agency. These codes were hierarchically organized into code trees to facilitate analysis of different degrees and patterns of engagement in transnational politics.

Negative view of the Mauritian government

While no respondent felt that the Mauritian government should help them while they resided in Canada, some showed attempted engagement in transnational politics.

However, none were fully successful in engaging politically with Mauritius. Underlying all cases is that all respondents did not have a high opinion of Mauritian governance and political system, a cynical view that curtailed involvement in transnational politics. The lack of formal transnational channels for political involvement in Mauritius, and the perceived superiority of the Canadian system of governance over that of Mauritius, were other factors that restricted the degree and success of the Mauritian diaspora's engagement in transnational politics. Such engagement followed three patterns. The first is that immigrants were trying to be active politically in Mauritius from abroad, although they were not successful. The second is that immigrants were not currently politically active in Mauritius but hoped to engage in transnational politics in the future. The third is that immigrants did not engage politically in Mauritius and had no plans to do so in the future. I will develop these three cases further.

Mauritians in Toronto are highly critical of Mauritian politicians and way of governing, especially after exposure to the Canadian way of governing. According to interviewees, the main difference between Mauritian and Canadian politics is that in Canada, all governmental procedures are codified, therefore creating more transparent and responsive government employees. Immigrants become familiar with Canadian bureaucracy immediately upon arrival, when they can avail themselves of resources available to newly-landed immigrants. This is in large part due to Canadian multiculturalism. The multiculturalism policy in Canada dates to 1971 and arose in the context of French Canadians demanding formal recognition from the Canadian state. The multiculturalism policy includes protections for immigrant cultures outside of French Canadians and First Nations, but recognizes the latter two as inherently Canadian and in

opposition to immigrants who are always seen as foreign. This also means that multicultural policies in Canada are divided mainly between policies for native-born Canadians and policies for immigrants. Immigrants are encouraged to retain their cultural identity while still being allowed to participate in Canadian civic life. The multiculturalism policy is applied indiscriminately to all immigrant groups, and includes such things as subsidized English (or French) language classes, support to find jobs and build skills for the Canadian job market, support to navigate immigration paperwork for continued legal presence, and some monetary support for the creation of cultural organizations. Mauritians take advantage of these services, specially for help finding jobs, and this becomes their first positive experience of the Canadian state. As Karan, an immigrant in his 40s, stated: “the way that Canada treats their immigrants, I believe that the system is giving the maximum good environment for people to live, grow and integrate in the society and take part in the economic development.” Karan is explicitly crediting the good treatment of newly-landed immigrants for their economic and social success in Canada.

Beyond services available to all immigrants, Mauritians in Toronto come to expect a particular level of professionalism from government officials they encounter in their day to day life. For instance, it is generally accepted that officials will respond to phone calls or emails in a timely fashion, without having to ask their superiors for permission for every single communication. This was Theresa’s experience, a high-level HR manager in local government who left Mauritius with her husband to pursue better job opportunities and who is now in her late 30s. As she now has an example of clear policies and transparent expectations from all employees as part of her job, she is

frustrated that the Mauritian government is characterized by inefficiencies, going so far as to call it a “joke.” Mauritian government employees are seen as unable to move requests along unless explicitly given instruction by their superiors. This is partly why being politically well-connected in Mauritius is important.

Another often-mentioned critique voiced by respondents is that, while Mauritian politicians do regularly travel internationally and see how things are done in more economically developed countries, they do not apply these changes to Mauritius. Mohamed, in his 30s, mentioned that “these political and government officials, when they travel they do not see these things? And why don’t they try – not to copy, but to put better systems in Mauritius for the Mauritian people?” Similar feelings were echoed by Sweetie, in her 30s as well, who was outraged by the way the government handled the construction of a light rail system in the island. As part of construction, a number of people were forcefully evicted from their homes and given little compensation or time to appeal in court (Defi Media, 2017). Sweetie stated that in Canada, there were mechanisms in place for the government to listen to the concerns of citizens:

Here, when they start doing something, I’m not sure how it works but when the government decides to do something, there is a town hall where people say stuff, what the people think. What the public thinks. But looks like in Mauritius, they don’t care. Like they just say ‘I’m doing Metro Express, I’m going to erase this city, I’m going to do it.’ This bothers me a little bit. It’s not done right. There is something not right.

Sweetie’s outrage is indicative of the perceived lack of democracy and transparency in decision-making by the Mauritian government, which does not hesitate to use some degree of coercion against their own people in order to achieve their own political ends. It is worth noting here that the entire light rail project in Mauritius has

been shadowed by accusations of corruption, both for the approval of the project and in the allocation of construction contracts.

Furthermore, the current state of Mauritian politics is not new. According to Sebastien, who has been settled in Canada for over 30 years, Mauritian politics have not changed since he migrated: “When I see the messages I receive [about Mauritian politics] or posts on Facebook, I think oh my God, it will never change. Who is a *transfuge* [turncoat], who got in alliance with whom...”. Sebastien’s choice not to engage with Mauritian politics, even though he is engaged in Canadian politics, is driven by his perceptions of the Mauritian government. These perceived failures are woven into three patterns of transnational political engagement visible among the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto, which are discussed further.

Services from governments

Only a minority of Mauritians in Toronto are actively engaging in transnational politics, as discussed further below. This may be due to the lack of initiative from the Mauritian state to engage its diaspora using formal channels. While Mauritians are able to retain dual nationality even if they become naturalized citizens of other countries, Mauritians settled abroad cannot vote in Mauritian elections, unless they travel back to Mauritius for the occasion. Given the high cost of air travel, this is not widely done. Over the course of 30 interviews, no respondent reported returning to Mauritius specifically to vote. Rather, they went back to Mauritius to spend more time with family and friends, as well as to enjoy local foods and natural resources.

The lack of services available to Mauritian immigrants from the Mauritian government is in contrast to the system in place by the Canadian government to welcome

new immigrants, which all interviewees knew about, even if they had not necessarily used these services themselves. Such services include language classes, workshops to review resumes and secure employment in Canada, and resources to help secure lodging upon first arrival. Kavi, now in his 50s, mentioned that the help he received from a government service that reviewed his resume was instrumental for his securing a job when he first arrived in Toronto: “from the feedback that I got from the consultant, I tried to get better on those weak fronts, and how to write the resume, the key points. She told me ‘you should put in the first line itself that you are bilingual.’ So those were some of the striking points that I had to put in my resume, and then the employment agency consultants guided me and I had the confidence to go and get the job I got.” Kavi was not familiar with the norms of resume writing and hiring in Canada, and relied on the government agency to help him enter the job market. He mentioned that he was disappointed that he had to start at a lower level compared to his career in Mauritius, but was grateful for the help that allowed him to secure employment, where he was subsequently able to get promoted.

Thus, even though Mauritian immigrants were not formal citizens of Canada, the Canadian state showed willingness to take responsibility for them. This does not change the fact that Mauritians still think of themselves as citizens of Mauritius, but rather changes how they relate to Mauritius in general: instead of the Mauritian government helping them, they now have the option of help from the Canadian government. This is an example of a zero-sum relationship in transnational simultaneity (Tsuda, 2012), where the increase in engagement with the Canadian government (through receiving services) leads to a decrease in engagement with the Mauritian government. That is, the services

they receive from the Canadian government remove the need to engage transnationally with the Mauritian government, since they do not need the Mauritian government to intercede on their behalf. Even if they wanted to engage with the Mauritian government, the formal channels to do so are highly limited.

In 2015, the government launched the Mauritian Diaspora Scheme, the first attempt to offer formal channels for transnational engagement from the diaspora. While some nation-states encourage both economic and political engagement from the diaspora (see for instance Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003), the Mauritian government seems to be interested only in economic engagement. The Scheme aims to “attract members of the Mauritian Diaspora back to Mauritius to participate in the economic development of the country” (Economic Development Board, n.d.). It does so by way of provisions for tax-exempt status on income for a number of years, as well as other financial incentives for the resettling of members of the diaspora in Mauritius. It does not provide formal channels for continued transnational engagement, but rather transnationally reaches out to the diaspora across borders. Additionally, the Scheme does not make provisions for political rights, but is rather solely concerned with the economy. The Mauritian Ambassador to the U.S. promoted the scheme to the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto during a speech at the March 2019 flag-raising ceremony. In this speech, he encouraged Mauritians in attendance to take advantage of the Scheme. He further stated that “everyone in Mauritius has family abroad” and expressed that the Mauritian government was highly interested in reaching out to its “hard working and highly successful worldwide diaspora.”

Yet, despite this recent and explicit mention, all but one of my respondents were not aware of the Scheme, nor did they think that the government was really concerned with reaching its diaspora abroad. Ingrid, in her 30s, was the only one out of 30 respondents who affirmed some knowledge of the Scheme, yet she was unimpressed with what it offered for the diaspora: “They are trying, but it is not working. There is nothing tangible, concrete, to encourage the Mauritian diaspora to come back home. Or even if not coming back home [permanently], to visit Mauritius more often.” Ingrid’s sentiment is due in part to the fact that the diaspora is already returning home to visit, usually spending money in the process. The lack of concern from the Mauritian government is felt throughout the broader diaspora, as well. A 2018 survey calculated that the Mauritian diaspora constitutes “upwards of 20%” of Mauritian adults of working age, a resource that has been continuously ignored by the state (Jahangeer-Chojoo, 2018, p. 61). Other countries have successfully leveraged their diasporas for economic gain, including India reaching out to its overseas citizens (Grewal, 1999).

The Scheme seems inadequate for the needs of the diaspora. Some respondents had ideas about the kind of formal transnational channels they would like to see from the Mauritian state. These included delegating some consular responsibilities (processing paperwork for immigrants) more broadly to members of the diaspora and preferential consideration when looking for expert consultants with skillsets not found within Mauritius. No respondent mentioned wanting the right to vote from outside Mauritius, potentially due to the overall negative opinion of the Mauritian government and its perceived high levels of corruption described in the section above.

Not everyone thought that the government should give special treatment to its citizens abroad, or that a Diaspora Scheme should exist at all. Sheena, for instance, mentioned that she would rather the government spend time taking care of Mauritians in Mauritius rather than expend resources on its citizens abroad. For her, and 6 other respondents who felt the same way, the responsibility of the government toward its citizens was still bound by geography: while she was still a citizen of Mauritius, her physical distance from the territory of the nation-state meant that she did not expect the government to care for her. This is in contrast to the concept of the deterritorialized nation-state proposed by Basch, Schiller, and Szanton (1994). This concept refers to how dispersed populations, including diasporas, contribute to the homeland through economic, political, social and cultural contributions from outside national borders. For the Mauritian diaspora, despite many transnational connections facilitated by the internet, national borders are still important and define the acceptable involvement of the Mauritian state. Perhaps if the Mauritian state created more intentional policies to connect with their citizens abroad there would be more political involvement, as research on diaspora engagement policies suggest (Gamlen, 2006).

Active engagement in transnational politics

Despite negative feelings about the Mauritian government, immigrants have not turned their back on Mauritian politics and governance completely. Indeed, 10 interviewees (a third of the total) saw the inadequacy of the Mauritian government as an incentive and even a personal responsibility to change things in their home country based on what they witnessed and experienced in Canada. They were not actively politically active prior to immigrating to Canada, but they do follow current events in Mauritius.

This is an example of a positively reinforcing relationship in transnational simultaneity (Tsuda, 2012), as an increase in engagement in Canada leads to an (attempted) increase in engagement in Mauritius. This kind of engagement is seen almost exclusively among interviewees who migrated to Canada in pursuit of better job opportunities, having spent a period of their adult lives in Mauritius. Typically, they understand the bureaucratic processes needed to reach people with the authority to change things, and they already have contacts in Mauritius to people in positions of power, and they have tried to leverage these contacts to their advantage. Unfortunately, despite already having some connections in Mauritius, they have not been able to exert influence or enact any change in Mauritius.

For instance, Sailesh, now in his 50s, has ideas on how to better leverage the Mauritian diaspora for the betterment of Mauritius. Through his work as a community organizer, he knows that many immigrants who have gained valuable expertise that Mauritius could leverage for economic development, if there was an opportunity for them to do so. Unfortunately, he is frustrated by his inability to enact change despite having contacts in high ranks of the government who could potentially help him: “When I was in Mauritius I knew some people, so for me it was easy to call someone and refer me to the right desk [...] there are many Mauritians who have the passion for sharing [their skills] without an expectation of some salary and wages. But the prime minister’s office, the decision making, these guys don’t understand when we talk like that.” By “the right desk,” Sailesh means the right person to talk to politicians who have the power to change things, such as starting the process of harnessing the expertise of the Mauritian diaspora.

However, the highest decision-making body – the prime minister’s office – did not see the value in his proposition, or was not interested in taking it further.

Reshma, in her 40s, was more outwardly frustrated that her efforts were not fruitful: “there’s no framework. There’s no legal system. There is no initiative to allow us to contribute back home.” Reshma is one of those immigrants identified by Sailesh who has acquired expertise that would be useful to Mauritius. While visiting her family in Mauritius, she started reaching out to her friends in the government to talk about ways she could contribute, specifically in terms of Reshma’s expertise is in social work. She had ideas to share with the Ministry of Health regarding initiatives to help the fast-growing drug addiction problem in Mauritius, but was not able to reach anyone who would listen to her. Both Sailesh and Reshma tried to enact political change in Mauritius, but their efforts were in vain as there was no will from the government of Mauritius to listen to their ideas. Not only are there no formal channels for the government to listen to its constituents abroad, even the informal channels of connections in high places did not bring about any changes. While the Mauritian government is generally known not to listen to the populace in general, it is rarer that it refuses to listen to those who are well-connected politically. Sailesh and Reshma are illustrative of other interviewees who felt well-positioned to change things in Mauritian governance, but were not successful.

It is important to note that these immigrants are not necessarily interested in changing the way that the Mauritian public sector works, with its reliance on personal connections and carefully cultivated networks. They are not revolutionaries seeking to instill a different form of government. Rather, they wish to use their local connections to better the life of Mauritians who are still on the island, leveraging their experience and

expertise to give back. These individuals typically have a large extended family still in Mauritius, and therefore feel personal motivation to improve conditions there. Their positive experiences living in Canada have given them the impetus and drive to change things in Mauritius. As successful immigrants in Canada, they want to leverage their success, stability, and resources in order to be part of Mauritian development.

Aspirational engagement in transnational politics

For interviewees who moved to Canada to further their education, and who had just started their career, the nature of Mauritian politics and governance was the main obstacle to active transnational political engagement. These respondents were the most numerous in this study, with 13 individuals fitting in this category. Similarly to Mauritians who are actively trying to engage with Mauritian politics transnationally, these immigrants have a positive view of Canadian governance that they contrast to Mauritius. However, this comparison leads to them feeling disillusioned about their ability to contribute to Mauritius despite their desire to do so. Their lack of personal connections lead to feeling powerless to exert any influence on the Mauritian government. Therefore, while they do have hopes of engaging in transnational politics eventually in the future, such aspirations remain nebulous and they currently have no concrete plans of doing so. While they are currently in a zero-sum pattern of transnational simultaneity (Tsuda, 2012), they would ideally like to enter into a positively reinforcing pattern, where their positive experience with Canada leads to an increase in engagement with Mauritius.

Dominic is an example. A man in his late 20s who recently started his career, he shared: “I do have this vision of returning to Mauritius one day and doing something

good for the country. It's what a lot of young professionals like myself want to do sometimes, but they are discouraged by the political system." Dominic feels that the Mauritian political system is particularly problematic in letting young people leverage their skills for the betterment of society, in a way that Canada is not. Dominic did not have the chance to start cultivating personal connections and social capital in order to hold political sway in Mauritius, which is an integral part of the political system, and why he feels so discouraged. The lack of formal avenues for the diaspora to engage politically in Mauritius, coupled with a lack of connections within the Mauritian government, leaves Dominic without a viable avenue to use his skills in Mauritius. While he, and others like him, have a desire to engage in transnational politics, his desire will remain aspirational until something changes in the formal political system that would enable diasporic Mauritians to contribute.

At the same time, these early-career immigrants are finding ways to fruitfully use their skills within Canadian society, and find their skills recognized civically. They indicate that they would wish to see the Mauritian governance system become more like that of Canada. This is again an example of transnational simultaneity, where a positive experience in Canada leads to a desire to engage more with Mauritius – although that desire is currently unachievable. Haroon, who left Mauritius at the age of 19, acknowledged that Canadian politics has its share of issues as well, except for corruption: "I'm pretty much convinced there's much less corruption over here, even though there might be some. But there's been much more public outrage, and that's something that I would like to see back home." Haroon here indicates that he wishes that there was less tacit acceptance of corruption in Mauritian government, with more public outrage and

pushback by the Mauritian people. However, when asked whether he had immediate plans to return to start enacting these changes in Mauritius, Haroon stated that he did not. He succinctly – and harshly – encapsulated the thoughts of younger Mauritians in Toronto who want to use their skills for the betterment of Mauritius but feel that they cannot:

The current political system and those in power are from the old generation and they've been there for 4-5 decades, them and their legacy. And my view is that the only way to reset the system, to give everybody else a fair chance, is – I hate to say it, but it's to let them die off. There's no way of joining them, because it's a dirty game at the end. You need to have the right family, you need to have money, you need to be involved in all sorts of things that you necessarily don't want to. So for us to start fresh, they need to be out. So you either spend a lot of your life, and time, money, energy, health, trying to fight against the system, or you just wait until they've cleared off and hope that the next generation coming in is more in line with our ideologies and our thoughts.

Haroon thus aspires to engage in transnational politics in Mauritius, but does not feel that he currently has an avenue to do so due to his perceptions of the current political system. Instead of fruitlessly trying to engage with a system that is not built with transnational engagement in mind, he daydreams of a time in the future where the “next generation” of politicians will be more open for the diaspora to contribute to Mauritius. This will be when he would be willing to engage in transnational politics.

Many other members of the younger generation feel this way. For these respondents, it would not be enough to contribute to the development and prosperity of Mauritius; wholesale change needs to happen, whereby the existing systems of cronyism and personal connections are abolished in order to create a system where anyone can leverage their skills for the betterment of Mauritius if they wish. They are willing to engage with Mauritian governance through civic engagement, but systemic issues with

the Mauritian government preclude them from doing so. They know that the only way to get anything done politically is through personal connections, and they lack these connections. Yet these immigrants are also not revolutionaries, in that they are not planning on being the ones to topple the existing political system and put another one in its place. Rather, they are hoping that Mauritians of their own generation who are still living in Mauritius will be the ones to create changes once they replace the older generation.

No engagement in transnational politics

Finally, there are those for whom the Mauritian government is not redeemable, and they did not have plans to engage in transnational politics or use their skill for the betterment of the country. They exemplify the end-stage of zero-sum simultaneous transnational engagement, as they are fully engaging with Canadian governance and have no intention to engage with Mauritius anymore. They do not see a need to reach out to the Mauritian government for services, or to try to change the government, as they were content to build their lives fully in Canada and forget about the Mauritian government entirely. Additionally, they all felt that their civic engagement with Canada was more meaningful than their civic engagement to Mauritius could ever be. While only 7 respondents indicated a complete disconnect from Mauritius, it is instructive to look at and understand their motives.

These respondents, for the most part, are also those who moved to Canada to pursue higher education. They had all migrated before being able to form personal connections with people in power and were in various stages of their careers. Jessica, in her late 20s, recently completed a master's certification and has now opened her own

business. She stated that “[her] career, family, children, everything is here... I can be successful here even without knowing any ministers [in Canada].” Jessica seemed somewhat bitter while saying this. When asked, she mentioned her frustration at not getting into particular state schools in Mauritius because her family was not well-connected, and that her parents had also struggled getting promotions at work because they “did not have the right last name.” Jessica sought to pursue higher education in Canada to leave such constraints behind. Now being successful in Canada, she had no intention of using her education and skills back in Mauritius.

While immigrants with connections in high places in Mauritius are eager to use these connections to try and better conditions in Mauritius (even if they fail), those who lack these connections may feel that they can have better opportunities for themselves and their families away from Mauritius – that is, they are engaging in Canada and disengaging from any transnational political connections to Mauritius. Further, they do not believe that the system will ever change, and they are not interested in trying to change it. They view Canada as a system based on meritocracy and are content to settle in Toronto without looking to improve Mauritius. Respondents in this category sometimes still had families in Mauritius, and said they still loved their country and looked forward to visiting, but they did not feel the drive to go back and change things. Christian, in his mid 40s, still has some family and acquaintances in Mauritius. He stated: “[Mauritian politics] doesn’t impact me, it doesn’t really impact me. I don’t care what they are doing. But because I have dual citizenship, I don’t want [the government] to do crap too, right?” Christian cares about the well-being of those he is connected to, so he does not want the government to get worse. However, he also shows a personal

disconnect from the government, citing the complete lack of impact Mauritius has on his life. This is despite retaining his Mauritian citizenship, which becomes simply a market of identity: he still identifies as being Mauritian, but is not connected transnationally politically to Mauritius.

Interestingly, all 7 respondents in this category were not Hindus. Respondents in the other two categories were not of one particular ethnicity, and were a mix of Hindu, Creole, Chinese and Muslim. As outlined previously, Hindus in Mauritius are a numerical majority and have a quasi-monopoly on state power and the public sector (Eisenlohr, 2006; Srebrnik, 2002). While some scholars have argued that proportional representation in Mauritius results in fair representation of all segments of the population (Eriksen, 1998), others have argued that non-Hindus in general, and Creoles in particular, were disadvantaged due to their lack of access to politics (Laville, 2000; Ramtohul, 2015). It is plausible that there is a link between being part of a disenfranchised group in Mauritius, and then being uninterested in changing things after migration to a country with more opportunities. However, with only 7 interviewees showing this complete disconnect from the Mauritian government, it is difficult to draw a strong link between ethnicity and a complete lack of engagement in transnational politics.

Conclusion

Immigrants engage in transnational politics using both formal channels afforded by the sending country, or informally through their own choices and interests. There are no real formal channels for the Mauritian diaspora. While the Mauritian Diaspora Scheme does exist, it is not well publicized by the government and is not very much used by the diaspora. Additionally, this does not provide for a way for Mauritians to engage in

transnational politics, but rather simply encourages Mauritians to spend money in Mauritius. In order to attempt to engage with Mauritian governance – and thus in transnational politics – immigrants need to already have personal connections within the Mauritian government.

There are three patterns of transnational politics for the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto: active, aspirational, and no engagement. They are all predicated on a widespread negative view of Mauritian governmentality, which entails a perceived high level of corruption, inefficiency, and cronyism, as well as a positive experience with Canadian governance. Immigrants' engagement with the Canadian state simultaneously impacts the way that they engage with the Mauritian state, usually in a zero-sum relationship. That is, members of the Mauritian diaspora tend to decrease their transnational engagement with Mauritius as they increased their engagement with the Canadian state. These individuals migrated to Canada as young adults to pursue higher education. They did not have time to build their personal networks, and thus feel completely unable to engage in transnational politics given the current political system. Those who aspire to transnational politics wish to engage with Mauritius one day, but want the system to change first so that they may have formal avenues to participate. They show no interest in being the ones to change the political system, but hope that younger generations of politicians will change the system for the better. Those who show no engagement have no interest in ever participating: they are choosing to focus on their lives in Canada without engaging with Mauritian politics at all.

Since personal connections are necessary for people to exert influence on decision making, Mauritian immigrants who are actively trying to engage in transnational politics

in Mauritius migrated to Canada after spending some of their adult years in Mauritius. They had time to build their own personal network and can leverage social connections that enable them to have influence in Mauritian governmentality. They have so far not been successful, but have not been discouraged from trying further. They exhibit a positively reinforcing pattern of simultaneous engagement, where their increased engagement with the Canadian state leads to an increased desire to engage with the Mauritian state – even if that desire has so far not yielded tangible results.

This paper contributes to the understanding of transnational politics by providing an ethnographic description of the reasons individuals have for engaging with the sending country. The political structure of Mauritius and the context of migration for individual immigrants both affect the degree of engagement from the Mauritian diaspora. This research demonstrates that, while transnational political engagement exists between Toronto and Mauritius, its strength varies based on generational differences and individual ties to Mauritius. Further research should focus on the effect of ethnicity on Mauritian individuals' likelihood of engaging in transnational politics, as well as whether the younger generation – those with an aspirations to someday engage in transnational politics – eventually manage to find a way, or end up completely disengaged from the formal Mauritian state.

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CHAPTER 4

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ON IMMIGRATION DECISIONS FOR THE MAURITIAN DIASPORA IN TORONTO

A few children noisily run around Toronto City Hall while waiting for the ceremony to begin. The stage is fittingly decorated with multiple Mauritian flags for the celebration of Mauritian Independence Day, but the festivities have not yet started. Adults are mingling, walking around the room to catch up with old friends or leaning over seats to chat with their neighbors in the row behind them. Krish, a Mauritian immigrant in his late 50s, introduces me to his friends Mike and Marie-Josée, who ask him if his children are in attendance. Krish explains that his two children, who were born and raised in Mauritius, were too busy finishing their semesters at university to come, and that he is proud of them for their hard work. He adds that they will be visiting their relatives in Mauritius over the summer, and that they are all looking forward to reconnecting as a family. As Mike, Marie-Josée and Krish continue their conversation, I notice Yanish, another Mauritian acquaintance, walk into City Hall. He is leading his non-Mauritian girlfriend by the hand to introduce her to some Mauritian friends. Later, Yanish, in his late 20s, will admit that he wants to be with his girlfriend long term, and he was anxious to share his culture with her. “If all goes well, I want our children to know where they came from and all of us to go visit Mauritius as a family,” he adds.

Krish and Yanish are of different generations, but both family and kinship ties to Mauritius are important to them. Krish is proud that his children are academically successful, given that he chose to migrate from Mauritius to provide them with academic opportunities they would not have access to had they stayed in Mauritius. He is

additionally proud that his children have retained a connection to Mauritius. On the other hand, Yanish, who migrated for higher education, does not yet have children, but hopes that his future family will have a strong connection to Mauritius. Both Krish and Yanish have transnational kinship ties that they actively manage, as do many members of the Mauritian diaspora. They have also developed new kinships ties based in Canada, which complicate any potential return to Mauritius.

In this paper, I investigate how family is the primary driver of transnational activity between Mauritius and its diaspora in Toronto. “Family” does not refer only to nuclear relationships (that is, parents and children), but also to extended family and other kin such as cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and in-laws. I show that family considerations inform the decision to migrate to Canada. However, it is only the nuclear family that migrates, while other kin remain in Mauritius. Since Mauritians do not typically engage in the chain migration of other kin, such kin relationships are maintained transnationally, mediated by remittances, gifts, and internet technologies over a long period of time. Mauritian immigrants maintain kin relationships in Mauritius while simultaneously building new family relationships in Canada, for instance by getting married or through the marriage of their adult children to non-Mauritians. This eventually leads to ambivalence as to whether they want to return “home,” since they would be leaving kin behind once again.

Diasporas and Transnational Families

The term diaspora has been used in myriad ways in the literature, more notably through the construction of specific criteria to define them (see, for instance: Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Brubaker, 2005). This paper does not attempt to show how many

criteria the Mauritian immigrant community checks off. Rather, I define a diaspora as an immigrant community which has migrated to two or more countries and which retains an orientation to the homeland. The immigrant groups retain some degree of cultural distinctiveness from the receiving country, including their original religions, languages, and holidays. This does not imply that the immigrant group is marginalized within the receiving country - it is possible for them to be economically successful and to be incorporated into the civic life of their host community while retaining an orientation to the homeland (Cohen, 1997). Mauritians in Toronto are thus part of the Mauritian diaspora, and I will be referring to them as such throughout this paper. The limited studies on Mauritian migration show that diasporic Mauritian groups have formed in Canada, England, France, and Australia (Dinan, 1985; Harmon & Karghoo, 2015; IOM, 2013). These countries are attractive for Mauritian immigrants due to Mauritius' colonial history (England and France) and relatively more open borders compared to other potential countries of migration (Australia and Canada). The 1960s and early 1970s are an important time in Mauritian migration, as Mauritius became an independent country in 1968. This led some segments of the population to seek their fortune elsewhere, as it was unclear whether independent Mauritius would be able to provide enough jobs as well as guarantee freedom of religion as it had under colonial rule (Dinan, 1985; Duyker, 1988; Mannick, 1987). The fear of the lack of jobs stemmed from the lack of natural resources coupled with the loss of colonial capital and the expanding population in a small geographic area (Duyker, 1988). Indeed, there was a period of high unemployment after independence and before Mauritius was able to create a booming manufacturing industry (Auty, 2017).

Diasporic communities use transnational practices to maintain ties to the homeland and to each other. “Transnationalism” refers to the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch et al., 1994, p. 7). The concepts of assimilation and ethnic pluralism, which attempted to describe how immigrants became incorporated in the receiving country (Massey et al., 2003), did not account for the continued ties migrants maintain across national borders. Transnational theory thus is a better framework to understand the experiences of immigrants who continue to engage with the sending country (Faist, 2000; Glick Schiller et al., 1995). These transnational practices may be varied, including investing in businesses back home, voting in elections to influence politics in their homeland, or sending remittances to family members.

Family members may be defined in multiple ways. The field of anthropology has a long history of investigating and classifying kinship ties, starting with Morgan’s seminal contribution in the late 1800s (Morgan, 1871). In the 1930s, Radcliffe-Brown distinguished between “systems of genealogical relationships” and “kinship system” which is based on genealogical ties but also socially constructed (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930). A few decades later, critiques of the concept of kinship by anthropologists such as Needham (Needham, 1971, 1974) and Schneider (Schneider, 1972, 1984) contributed to the decline of the traditional study of kinship in anthropology (Sousa, 2003). There is still contemporary debate about the validity of “kinship” in current anthropology, arguing that the “new kinship” pioneered by Schneider and based primarily on social constructions strays too far from looking at actual genealogical ties (i.e. related through biology), and that these are analytically important when looking at social relationships (Shapiro, 2015;

Wilson, 2016). The degree of importance of biological kinship ties compared to symbolic or fictive kinship ties is also still a matter of debate as well (Kronenfeld, 2012; Sahlins, 2011; Shapiro, 2014). In this paper, I do not describe or classify the kinship ties of Mauritians in the diaspora. Rather, I investigate how these kinship ties influence migration decisions, how they are maintained across national borders, and how they influence the decision to return home. In this way, I follow Bryceson and Vuorela's (2002) conception of "family belonging" as arising from choice and negotiation, and is therefore not limited to those who share biological ties.

Family and kinship relationships are an important driver of migration and subsequent transnational processes. Research surrounding the reasons for migration has found that individuals may not choose to migrate only for their personal benefit, but also for the benefit of their families (Massey et al., 2003). Concretely, this means that the decision for migration is not made at the individual level, but at the family level. Entire families may decide to migrate, or send select family members to another country for the benefit of the family. Children are a part of the decision making process, since their future economic and social well-being is taken into account by adults making decisions (Orellana et al., 2001). Even if the children do not immediately migrate with the family, migration can be for their benefit while they remain in the home country. This can take the form of amassing capital for the benefit of the family back home, usually in the form of remittances (Coe, 2011; Parreñas, 2015), or for eventual chain migration. Chain migration refers to the process by which established immigrants in the receiving country provide support, opportunities, and guidance to facilitate the migration of individuals

from the sending country, usually (but not always) family members (Massey et al., 2003; Yu, 2008).

While families are separated through migration, transnational processes maintain familial relationships across national borders. These activities serve to maintain social relationships between immigrants and the people they have left behind in the home country. Transnational families are therefore a reality in the lives of many immigrants (Chavez, 1992; Glick Schiller et al., 2001; Harmon & Karghoo, 2015), either temporarily or permanently. There is a lack of consensus in the literature around the exact definition of the family members that make up the transnational family. Some scholars use the term to refer exclusively to the nuclear family, using “transnational family” to explore the reasons for and impacts of parents migrating away from their minor children (Abrego, 2014; Coe, 2011). Others use the term to refer more broadly to exchanges spanning national borders that maintain relationships among kin, such as between siblings or cousins (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Yount-André, 2018). It is this second definition that I am using in this paper.

While it is rare that immigrants plan on being separated from their families permanently, some immigrants are forced to maintain transnational families indefinitely due to lack of legal options for migration, lack of funds, or different family members being unwilling to uproot their lives (Boehm, 2012; Yount-André, 2018). Additionally, the length of time since migration may make return less desirable, leading to the creation of transnational kinship ties that may extend to the second generation (Tsuda & Lee, nd). The space of transnational kinship processes is thus rich, especially with the advance of

internet technologies that allow for instantaneous or near-instantaneous communications (Miller, 2016; Yount-André, 2018).

Methods

I conducted participant observation during March 2019 in Toronto, where I witnessed the opening vignette of this paper. In addition to the analysis of field notes, this paper is based on 30 interviews with members of the Mauritian diaspora conducted March 2019 – June 2020. Data collection was conducted both in-person (participant observation, some interviews) and virtually through video calling software (majority of interviews). I made contact with members of the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto prior to participant observation using Facebook groups for Mauritian immigrants in Canada. These groups are public, and anyone can join and participate. I chose the month of March because Mauritian Independence Day is celebrated on March 12, and a celebration was at the Toronto City Hall. Once there, I met my contacts in person to cement our acquaintance and so I could tell them more about my research. Through these initial contacts, I was able to meet more Mauritian immigrants in person, who I was subsequently able to interview. I also took detailed notes about the ceremony, including who was in attendance and how attendees were interacting. I was able to observe how children were a highly visible group at the celebration, and that this was a great opportunity for the children to learn about Mauritian culture. The COVID-19 pandemic precluded me from returning to the field in March 2020, despite being invited to do so by my contacts. Fortunately, by this point, I had enough contacts within the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto to enable me to finish interviewing remotely through snowball sampling.

The interviews were semi-structured ranged in length from 45 minutes to a little over two hours. Throughout the interview, I spoke in English, French and Mauritian Kreol depending on the comfort level of my interviewees. I generally asked questions in English following the interview protocol but provided clarifications or probes in Kreol or French if the interviewee was more comfortable in these languages. All interviews were transcribed and translated to English by me. I assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees as part of the transcribing process in order to protect their identity. For this paper, I focused on the analysis of interview questions dealing with reasons for migrating, whether and how they kept in touch with friends and family in Mauritius, and whether they planned on reunifying with their family through the family's migration or by returning to Mauritius. Of the 30 people I interviewed, 13 identified as male and 17 as female. They ranged in age from 26 to 63, with an average age of 43.4 years old. They were all first-generation legal immigrants, with a length of stay in Canada ranging between 5 and 30 years, with a 12-year average. 16 respondents had migrated to Canada for higher education, while the rest migrated to pursue career opportunities or support their spouse in doing so. Additionally, 14 respondents had migrated with their nuclear family (spouse and any children) while 16 migrated alone. 20 respondents had formal Canadian citizenship, and the others were in various stages in the process (waiting to be eligible or had started the paperwork).

Field notes and interview transcripts were all analyzed using the qualitative software MaxQDA. The codebook was a mix of deductive and inductive themes. The former were informed by the literature on transnational families, including the sending of remittances, the flow of gifts, and the ways families keep in touch transnationally. The

latter emerged from the interviews and included practices specific to the Mauritian diaspora.

Family as reason for migration

The majority of Mauritians interviewed mentioned that their family was involved in the decision to migrate, either by explicitly providing support for them to leave Mauritius (visible among Mauritian students) or because they would benefit from migration. The latter were primarily the children of the immigrants, who would not have as many opportunities had they stayed in Mauritius. Krish, who migrated in his late 30s when his children were almost college-aged, simply stated that: “the main reason for leaving Mauritius was for the education of the children, for the university education of the children.” Like many Mauritians (and all those interviewed for this paper who had not come to Canada to study), Krish was able to immigrate to Canada using the points system leveraging his work experience and his bilingual skills, and was a permanent resident from the outset. His children completed secondary education in Mauritius and wanted to pursue a university degree. Krish explained that he did not like the quality of higher education in Mauritius, but knew that he would not be able to afford paying the tuition fees of universities overseas on a Mauritian salary. Additionally, he hoped that his children might opt for Canadian universities, which would be even more affordable as permanent residents of Canada. Therefore, he made the decision to migrate. Better educational prospects for the children were also important to Soubashini, also in her late 50s. Soubashini, who has two teenaged daughters, said that while their education was not the primary reason she migrated, she was happy that both her daughters could have more educational opportunities in Canada compared to Mauritius.

Both Krish and Soubashini migrated with their nuclear families (that is, their spouse and children) while the rest of their extended family remained in Mauritius. While Krish migrated primarily for the benefit of his children, Soubashini did so because it made financial sense for the family as a whole. She mentioned that while she was doing quite well in her career in Mauritius, her husband found a job opportunity in Canada that they could not ignore, since the earning potential in Canada is higher. They then jointly decided that migrating to Canada as a family would be more advantageous. This situation is similar to that of Vicky, whose husband pursued a job opportunity in Canada, bringing her and their young son along. In Vicky's case, she was not employed in Mauritius, but found employment in Canada and is now successful in middle management at a bank. Vicky enjoyed not having to work in Mauritius, but acknowledged that her husband's job opportunity and the high income she received in Canada (compared to her earning potential in Mauritius) was highly advantageous to them to help their son's future. In all these cases, the decision to migrate was made at the family level, and the future opportunities of the wellbeing of the entire family, including the children were considered top priorities.

While better economic opportunities for the parents was a factor in favor of migration, Mauritian immigrants are not economic labor migrants who are migrating under duress. Many of them had comfortable careers already in Mauritius, and did not have to migrate out of economic necessity. Rather, they saw the opportunity to migrate as being a benefit to their children or to the entire family unit, and decided to migrate based on the family. Some immigrants were able to leverage their comfortable career in Mauritius as a safety net in case their migration experience did not work out – they did

not immediately quit their jobs, but went on extended leave with the option of resuming employment just in case they did not want to keep living in Canada. For instance, Soubashini had been employed for 12 years at the same place when her husband found a job opportunity in Canada that would improve their family finances. She was able to take an extended leave without pay for her job and move with her family to Canada to support her husband. Once they were established and she secured a job for herself, she formally quit her job in Mauritius. Vicky's husband Abdul was in a similar position, where he did not resign from his job in Mauritius until the family was well established in Canada. Interestingly, Vicky did not have to work in Mauritius but had to find a job in Canada due to her husband not making enough money alone to support the family. However, because both are employed, they were able to buy a home only a couple of years into their migration journey, and Vicky feels satisfied with her decision to work because of how it has helped the family in Canada.

Some members of the Mauritian diaspora did not migrate for jobs, but rather for higher education. At the time of immigration, they were unsure whether they would return to Mauritius after completing their degree, but hoped to find employment opportunities in Canada due to the higher earning potential. They were subsequently able to secure employment and achieve permanent residency, instead of being in Canada on a student visa. For all the student immigrants I interviewed, their migration journey would not have been possible without the support of their family, especially their parents. This could take the form of financial support through paying for all or part of tuition fees, or emotional support by encouraging them to migrate to pursue higher education, even if it meant leaving their family behind. For instance, Yanish credits his father for making his

decision to study in Canada fairly straightforward: “My father always had this expectation that I would leave Mauritius. He always said ‘the headquarters are always open for you to come back, but you need to go out to do your own thing, to build your own thing.’ I felt excited that I was going into a new environment and starting from scratch.” Yanish’s father knew that he wanted his children to pursue better educational opportunities than are possible in Mauritius, and therefore provided the emotional support for Yanish and his siblings to leave Mauritius. In fact, Yanish mentioned that he has not seen his entire nuclear family since he migrated because his siblings are in Australia and Germany, while his parents are still in Mauritius.

Annika is in a similar situation, although her nuclear family is not as scattered around the globe. From a young age, her parents expected her to pursue higher education outside of Mauritius, thus encouraging her to migrate as soon as she finished high school. Annika did not need financial help from her parents as she secured enough scholarships to support her education. She is grateful that her parents were always supportive of her choices and have come to visit her in Canada a few times. She stated that “of course I miss my parents, but if I am here it is because of them. They always told me I should try to study abroad if I can.” Annika’s brothers also ended up leaving Mauritius to study, although they decided to go to universities in North America, making family reunions more accessible. Yanish and Annika exemplify the younger generation of Mauritian immigrants who credit their family’s support for their successful migration.

Patterns of travel and migration

Despite the importance of family members (including extended family) in the decision to migrate, most Mauritian immigrants in Toronto do not plan to bring their

extended family members with them to Canada. Chain migration refers to the process by which established immigrants in the receiving country provide support, opportunities, and guidance to facilitate the migration of individuals from the sending country, usually (but not always) family members (Massey et al., 2003; Yu, 2008). There is little evidence of chain migration of extended family members (outside the nuclear family) within the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto, despite the majority of immigrants being permanent residents who are planning on staying in Canada for some time. When chain migration happens, it usually takes the form of a spouse migrating alone to pursue a job opportunity and sending for the other spouse (and any children) once they have settled. This was the case for Sheila, whose husband found a job opportunity in Canada and migrated alone first to settle down before sending for her and their two children. Landing in Canada during the winter was very difficult, as Sheila and her children were not used to subzero temperatures. Sheila credits her husband's networking with the neighbors at their new house for alleviating the temperature and culture shock: "It's good that we had some very nice neighbors who helped to adjust to my new environment together with my two girls. Everything was empty in the house, so the neighbors helped me to adjust. They brought blankets, they brought warm clothes for us. I really appreciated that." The fact that Sheila's husband was able to buy a home and cultivate good relationships with the neighbors meant that Sheila's migration six months later was a positive experience.

However, it is equally as likely that the family migrates together and are able to provide support to each other during the adjustment period. For example, Deepa migrated with her husband and two children in 2010. While the first months of their migration were difficult, she was able to secure a job for herself within six months, and later was

able to get her husband employed at the same company: “[my workplace] was expanding, they needed a lot of people working in the office. I asked my husband ‘why don’t you come work with me?’ He did the interview, he got the job. After one year we were able to buy our home. Things fell into place at that point, once we started working.” In Deepa’s case, it took two incomes to be able to provide a stable residence and income for their children. Had one of them migrated alone, it may have taken longer for them to settle enough to bring the rest of the family over.

When chain migration happens, it is limited to the nuclear family, and does not include the extended family. Because there is usually no permanent reunification of family members, transnational family relationships take place through visits that can vary in length and frequency. These visits reaffirm the relationship between the immigrant and those still in Mauritius, but transnational activities such as remittances and contact using internet technologies, discussed below, also maintain these relationships between visits. It is much more likely for Mauritians to travel back to Mauritius to see their family than to have the family members travel to Canada for a visit.

Part of the reason for this is practical. Since most relatives outside of the nuclear family are still in Mauritius, it is easier for Mauritians in Toronto to travel back to see everyone. Even then, it is sometimes not possible for immigrants to see everyone whom they wish to see back, because of the large number of relatives and limited time. Avinash, in his 50s, does not manage to go back to Mauritius very often, because he does not get a lot of time off from work and plane tickets can be prohibitively expensive. He explains that the last time he visited Mauritius, he was not able to see all of his relatives: “I didn’t even see people on my mom’s side of the family, my two cousins. They’re in Mauritius.

They weren't able to come to the party I threw. I was close to them when I was young, we're keeping in touch through Facebook. I would like to see them again eventually."

Avinash regrets not being able to see a part of his family, but has used internet technologies (Facebook) to keep in touch with them, and is hopeful for more opportunities to connect in person in the future.

Sheila was one of the few respondents who was actively trying to bring over a family member to visit at the time of our conversation. She clearly indicated missing her family greatly, enumerating the various relatives whom she considers family. To alleviate this, she wants to bring her mother for a temporary visit:

I love my family, I do not have anybody here. I just have friends. Me, my husband and my two girls, they are the only ones who are family. I do not have my siblings, my in-laws, my mom, my parents. I do not have anybody family-wise. My nieces, nephews, I do not have anyone here. I miss my family, definitely. That's why I'm doing the paperwork for my mum, so she can come and visit us.

Sheila's ability and willingness to have her mother visit her from Mauritius was not widespread amongst respondents, as they generally prefer to be the ones traveling to visit Mauritius. This is both for the ease of seeing as many relatives as possible, and to use their visits to Mauritius as vacations.

Family central to transnational ties

As seen in the examples so far, Mauritians in Toronto do not migrate with extended family outside of the nuclear family. As a result, they maintain strong transnational kinship ties with their extended family back home despite the large geographical distance. Noella, who is active in a Mauritian cultural association in the Toronto area and who has been in Toronto for 20 years, described the Mauritian

immigration experience as different from other migrant groups in Toronto: “many Mauritians, if not all, will still have their [extended] families over there, and their friends. It’s not like immigrants coming from Sri Lanka or from Pakistan. When people come from Sri Lanka or Pakistan, they will close everything down there and they will come here. But Mauritian people are different in this case. We still have our [extended] family there. In most of the cases I would say Mauritians still have the family and friends ties at home.” This pattern is not limited to the Mauritian diaspora in Canada, as Harmon and Karghoo (2015) also found that Mauritians in Australia kept strong transnational kinship ties to Mauritius. The Australian case was also similar in that Mauritians migrated either alone or with their spouse and children, and maintained transnational ties with extended family still in Mauritius, such as cousins, grandparents, nieces and nephews (Harmon & Karghoo, 2015).

Interestingly, very few respondents (3 out of 30) reported keeping in touch with friends at home, whereas all but one reported keeping in touch with family. Those who kept in touch with their friends tended to be newer migrants - two students and one immigrant who had been in Canada for 3 years. In these cases, all the friends had been high school friends who had not been able to leave Mauritius for higher education or other opportunities. The 3 respondents mentioned keeping in touch with these friends specifically because they can see each other during visits back to Mauritius. My other interviewees ended up losing touch with Mauritian friends who were in other countries because of the inability of seeing each other. This can partly be attributed to the lack of internet technologies at the time of migration for some immigrants; however, this pattern was also seen for younger immigrants who were fully conversant with social media and

instant messaging apps. This shows the importance of visits in maintaining relationships, especially when it comes to friendship ties rather than kin.

On the other hand, transnational family ties were maintained even when family members settled elsewhere. When asked whether she kept in touch with anyone from Mauritius, Noor, in her 30s, enumerated: “I have a sister in the UK, I have a lot of family in Europe actually in Switzerland. But I have a sister back home, a brother, and I don’t have my parents anymore but my husband has everybody. Sister, brother, mum, dad, he has a big a family there. Cousins, nephews...” Noor said that she kept in touch just as much with her sister in the UK as her siblings back home, although they never got to see the entire family at the same time. Noor’s family connections include her husband’s family as well as her own family. Other respondents also mentioned having family in other countries, and kept in touch with them, but they did not mention keeping in touch regularly with Mauritian friends who were not in Mauritius anymore. The strength of connection between the homeland and its diasporic groups tends to be stronger than the strength of connections between the diasporic groups themselves, called “centripetal” and “lateral” connections respectively in Tsuda’s (2016) model of diasporicity. The Mauritian diaspora follows this pattern by showing stronger centripetal connections through many continued interpersonal relationships, but it is only kin relationships that perpetuate lateral connections.

Internet technologies are instrumental in keeping in touch with family members in Mauritius and in other countries. Group messages (or “group chats”) are especially popular, because they allow communication across different time zones and do not require all members to be online simultaneously. These group messages are usually over

WhatsApp, a messaging application for all major smartphone platforms that is very popular in Mauritius. Such group messages can sometimes be overwhelming due to the number of messages shared daily, but they are generally viewed favorably by diasporic Mauritians who are eager to stay in touch. For instance, Vikash, early 30s, sometimes has to adjust his life in Canada around the demands of the family group message: “In the group chat we are always texting. Sometimes there is nothing for a day, sometimes there’ll be lots of texts going on back and forth. It is a bit demanding, especially because of the time difference. I always have to read a lot of that during lunchtime at work and that can get a bit hectic sometimes.” Josephine, early 40s, explained that using WhatsApp made it feel like the distance between herself and her family and friends in Mauritius did not really exist: “WhatsApp has definitely made it very easy to stay in touch. WhatsApp makes it easy because I feel like I can just text them like I would anybody who I see here on a regular basis.” This allows for a high level of connectivity with people in Mauritius. Nandini, also in her early 40s, summarized the experience of many respondents when I asked how often she was in contact with family and friends in Mauritius: “Every day and mostly every hour! I talk to my mom I would say at least three times a week. I talk to my brothers another three times a week. Every day I could be in touch with someone in Mauritius.” Here Nandini is using the verb “talk,” even though her primary mode of communication is not through synchronous calls, but through sending messages over WhatsApp.

In addition to messaging, respondents also used synchronous video chatting technologies, such as Skype or FaceTime, to stay in touch with their family. These types of communications tended to be reserved for closer relatives only, such as parents or

siblings. Those who had migrated prior to the widespread use of the internet remember purchasing phone cards in order to call their family back in Mauritius, and agree that video calling technology has been an incredible improvement. Pooja, late 40s, for instance, reminisced about the difficulties of keeping in touch with her family: “Now it’s easier but back then, I don’t think we had WhatsApp at that time. When we came, luckily my brother gave us a laptop. So then we were able to Skype on the laptop and only my sister back then had internet, 10 years back. So I was able just to talk to my sister and my brother, and no one else.” Regardless of age, all respondents (and their family and friends back in Mauritius) had adapted to the use of internet technologies in order to stay in touch despite the distance. Only one respondent mentioned using a regular telephone to keep in touch with a relative: this relative was elderly and living in a care facility, and did not have access to the internet. The use of internet technologies to maintain transnational relationships for immigrants is widespread despite the persistence of digital divides (Pertierra, 2012). These digital divides refer to the ability of particular groups to access and use technology, either due to a lack of infrastructure or to prohibitive cost (Horst, 2012). Even where technology has been adopted, there are different gendered and generational approaches to technology use (Horst, 2012; Nishitani, 2014), sometimes leading to miscommunications. The Mauritian’s diaspora general conformity in its technology use (group messages supplemented by video calling) is therefore an anomaly, and may be a reflection of technology trends within Mauritius than a method of communication created by the diaspora.

Mauritians in Toronto also engage in transnational economic exchanges, in the form of remittances and gifts. Remittances refer to the sending of money by immigrants

back to family (and sometimes friends) who are still in the home country. Remittances can vary in both amount and frequency, from irregular small monetary gifts to sizable and regular contributions that significantly help support recipients. According to the World Bank, Mauritius received remittances totaling 2.2 per cent of its GDP in 2019 (World Bank, 2019) although it is unknown how much of these remittances came specifically from Canada. The majority of respondents mentioned sending remittances to their family members back in Mauritius, varying from a regular amount each month to whatever extra money they were able to spare. Noella summarized the viewpoint of Mauritian immigrants from her generation, which others also expressed: “Mauritians have a way of living that we send money to family members. Like all the people in the past who have gone to work outside Mauritius, you send money back.”

For the younger generation, typically those who migrated to Canada to further their studies, the question about remittances surprised them because, up until starting their careers, they had been financially dependent on their family members back in Mauritius to various degrees while they completed their education. They had not given much thought about sending money back, since they were used to receiving money instead. Nonetheless, they all agreed that they would be happy to send money back to their family in Mauritius if they needed it. Those who said that they did not plan on sending any remittances in the future specified that they knew their parents to be well-off and well-prepared for retirement. Nishta, mid 20s, pointed out: “I know they worked hard to be successful and be able to send me here to study. I think they would be pissed off honestly if I tried to pay them back.” Here Nishta is navigating her relationship with her parents, where they were able to pay for her education as part of their parental duties and

do not want any perceived “payback.” The immigrants in this situation are privileged compared to other immigrants, since they do not have the pressure to find a good job to help the family. Since the economic situation of the family in the home country is only one of the factors affecting the sending of remittances (Carling, 2008), it is unusual for these immigrants not to send any remittances at all.

There is also an exchange of goods between Toronto and Mauritius. Some consumer items such as high-end electronics, good quality winter clothing, and fashion accessories can be difficult to acquire in Mauritius, but readily available in Toronto. On the other hand, Mauritian food items can be hard to find in Toronto, if not impossible. A form of exchange thus takes place when immigrants go back to Mauritius for a visit, where they give consumer items as gifts to their family and friends in Mauritius, and receive locally made items as gifts in return (usually non-perishable or dried foods that can travel easily) to take back with them to Canada. Since this is not strictly legal according to customs laws of either country, respondents were evasive when talking about this practice. Ravi, in his 40s, was one of the few who agreed to frankly tell me about his experience:

The love that I have for my parents back home and my in-laws... if I know someone is going [to Mauritius], I am always sending something with someone, for the family. That's what I'm always doing. And I love what I get back. Even my kids, if they're getting some nice candies, some goodies from Mauritius, they appreciate it. Just like my elder daughter she just went to Mauritius in July and she came back like two weeks ago. She brought lots of stuff from my parents, my family back home. The rum, the sweets, and everything. That's the love also, which is greatly appreciated. I send a bunch of stuff, because I know my daughter is going, so I've been buying stuff for everybody.

Ravi uses the “love” he feels for his family to explain the constant exchange between them, highlighting that his daughter is also part of this exchange. He mentions that he is “always” sending items back to his family, and that he has been buying stuff for “everybody,” indicating that this exchange is ongoing and a significant part of his life. The local goods brought back from Mauritius contribute to the continued transnational connection between Ravi and his daughter in Canada, and the rest of their family in Mauritius. This is predicated on the ability to afford travel back and forth between Mauritius and Canada and to do so legally, which help maintain transnational ties in a way that undocumented immigrants do not have access to.

Ambivalence of return

Despite strong transnational kinship ties with Mauritius, members of the Mauritian diaspora in Canada are ambivalent about returning to Mauritius permanently. Returning for visits was widespread, as it is an occasion to reconnect with family and local friends, and to enjoy the local food and beaches. In fact, when asked what respondents missed most about Mauritius, they all mentioned family, the food, and the beaches. No interviewee expressed definite plans to return permanently to their homeland. The ambivalence of return is not unusual among immigrants, since building a life in a new country makes it harder to make the decision to uproot (Ceruse, 1974; Tsuda and Lee, nd). Even those with a strong desire to return (5 immigrants) felt unsure if they would actually return to Mauritius, because they were unwilling to move away from their adult children (and sometimes grandchildren) in Canada. In contrast, there were some (3 immigrants) who definitely did not want to return to Mauritius. Ari, mid 20s, has also built new strong ties to Canada that impact her desire to return to Mauritius. She moved

to Canada right after graduating high school and has just started her own business. She has no desire to return to Mauritius because she has built her entire life in Canada: “I’ve been working toward building a life here, I like the career – I’ve started my career here and that’s big. A lot of the friends I’ve made as an adult are all here. My partner and his friends are here. I do enjoy going back and I hope that I can continue to go back frequently. But I don’t see myself moving back permanently.” Despite still having family connections on the island, and nurturing these connections through bi-weekly calls over FaceTime, Ari has no desire to return to Mauritius permanently. She is content with nurturing transnational family relationships with those in Mauritius, while starting a family of her own in Canada.

Most immigrants showed some ambivalence about whether they would return. Again, there is a generational aspect to this ambivalence, as younger immigrants start building new family ties in Canada and older immigrants are unwilling to move away from their adult children. At the same time, they have extended family in Mauritius whom they miss and wish to live close to again. Those who are younger may have aging relatives who need their assistance, and who have expressed the desire to live with their children once again. As a result, these immigrants felt some pressure to return permanently to Mauritius, even though they would prefer to continue living in Canada. Dinesh, late 30s, recounts that his father probably wants to have him back on the island: “My dad is about to retire and I have a feeling he wants me to come back, because we have a group chat and he keeps sending me pictures of things like job openings. So that’s telling me that he’s showing me that ‘hey, there are jobs back home, so come back, even for a year or two.’” Dinesh is open to returning to Mauritius for a few years, provided he

has a good job, but he also has a long-term Canadian girlfriend whom he does not want to leave behind: “In terms of my relationship -- how do you tell someone that you have to go for a year or two [to Mauritius] and then come back [to Canada]? I can’t do that to her.” While Dinesh does care about his family in Mauritius and would be willing to return to Mauritius to spend more time with them, he has started building a life in Toronto with his partner. He could find a similar job in Mauritius but does not want to sever his romantic relationship.

On the other hand, those who are part of the older generation consider retiring in Mauritius, but they are reluctant to move away from their adult children, who are now building their lives in Canada. Sheila, who was hoping to have her mother visit Canada, mentioned that she sometimes daydreams about retiring in Mauritius once she turns 65. She dearly misses her family and fondly remembers their close-knit relationship when she lived in Mauritius. However, she also wants to remain in the life of her two children: “One of them just turned 16 and she’s interested in the army. And the other has started university. I like being part of their life, cooking for them, meeting their friends. I don’t want to leave them. They love Mauritius, but they feel Canadian only. They like visiting but they always want to come back here.” Sheila knows that her children will likely not move to Mauritius with her, and this is the reason for her ambivalence about returning. She values her family connections in Mauritius, but her relationship with her children are equally important to her.

Sheila’s desire to return to Mauritius is rooted in nostalgia, as she remembers her life when she could interact in person with her family. Research has shown that nostalgia is a powerful driver for the aspiration of returning “home” for the diaspora, as the home

country becomes synonymous with an idealized past (Marschall, 2017). First generation immigrants have first-hand memories of the home country and thus may be particularly susceptible to nostalgia; however, some realize that their homeland has inexorably changed from when they left. Avinash, who has lived in Canada for over 30 years, explained why he changed his plan to retire to Mauritius:

Back when I first migrated, I always thought about retiring in Mauritius, to have a bungalow at the beach. But when you look at it 25 years ago, you think that your family is always going to be there. You come back to the familiar ambiance. Now the majority are dead, there's only a few left. Their children have grown, cousins aren't speaking to each other. So going back to Mauritius, why? It wouldn't be the same. Life is not the same. My children would be in Canada. If my daughter has children, my grandchildren would be here. So I would go back to Mauritius to visit now and then. But going to live, no. I don't think that I could.

Through his return visits, Avinash has realized that the idealized past in his memories does not exist in Mauritius anymore. He now plans to stay in Canada with his children and potential grandchildren, and will continue to maintain transnational kinship connections to his family back in Mauritius. The widespread ambivalence of return to Mauritius may be another reason why Mauritians retain strong transnational ties with their extended family in the homeland and siblings in other countries, since it is unlikely that they will permanently join them in the future.

Conclusion

Family ties are an important factor in the migration experience of the Mauritian diaspora. Those who migrated alone (without their nuclear family) as young adults to pursue higher education relied on the support (financial or emotional) of their relatives back home, who acknowledged the need for the immigrant to pursue advanced educational and career opportunities not available in Mauritius. Those who migrated later

in life considered the future opportunities of their children, both indirectly (as better opportunities for the immigrant parents lead to better opportunities for their children) and directly (children will have access to better educational opportunities). Mauritian immigration tends to be either individual or in nuclear family units, with chain migration occurring mostly at the nuclear family level. There is no widespread system of chain migration whereby Mauritians facilitate the migration of extended relatives or friends to Canada. When it happens, chain migration tends to remain within the nuclear family, where one person migrates first and then facilitates the migration of their spouse and any children.

Because of this pattern of migration, Mauritians in the diaspora tend to retain strong transnational kinship ties to their families that are still in Mauritius. “Family” does not include only members of the nuclear family, but also include extended connections such as cousins, nephews, and in-laws. These transnational kinship connections are fostered by internet technologies, primarily group chats, as these alleviate issues associated with different time zones. These ties are also strengthened by visits of the immigrant and their children back to Mauritius, and the exchange of remittances and gifts. Transnational kinship ties are ongoing, as immigrants generally consider their migration to be long term, and have no plans to bring relatives to Canada permanently.

Despite the strong transnational kinship ties connecting Mauritian immigrants to their homeland, most are ambivalent about returning to Mauritius for the long term. There is a generational basis for this ambivalence. The younger generation, who migrated to Canada as young adults, are starting careers and families of their own in Canada; while they do maintain strong ties to their family back home, they are also unwilling to uproot

their lives to move back. For the older generation, who tend to have children who have grown up at least in part in Canada, they are unwilling to move away from their children and grandchildren by moving back to Mauritius. The older generation is more likely to consider retiring back to Mauritius, due in part to a nostalgic idealized past from their time before migration. Some have already realized that this past is gone and that they would not be happy in current Mauritius; others are still ambivalent about returning, torn between their kinship ties in Canada and those they miss back in Mauritius.

This paper contributed to the transnational migration literature by showing the ways in which immigrants maintain transnational kinship ties post-migration. These ties are ongoing and not temporary, since there is no ultimate goal of reunification through diasporic return. This paper also shows how kinship ties contribute to the decision of whether to migrate and whether to move back home: children especially, even when they have become adults, are a determining factor in this decision. Further studies should focus on the 1.5 and second generation of Mauritian immigrants to investigate whether they show similar transnational kinship ties to their relatives in Mauritius, and whether they view a return to Mauritius in a similar way as first generation immigrants.

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CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This dissertation used anthropological methods to investigate identity and transnational processes within the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto. It showed that the Canadian context of multiculturalism allows for Mauritians to remain culturally distinct while also becoming economically and socially incorporated within Canadian society. It confirmed that individual experiences vary within diasporas, and that the experiences of immigrants depend on the context of their migration (including their life in the sending country prior to migration) and their continued ties to the sending country. By studying the experiences of immigrants from a small African island, we can better understand the wide range of possibilities of immigrant identity and incorporation, while acknowledging their simultaneous engagement in transnational processes.

Summary of chapters

In chapter 2, I showed how Mauritians identify as a unified immigrant group in Toronto, both in the way they speak about themselves and the way they work together to remain culturally distinct – and become culturally visible – in their host city. Mauritius' history as a former French colony, and the resulting knowledge of the French language that persists in the country to this day, is an important advantage that Mauritians leverage in the Canadian job market, even if it is not part and parcel of Mauritian national identity. However, in actuality, the experience of migration does not lead to a more unified Mauritian community, as Mauritians tend to keep within their own *communautés*. This is despite Canada's overall more liberal values, including those of supporting minorities and pushing for inclusion, which Mauritians overall also identify with. Mauritians' self-

identity is still closely tied to their *communautés*, especially for older immigrants who spent much of their formative years in Mauritius. This chapter illustrated the fluid nature of identity, and further demonstrated the disjunctures between emic conceptualizations of community and how community is enacted in practice: Mauritians in Toronto simultaneously identify as “Mauritian” and part of a unified community, while also reifying differences between the *communautés*.

In chapter 3, I describe how Mauritian immigrants engage in transnational politics by leveraging the concept of transnational simultaneity (Tsuda, 2012). It provides an ethnographic description of the reasons individuals have for engaging with the sending country, and how this engagement is influenced by their simultaneous engagement in the receiving country. The political structure of Mauritius and the context of migration for individual immigrants both affect the degree of engagement from the Mauritian diaspora. There are no formal channels created for political engagement by the Mauritian government for the Mauritian diaspora. While the Mauritian Diaspora Scheme does exist, it is not well publicized by the government and is not used by most members of the diaspora. Additionally, this does not provide a way for Mauritians to engage in transnational politics, but rather simply encourages Mauritians to spend money in Mauritius. In order to attempt to engage with the Mauritian government – and thus in transnational politics – immigrants need to already have personal connections within the Mauritian government.

Immigrants’ engagement with the Canadian state simultaneously impacts the way that they engage with the Mauritian state. There are three patterns of transnational politics for the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto: active, aspirational, and no engagement. They are

all predicated on a widespread negative view of the Mauritian government, which entails a perceived high level of corruption, inefficiency, and cronyism, as well as a positive experience with Canadian governance. Since personal connections are necessary for people to exert influence on decision making, Mauritian immigrants who are actively engaging in transnational politics in Mauritius migrated to Canada after spending some of their adult years in Mauritius. They had time to build their own personal network and leverage social connections that enable them to have influence in the Mauritian government. They have so far not been successful, but have not been discouraged from trying further. They exhibit a positively reinforcing pattern of simultaneous engagement, where their increased engagement with the Canadian state leads to an increased desire to engage with the Mauritian state – even if that desire has so far not yielded tangible results.

Most of the Mauritian diaspora tend to decrease their transnational engagement with Mauritius as they increased their engagement with the Canadian state. These individuals migrated to Canada as young adults to pursue higher education. They did not have time to build their personal networks in Mauritius, and thus feel completely unable to engage in transnational politics given the current political system. Those with aspirational engagement in transnational politics wish to engage with Mauritius one day, but want the system to change first so that they may have formal avenues to participate. They show no interest in being the ones to change the political system, but hope that younger generations of politicians will change the system for the better. Finally, there are those who show no engagement have no interest in ever participating: they are choosing to focus on their lives in Canada without engaging with Mauritian politics at all.

In chapter 4, I show that family ties are an important factor in the migration experience of the Mauritian diaspora. Those who migrated alone to Canada (without their nuclear family) as young adults to pursue higher education relied on the support (financial or emotional) of their kin back home, who acknowledged the need for them to pursue advanced educational and career opportunities not available in Mauritius. Those who migrated later in life considered the future opportunities of their children, both indirectly (as better opportunities for the immigrant parents lead to better opportunities for their children) and directly (children will have access to educational opportunities in Canada). In this way, children are indirect actors in the decision to migrate (Orellana et al., 2001). Mauritian immigration tends to be either individual or in nuclear family units, with chain migration occurring mostly at the nuclear family level. There is no widespread system of chain migration whereby Mauritians facilitate the migration of other kin or friends. The limited amount of chain migration tends to remain within the nuclear family, where one person migrates first and then facilitates the migration of their spouse and any children.

Because of this pattern of migration, Mauritians in the diaspora tend to retain strong transnational kinship ties to their families that are still in Mauritius. “Family” does not include only members of the nuclear family, but also include other kin such as cousins, nephews, and in-laws. These transnational kinship connections are fostered by internet technologies, primarily online group chats, which allow them to engage others in different time zones. These ties are also strengthened by visits of the immigrant back to Mauritius, and the exchange of remittances and gifts. Transnational kinship ties are

ongoing, as immigrants generally consider their migration to be long term, and have no plans to bring relatives to Canada permanently.

Despite the strong transnational kinship ties connecting Mauritian immigrants to their homeland, most are ambivalent about returning to Mauritius permanently or long-term. There is a generational basis for this ambivalence. The younger generation, who migrated to Canada as young adults, are starting careers and families of their own in Canada; while they do maintain strong ties to their family back home, they are also unwilling to uproot their lives to move back. For the older generation, who tend to have children that have grown up at least in part in Canada, they are unwilling to move away from their children and grandchildren by moving back to Mauritius. The older generation is more likely to consider retiring back to Mauritius, due in part to a nostalgic idealized past from their time before migration. However, some have already realized that this past is gone and that they would not be happy in current Mauritius; others are still ambivalent about returning, torn between their kinship ties in Canada and those they miss back in Mauritius.

Synthesis of theoretical contributions

Across the three chapters, the themes of generational differences and the effects of time are salient. Generational differences can also be tied to the context of migration, as younger immigrants are generally those who migrated to Canada for higher education and subsequently stayed in the country upon finding employment. These immigrants generally migrated alone (that is, without family members) and are now starting their families in Canada by marrying non-Mauritians. They also did not have a broad political network before leaving Mauritius, and either do not wish to engage in transnational

politics or want the system to change before they are willing to engage. Older immigrants generally migrated to Canada after starting a family in Mauritius and migrate with their spouse and children. They are more likely to have political connections in Mauritius and want to actively engage in transnational politics, although their efforts have so far not been fruitful. The field of transnational politics has generally been framed around voting rights (Glick Schiller et al., 2001; Lafleur, 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), but immigrants can engage in transnational politics beyond formal channels afforded by the state, as older Mauritian immigrants are attempting.

Regardless of generation or the length of time spent in Canada, the identity of Mauritian immigrants remains linked to their *communauté* of origin in Mauritius (Boswell, 2006; Eisenlohr, 2006; Nave, 2000), even while a pan-Mauritian community consciousness has developed. New markers of Mauritian identity have arisen, like the importance and salience of the Mauritian kreol language. This confirms previous work on the persistence of Mauritian kreol among Mauritian immigrants in the UK (Goodchild, 2013) and Australia (Duyker, 1988; Harmon & Karghoo, 2015). Other elements of the pan-Mauritian community consciousness include pride in “being Mauritian” (linked to Mauritian success in Canada) and the existence of a network of help for newly landed immigrants to Canada. Such a strong ethnic network of assistance for newly landed immigrants is important for immigrant success, especially because Mauritians do not engage in chain migration. That is, Mauritians already established in Canada do not try to facilitate the migration of other kin and friends to Canada. The strong network of help for new immigrants is facilitated by social media such as Facebook groups, highlighting the importance of internet technology in the experience of Mauritian immigrants.

Internet technologies are even more important to maintain transnational family ties with kin still in Mauritius, which is done by virtually all the interviewees in this dissertation. The concept of the transnational family in the literature has either been narrowly used to refer to parents who leave their children in the sending country to pursue economic opportunities (Abrego, 2014; Coe, 2011) or more broadly to refer to kinship ties of various kinds (including fictive) that span national borders (Boehm, 2012; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). This dissertation does not attempt to define the transnational family more narrowly, but rather shows that there is a division between the nuclear family of immigrants (spouse and children) and other kin, which creates tension and ambivalence around return.

Implications

The analyses in the three chapters of this dissertation provide a more detailed understanding of how successful immigrant communities navigate their identities and transnational relations with the sending country. It shows that the widespread acceptance of multiculturalism in Canada enables immigrants to maintain their cultural distinctness while simultaneously becoming economically and socially incorporated in Canada. This has policy impacts given that one critique of multiculturalism is that it will lead to a highly fragmented society (Day, 2014; Fleras & Elliot, 2002). This dissertation shows that it is possible for an immigrant group to remain culturally visible, continue to engage transnationally with kin, potentially engage transnationally with politics, and still be well-integrated in the receiving country.

This analysis also has direct policy implications for the Mauritian government, as it clearly shows that the diaspora is willing and eager to engage in the economic and

political development of the island, even though immigrants lack the formal channels to do so. By actively attempting to leverage existing personal political connections, or aspiring to engage with Mauritian politics if there was hope of being heard, the diaspora expresses a desire to contribute to the future of the country.

The processes described in this dissertation can also help understand events leading to the international mobilization of the Mauritian diaspora, which started in August 2020 and is ongoing at the time of writing. On July 25, 2020, a cargo ship ran aground on a coral reef in the south east of Mauritius. Authorities did not act in time to prevent an oil spill, and in August, the local Mauritian population mobilized to contain the spill and attempt to avoid a widespread environmental catastrophe (Wall Street Journal, 2020). The lack of decisive action by the government sparked anti-government protests in Mauritius that were not simply about the inadequate response to the oil spill, but more broadly about the lack of good governance, widespread corruption and nepotism, and the perceived pitting of the different *communautés* against one another for political gain (L'Express.mu, 2020a, 2020b; Sivaramen, 2020). This has led to similar demonstrations from the worldwide Mauritian diaspora, including in France, Australia and Switzerland (L'Express.mu, 2020c). During these demonstrations, diasporic Mauritians gathered in public places with signs showing their support for the protests in Mauritius and agreeing with the anti-government sentiment expressed by people in Mauritius. On social media, diasporic Mauritians have created Facebook groups to support local activism in Mauritius and to start the process of demanding rights to vote from the Mauritian government. In early 2021, there are indications that remittances from diasporic Mauritians have increased, and there is a renewed interest in engaging the

resources of Mauritians living abroad by both the government and by the diaspora which is now more aware of its numbers (Melidor, 2021).

The ongoing ramifications from the Wakashio oil spill and continuing protests have the potential to encourage immigrants to increase their engagement in transnational politics, especially those who are aspirational in their engagement. This group of diasporic Mauritian wishes to engage in Mauritian politics, but so far has felt that the system only favored those with the correct personal connections. If these ongoing protests lead to change in the Mauritian government in the form of more transparency and fewer inefficiencies, more diasporic Mauritians may be able to engage in transnational politics. This is already visible with the creation of a diasporic movement to demand the right to vote for citizens abroad directly following the protests. Additionally, Mauritian public discourse about the inequities of communalism may spark such discussions in the diaspora.

Limitations and future research directions

While care was taken to sample as broadly as possible, this ethnographic research was based on a non-representative sample of the Mauritian diaspora in Toronto. The findings of this dissertation therefore cannot be fully applied to other Mauritian diasporic groups, even though the findings of this ethnography do not contradict the scant recent literature available on the Mauritian diaspora (Harmon & Karghoo, 2015; Jahangeer-Chojoo, 2018). For instance, Toronto's status as a highly diverse city, and the willingness of its government to recognize culturally different minority groups, both influence the experiences of diasporic Mauritians who live there. It is a useful case study to compare to other provinces of Canada where Mauritians have settled, where multiculturalism policies

are in place but may be enacted differently. It is also useful to compare to other countries that are not as inclusive of different cultures, or which do not have protections for minorities to retain their culture.

Generational differences are salient in how the subjects of this dissertation navigate their identity, engage in transnational politics, and maintain transnational family ties. Further research should therefore focus on whether the younger generation eventually shows similar patterns as the older generation as they settle and get incorporated in Toronto, or whether they create new ways of remaining connected to Mauritius. Further research could also investigate how the 1.5 and second generation construct their identity and engage in various transnational processes, as this dissertation has only focused on the first generation. The issue of belonging in the various *communautés* should also be further explored with a bigger and more representative sample size, especially as pertaining to Mauritian Muslims who were not well represented in this study.

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