

Communalism as Conflict: Examples from Mauritius¹

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Concepts of Communalism From Mauritius

Mauritians define all forms of culturally motivated collective actions which bring groups into conflict as communalism. Empirically communalism can be differentiated into two distinct phenomena: collective action based upon either the coordinated interests of individuals pursuing personal goals (Sugden, 1986; Boucher, 1985;

Hamilton 1971) or the uniquely human propensity to cooperate even when it is not within the individuals obvious short-term interests (Boyd and Richerson 1990). As all forms of communalism are based upon culturally defined interests, collective action can be the fall-out of the coordinated interests of many individuals each pursuing personal goals, shaped by a common culture. The human dependency upon culture to shape behaviors also allows for the perpetuation of altruistic cooperation above and beyond the self-interest of individuals.

In subsuming culturally defined coordination and cooperation under the common rubric of communalism, Mauritians have created a monolithic social category that includes two quite distinct mechanisms, leading to some confusion. They have done so because it is often quite difficult to accurately assess the real costs and benefits of actual choices. Coordination and cooperation thus blend together into all forms of collective behavior principally guided by cultural content, as opposed to pan-human fundamental drives. Disentangling these related but distinct phenomenon will help us appreciate the complex adaptive measures which have developed in Mauritius to minimize the entropy so common to multi-ethnic societies.

In Mauritius, communalism remains a potential source of violence and social upheaval. Emically, Mauritians define communalism as ethnic nepotism at the expense of other culture groups. For example, In November, 1995, the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, called for the inclusion of oriental languages into the nation-wide Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exam. The Creole community rallied against it, decrying 'communalism' in the belief that their children would be unjustly disadvantaged for not

speaking Hindi or Urdu in the home. The coalition government crumbled as a result, and new elections were called. Three months later, a group of Muslim men kidnapped a young Muslim newlywed because she had married a Hindu man. Again the denunciation of 'communalism' rang out over the airwaves and in the press. The kidnapers were hunted down and arrested.

Mauritians label both of these instances as communalism because they recognize the importance that shared identity, either in the language one speaks or the religion one follows, plays in shaping the behaviors of groups of individuals. It is easy to understand why Creoles, who speak predominately Kreole and French, would oppose oriental languages being added to the CPE exam. It is much more difficult to explain why a few Muslim men were willing to kidnap their friend's daughter out of deeply held religious beliefs and feelings of loyalty, knowing that they could incur heavy personal costs.

This paper articulates what Mauritians intuitively differentiate. I outline the strategies that have developed to minimize the sheering effects these group-level conflicts have on the society as a whole. The casual observer will often remark that Mauritians have a hypocritical stance on communalism, but as we shall see, they do so for good reason: unique obstacles of ethnically defined coordination and cooperation.

The role of culture in shaping behaviors is, on the one hand, embraced and institutionalized in the Constitution, which attempts to ensure ethnic-based representation and dispersal of power. On the other hand, the legitimacy of ethnic-based interest-groups that may arise are simultaneously

challenge and rooted out, particularly 'fanatic' behaviors which are shaped by cultural beliefs and not simply driven by personal self-interest. A national culture of universal values arrests fanatic behaviors by espousing a notion of universal civil rights to which all individuals are entitled and which all individuals must respect, regardless of individual cultural beliefs. Mauritians recognize that boundless cultural relativity does not provide political or social stability.

Waves of immigration and a long history of colonial rule by alien powers have shaped the development of this pan-ethnic civil culture. The vast majority of slaves, laborers, and traders who came to Mauritius were forced to incorporate new social norms based upon the dominant French and English traditions and laws which were reinforced through threats of violence. Over the years, these customs became ingrained into the cultural corpus of each ethnic group, and today there is a common national civic culture to which members of every ethnic group subscribe derived from a colonial history.

Since no single ethnic group is any longer in a position to dictate its cultural beliefs to others by force, a shared public culture has emerged in which communities cooperate to prevent inter-ethnic conflict. Both these strategies manipulate individual interests to promote nation-wide pro-social behaviors in the face of potential conflicts of interest.

Mauritius is continually plagued by the menace of communal violence. While not differentiated in the vernacular, coordinated and cooperative communalism are intuitively distinguished by Mauritians. Distinct social strategies have developed to cope with these stresses. Coordinated interests deriving from common culture are dissipated through the Best Loser Parliamentary system and

weakened by cross-cutting class ties. Coordination is further undermined by subverting the congruencies between the interests of parliamentary members and the groups they represent. Inter-ethnic conflicts arising out of intra-ethnic cooperation are stemmed by a common civil society and reinforced by punishment. This overlapping supra-culture demands conformity to social norms and mandates punitive action against defectors.

Development of a Plural Society

Mauritius is a small volcanic island nation situated in the Indian Ocean some 800 km east of Madagascar. Measuring 47 km wide and 58 km long (1865 km²) and supporting some 1.2 million people, Mauritius has one of the greatest population densities in the world (580 people km²). The island has no indigenous inhabitants. Successive waves of colonization have brought people from around the globe. Slaves were imported predominately from Madagascar and East Africa by a small French plantocracy. The British took control of Mauritius during the Napoleonic Wars but maintained French civil law. In 1835 the British officially guaranteed slaves their freedom, most of whom quit the sugar fields to fend for themselves as independent fishermen and unskilled laborers. The British looked to India as a source of indentured labor to work the cane fields owned by the French colonialists. Chinese immigrants also came to Mauritius, mostly as traders from the Canton Delta (Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo, 1985).

Today, the independent Republic of Mauritius is a classic example of a plural society. Table 1.0 provides a generalized overview of its population.

Table 1: Population Composition

Community	per cent of population
General Population	28
Hindus	53
Bhojpuri/North Indians	40
Tamils	7
Telegus	3
Marathi	2
Muslims	17
Chinese	2

Each of these constitutionally designated communities, perhaps with the exception of the Chinese, is deeply divided internally. The Hindu population, for example, is cross-cut by linguistic, racial, religious, and caste lines. The Tamil population of some 69,000 (representing 6% of the total population and 11% of the Hindu population), often identify themselves as a separate ethnic group. The General Population is likewise composed of multiple distinct communities, including Creoles and Franco-Mauritians, which are in turn, composite groups.. Therefore Mauritius is not dominated by any single homogenous culture group.

The fundamental differences in morals and behaviors which separate Mauritian groups are a social fragmenting force. Unlike Funivall's (1939) or M.G. Smith's (1965) models, which posit that plural societies are inherently weak and held together predominately by an external colonial force, the communities in Mauritius are also held together by a

number of adhesive elements, including true economic integration and a common civil culture.

Once in place, the civil culture is able to perpetuate itself. This civil culture and the peaceful coexistence enjoyed by Mauritius as a result can only be fully understood from a historical analysis of the demography. The country is an island of immigrants. No primordial ethnic claims can be made by any of the residents. The vast majority of the population trace their origins to slaves or indentured laborers. In any case, 99% of the population traces its ancestry, in part, to non-Europeans who were subjugated for several generations under the laws of an alien culture.

Mauritius became an established colony under the French in 1715. From 1810 until 1968, the British controlled Mauritius. French language and civil code remained a predominate fixture of everyday life, even as the size of the French population shrank and political hegemony was lost. Mauritians were consequently indoctrinated over generations into a culture of public life which demanded compliance with punitive laws. As political control changed hands from the French plantocracy to a foreign Colonial Office, and then again to a democratically elected parliament, the demand for compliance has remained. Given this context, Mauritians from all walks of life have agreed to or -- more accurately -- have been forced to, abide by certain fundamental principles of liberty and justice to which all are subject.

But before investigating the strategies used to maintain social stability, I will describe in greater detail two cases of communalism.

Coordination: Debate Over Certificate of Primary Education Exam Topples Government

In December 1995, the government of Mauritius crumbled when the Prime Minister (himself a Hindu) proposed that 'oriental' languages be used in ranking students for entry into secondary schools. The Creole community, constituting about 27% of the population, felt that such a law would place them at a disadvantage relative to people of Indian descent, both Hindu and Muslim. Ethnic coalitions began to crystallize around the CPE exam issue. The resulting large-scale demonstrations destroyed the delicate coalition maintaining the Prime Minister's power and the government fell. Individual and group interests here coincided because the ability to speak an oriental language and therefore excel on the CPE exam, was dependent upon group membership. The Prime Minister hoped to present an issue to the majority Hindus which, due to coordinated interests, would carry him to another term.

Language has remained an unresolved dilemma in the Mauritian education system. Since their foundation as an elitist bastion of francophone and anglophone hegemony, colonial languages have always been the primary mediums of instruction. In 1944, the Indian community pressured the colonial government to pass the Education Ordinance, instructing the Director of Education to institute the teaching of Chinese, Hindi, Tamil, and Urdu in primary schools (Bunwaree, 1994). Little importance was attached to learning these languages, however, and they were not included in the CPE exam.

When the Prime Minister moved to integrate ‘oriental languages’ into the CPE exam, he met resistance mostly from the Creole community. The issue at stake was not the enormous burden placed upon students already who had to be proficient in English, French, and Kreole. Rather, the Creole community felt that their children would be unjustly disadvantaged, as such languages were not spoken at home. (There was also some discontent among the Chinese community who were predominately of Hakka or Cantonese descent while Mandarin was taught in the schools.) Already feeling politically and economically marginalized, the Creole community interpreted this act as a further attempt to alienate them from economic achievement. Places at secondary schools are keenly competed for, as education is seen as the key to a successful career. Most students take the CPE exam at age 12. The vast number of students who fail the CPE exam more than twice are forced to work menial jobs illegally, not being permitted to work before the age of 16. Opponents argued that adding ‘Oriental languages’ to the CPE would increase the number of Creoles who could neither work nor attend school, exacerbating the ‘malaise creole.’

Hindus and Muslims countered that Creoles, who are predominately Roman Catholic, unjustly received a disproportionate number of the seats at the Catholic Confessional schools; the Catholic Church runs what are believed to be some of the best secondary schools in the country. In return for government funding, the Confessional schools opened up 49% of the enrollment to non-Catholics. As Catholics constitute only 30% of the population, non-Catholics have greater difficulty obtaining a seat at these prestigious facilities than do Creoles.

Despite Creole opposition, Prime Minister Jugnauth obtained enough votes to pass a law integrating oriental languages into the CPE exam. The Supreme Court, however, struck the law down on October 27th, 1995, precisely because the practice would favor certain communities. Jugnauth then moved to floor legislation to amend the constitution with Clause 17a, requiring oriental languages be included. In the midst of numerous demonstrations, Jugnauth threatened to dissolve parliament should the amendment not pass. He was unable to obtain the three quarters vote needed for a constitutional amendment². Jugnauth's hand was forced by the opposition alliance, propelling new elections which were held on December 20th.

In fact, Jugnauth had used the language issue which had been simmering off and on for decades in hope of conjuring up primordial feelings of ethnic group allegiance by presenting ethnically defined issues which crossed class lines. At the time, the Prime Minister’s government had an all-time low approval rating. By dissolving parliament and calling new elections in only a few weeks, he was hoping to ride a wave of ethnic solidarity to a new term in office by promising to amend the Constitution. His strategy failed, in part, because the vast majority of Mauritians, including Hindus, believed that the Jugnauth’s regime had grown corrupt, a weakness capitalized upon by the opposition coalition which formed between the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), a predominately Creole party, and the Labor Party (LP) which is predominately Hindu. This coalition consolidated the Creole vote while splitting vote of Hindus. It forced Hindus to choose which issue was more important, cultural heritage or economic prosperity. The opposition argued that an end to political corruption was more important than the CPE issue.

The result, despite the fact that Jugnauth's old MSM/RMM³ government received a total of 20% of the votes, was a unanimous victory for the MMM/LP alliance which obtained all 60 seats. The only political opposition currently in the government owes its existence to the Best Loser system⁴, discussed below.

Cooperation: Kidnapping a Muslim girl

Quite a different instance of 'communalism' occurred in January of 1996. A young Muslim woman, Nesha Bibi Deenmahomed⁵, had recently married a Hindu man, Vishal Dhawtal. A civil marriage was obtained on September 23, 1995 and a Hindu religious wedding was conducted on October 8th. Nesha's mother deeply disapproved of the marriage, telling her daughter 'You are no longer my family. You have betrayed your race,' (*To ne pli mo fami. To ne trahir to race.*)(Sivaramen 1996: 11)

On January 8, 1996, a group of between 15 and 20 men entered the home of Vishal's parents and forcibly removed Nesha. She was brought to the home of Abdool Kader Ootchotoyah where she was made to change into Muslim clothing and remove any marks of Hindu identity, including the red sindur powder Hindu women place in the part of their hair as a symbol of their marital status.

A wedding with a Muslim man was arranged. Within a few days, a young groom appeared at the house with an imam. A traditional Nikko ceremony was conducted in preparation for the wedding. Before the actual marriage was scheduled, Nesha escaped and returned to the house of her husband, while several men and women involved in the kidnapping were arrested. These individuals were motivated

out of a religious conviction that a Muslim woman should not marry outside her religion. A true ethnic cooperation occurred here. Individuals, despite high personal costs to themselves, acted according to their culturally learned moral convictions for the betterment of the group.

Explained away as the behavior of fanatic fundamentalist Muslim commandos by a Creole dominated press⁶, cases like this nevertheless illustrate the potential of cultural in instigating behavior that is maladaptive to the individual (Boyd and Richerson 1985). All forms of cooperation are, by definition, ecologies where individuals irrationally behave to their own short-term detriment. (For detailed discussion on the perplexities of cooperation, see Surgden, 1986; Maynard-Smith, 1982; Axelrod, 1980; Olson, 1965; Hinde, 1991; Hardin, 1968). Such behaviors can spread if the rate of cultural transmission is stronger than the behavior's culling effect on the host. Dawkins and others have drawn useful analogies between genetic and cultural units of transmission. He identifies the 'meme' as a cultural unit of transmission, (1976, 1982; Durham, 1991).

The idea that Muslim women are bound by Koranic law to marry only other Muslims, that this law takes precedence over any civil code, and that individual members of the community should take action to rectify any violations, is a meme which failed to successfully spread throughout the Muslim community in Mauritius. The Muslims who retain this belief were jailed and probably will have great difficulty instilling their beliefs to others in the community⁷. Those ideas rigorous enough to fan out in a population can be maintained by moralistic retribution even if they have negative effects on their hosts (Boyd and Richerson, 1992) but

the more maladaptive a trait, the less likely it will successfully spread.

Behaviors which entail little or no cost to the host but which provide benefits to the group are more likely to spread and persist. It is well known that Muslims in Mauritius drink Pepsi while the other communities predominantly drink Coca Cola. I have heard it argued that Muslims drink Pepsi because a prestigious Muslim family owns the Pepsi bottling company in Mauritius. According to this line of reason, each individual consumer absorbs only a minuscule cost, if any, for buying Pepsi while possibly providing a benefit to the Muslim community through jobs and political clout. That Muslims buy Pepsi and that this behavior may benefit the Muslim community, however, should not be mistaken as proof of rational decision making. While purchasers may have a rationale, the decision is not rational.

An individual's decision to purchase a singular Pepsi does not appear to benefit the Muslim community in any measurable sense. Indeed, most Muslims probably do not purchase Pepsi with the intent of nepotistically improving their own lot. Rather, Pepsi has become ingrained in Mauritian-Muslim food ways probably as a result of conformist transmission and cognitive biases toward social transactions with coethnics, thereby influencing distribution networks and which retailers sell Pepsi.⁸ In other words, ties between kinship and business relations may have resulted in Muslim salespeople distributing to Muslim owned outlets when originally trying to carve out a niche in the market. The result was a predominance of Pepsi purchases among Muslim consumers who frequented these stores.

In practice, the border between coordination and cooperation is fuzzy. This is because it is often difficult to evaluate the actual costs and benefits associated with specific behaviors. Buying a Pepsi instead of a Coke may have no significant implications for the individual. Is such behavior cooperation or coordination? Culture, however, plays an essential role in all forms of communalism regardless of the pay-offs. For this reason, both forms of collective action are subsumed under the common rubric of communalism.

Likewise culture plays an equally important role in shaping behaviors, including ethnic coordination and cooperation that do not create conflicts in plural societies. Such instances, rather than being labeled as communal by Mauritians, are seen somewhere between the poles of tradition and charity. These behaviors are contained within the sphere of private life and are of little concern socially unless they cross the border into public life by violating a tenant of the civil culture. Such was the case of the Muslim bride. If the kidnappers had been able to dissuade Nesha Deenmahomed from marrying a Hindu man by sitting down with her appealing to her moral and religious beliefs, the incident would have been an example of cooperation but not communalism.

Social policy and Communalism

Group-level interests tear at the fabric of plural societies, as is evident in current global ethnic violence. Mauritius is unique in its ability to counter communal violence. As we have seen, communal collective action may be based upon coordinated interests or rooted in altruistic behavior. Social policies have developed which address the

importance of culture in shaping individual preferences, taking into account the selfish ego-centric nature of many individual choices. The parliamentary system is designed to increase cultural representation and prevent the political alienation of large ethnic groups. Coordination is further diminished by altering the interests of politicians and their constituencies. An over-arching civil culture has also developed, enforced by moralistic retribution. This nationalistic culture compels a second-order form of cooperation which undermines lower forms of ethnic cooperation. 'Fanatics' and 'fundamentalists' are punished. People who passively comply also face retribution for failing to dole out negative sanctions to violators of the established social rule. This combination of mechanisms has created a stable plural society, a truly rare phenomenon.

The Best Loser System

The authors of the Mauritian Constitution clearly recognized the importance of community, read culturally defined ethnic groups, in the formation of interest groups. While a straight representational government may have been more conducive to the formation of national and class identity, each of the major communities insisted upon a system that would ensure representation proportional to the population structure. Sir Harold Banwell, the appointed Electoral Commissioner, was faced with designing a parliamentary system which ensured ethnic representation. However, residential integration of these communities made it impossible to create electoral boundaries which accurately reflected communal interests (Mathur, 1991).

Because Hindus constituted a majority or near majority in every electoral district, other communities feared

that the Hindus would disproportionately dominate, given the structure of a Westminster parliamentary system. Conceivably, Hindus could win every seat in government while comprising only 53% of the population. Recognition of the importance of ethnic membership in defining interests has led to a complex manipulation of the standard Westminster model. Thus the Mauritius Constitution recognizes the existence of four communities:

...the population of Mauritians shall be regarded as including a Hindu community, a Muslim community and a Sino-Mauritian community; and every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or another of those three communities shall be regarded as belonging to the General Population, which shall itself be regarded as a fourth Community, (Mauritius, 1968 -- Section 3(4) of First Schedule of the Constitution).

All parliamentary candidates are required to declare and publish which constitutionally defined community they represent. (Members of the Marxist Lalit Party, believing class to be more elementary, pick their community out of a hat). Any member of the electorate has the opportunity to contest nominee's proclaimed community, at which point a Supreme Court justice makes the final determination of a candidate's ethnic identity.

Of the 70 seats in the Mauritian parliament, 62 are actually obtained through election. The island is divided into 20 electoral districts, each allotted three seats in parliament. In addition, two seats are reserved for delegates of Rodrigues, a small island dependency. The remaining 8 seats are reserved 'to ensure a fair and adequate representation of each

community,' (Section 5(1)). These 8 seats are allocated for what are affectionately called 'Best Losers.'

The first four Best Losers are selected purely based upon communal membership, regardless of their political affiliation. For example, suppose that only 5 of the 62 candidates hail from the Muslim community. According to the 1972 census, the last census to ask ethnic identity, there are some 137,173 Muslims in Mauritius. Thus there is one Muslim representative for every 27,435 Muslims. If Muslims are the least represented in relationship to the size of the community, the first Best Loser to be added will be that Muslim candidate who received the most votes but who did not win a seat.

But adding these Best Losers solely on the basis of communal affiliation can throw off the political balance of the original 62 elected members. Suppose the MMM party had 40 (64.5%) of the original 62 seats while the MSM party had 12 (19.4%) and the PT party has 10 (16.1%). After adding the first four Best Loser seats, party representations may have changed. Say two Best Losers happened to be members of the MSM and two are members of the PT. The MMM party would thus have lost representation in the parliament, dropping to 60.6%. The fifth Best Loser therefore would be from the most under-represented community who also was a member of the MMM. A total of four additional Best Losers may be selected based upon community and party membership.

While Mauritius is divided both vertically by class and horizontally by ethnic differences, historically these divisions tightly corresponded (Benedict 1962). The British felt that a democratic government could only exist in a society where

political power was widely distributed and where class-interests crossed ethnic boundaries, (Colonial Office quoted in Chan Low 1995). Where class-based and culture-based interests do not correspond, interest groups become smaller and more ephemeral, coalescing and subsiding depending upon the issue. Ethnic groups have, in fact, become more stratified by class as the economy has grown and diversified. Some intellectuals have begun to question the continued need for the Best Loser system, arguing that class interests are more fundamental.

Without eliminating group-based interests, the Best Loser system has provided a vent for ethnically coordinated issues to be floored and debated, minimizing alienation of large segments of the population. The Best Loser system validates the role of culture in shaping interests. The greatest opponents to the Best Loser system are the Movement Against Communalism and the LaLit Party. Each of these groups expressly believe that class-based interests are more fundamental to shaping political concerns than culture. They see the Best Loser system as a way of conflating real economic interests with ethnic rhetoric in an attempt to mystify the population as to the actual loci of power in Mauritian society. Marxist discourse aside, it would be a mistake to discount the importance of culture in shaping people's beliefs and behaviors, even if one were to argue for the greater importance of class relations.

The Best Loser system deserves some credit for maintaining social stability in Mauritius by further distributing power. However, while the system does increase ethnic representation, the communities defined in the nation's constitution do not correspond to actual ethnic groups, except perhaps in the case of Sino-Mauritians. Thus, even though

Hindus are the majority, deep cultural divisions exist within this community, including those based upon caste, language and religion. These divisions further dissipate power by eliminating the presence of large homogeneous interest groups which can work in concert and which have the political-economic clout to force their will on the rest of the population. Thus the great mix of Mauritian cultures is partially responsible for the nation's stability where the competing interests of different communities are in equilibrium rather than in harmony.

Despite the fact that numerous interest groups disperse power, making it more difficult for any one community to force its will on the population on a whole, Mauritians of all communities also recognize that deeply held cultural beliefs can create irreconcilable conflicts between groups. A small minority group can wield influence disproportional to its size thought acts of terrorism, for example. People with fundamental differences in belief cannot always find a common ground. How then is social stability maintained if not through brute force of a police state headed by a single ethnic group? As with the Best Loser system, social institutions exist which manipulate pay-off matrices in such ways so as it maintain social stability. Specifically, the representation of group-level interests are undermined politically. Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) would naturally want to represent the interests of their community which constitutes the foundation of their political authority.

But members of parliament are indoctrinated into a system that provides enormous incentives to the individual to compromise group-based interests. Individual Members of the Legislative Assembly are thrust into a lifestyle of prestige

and wealth. They enjoy a respectable salary, numerous legitimate tax breaks, and high pensions. In addition, lawmakers informed me of several methods allegedly used to indirectly take advantage of their position for personal financial gain. Tenders, building permits, and development schemes are but a few of the tools at the disposal of a resourceful member of parliament. Clearly, Mauritius does not have a corruption problem comparable to that of a country like Nigeria. Yet the continued undeniable existence of high level corruption has become a central issue, almost an obsession, for the electorate.⁹

Ministers, who are afforded even greater advantages, are largely appointed according to ethnic identity (after political affiliation, of course). On the surface such a practice may appear as an attempt to distribute authority according to ethnic affiliation but such appointments are equally useful in preventing ethnic conflict from invading the seat of government by ensuring that the most influential representatives of these groups have the most incentive for the perpetuation of the current government.

Jaugnauth's threat to dissolve parliament was an attempt to modify the sources of costs and benefits to individual lawmakers and thus to alter their pay-off matrices. MLAs were not simply voting on the CPE issue but voting for their continued position in government. The impact of the vote on each legislator's personal prosperity had the effect of driving a wedge between the interests of the individual MLA and the group they represented. Unfortunately for Jugnauth, this strategy proved to be insufficient. Enough members of the opposition were confident that a vote against the Prime Minister would assure them re-election to prevent the constitutional amendment from passing.

Ethnic coordination is undermined by altering the payoff matrices of individuals who can voice the political views of their constituencies. The privileges gained through a life of politics depend upon the graces of the Prime Minister. Mauritians vote based upon party membership. A vote for a party member in one's constituency is, in fact, a vote for a particular Prime Minister. Consequently, most assembly members owe their political careers to the Prime Minister, with whom they must stay in good graces to be awarded ministerial positions or other posts (Mathur, 1991). Members of Parliament, concerned with their own political careers, generally depend more upon allegiance to the Prime Minister than on voicing the beliefs of their own constituency. And as most governments are actually based upon party alliances, allegiance to the Prime Minister may create conflicts in loyalty, forcing still more compromise. Of course the Prime Minister's popularity is based upon popular support. When this wanes, his ability to keep politicians in line fades, as the latter form new opposition parties and disrupt the government in the hopes of new elections being called. This was the case with Jugnauth in 1995.

The success of Mauritius in maintaining peaceful ethnic relations is in part due to the existence institutions which create incentives for individuals to behave in ways that undermine ethnic-based coordination. Thus, on the one hand the Best Loser system would seem to encourage ethnic-based political representation, but other equally strong mechanisms exist to undermine the actual influence of the electorate as a whole on the political system, thereby maintaining the status quo and reducing conflict.

Illegitimacy of Fanatic Behavior

Mauritians dislike ethnic based coordination but recognize it is an essential part of their society to be tolerated if a rich and diverse cultural heritage is to be maintained. They fear ethnic fanaticism, however. Truly cooperative behaviors, in which the interests of the individual are not the driving force, lie outside the spheres of control normally instituted to maintain social stability. Cooperation is more difficult to manipulate or undermine than coordination because of the dissipated nature of moralistic retribution. It is not the individual actor but the community of potential punishers who must be the loci of influence to manipulate cooperation once spread. Unlike coordinated behaviors, the individual's interests cannot be influenced in isolation from the group. Cooperative behaviors are also only 'understandable' to members who share the cultural beliefs underlying the behavior; such behaviors may appear irrational to outsiders.

Interestingly, forms of ethnic cooperation which create inter-group conflicts are themselves stemmed by a form of nationalistic cooperation. Despite many differences in values, most all Mauritians subscribe to a national civil culture which takes precedence over ethnic beliefs. Fanaticism, or ethnic cooperation with costs to other groups, is a form of defection from national cooperation. Just as moralistic retribution can maintain ethnic cooperation, so too can it reinforce nationalistic cooperation. While any one group may try to defect at some point in time, retribution by the coalition of remaining ethnic groups keeps such behaviors from becoming firmly established and spreading.

Thus Muslim kidnapers, by infringing upon an individual's civil rights, defected from the social contract of civil cooperation . Forms of moralistic retribution were used to quell the behavior. The kidnapers were imprisoned. All major papers ran front page stories, embarrassing accomplices and reasserting the importance of an over-riding civil culture. These forms of retribution perpetuate civil cooperation by making the costs of defecting greater than the costs of cooperating. Therefore, when a newspaper asked prominent figures to comment on the affair, all stressed the overruling importance of civil culture to protect human rights, even when these were in conflict with their own ethnic beliefs.

Father Souchon, a Roman Catholic priest, noted that:

In Mauritius, Muslims and the Christian groups like Adventists, Jehovah's Witness, and Assembly of God, oppose mixed marriage. And this is their right. Moreover, each man and each woman has the right to live their life by their conscience, In a democratic state, one must respect these rights and, within this framework, the law (5-Plus Dimanche, 1996).

The entire Mauritian community, with the exception of fundamentalist Muslims, voiced their disapproval. Even members of Hizbullah were unwilling to openly express dissent from the civil order. Imam Beeharry, a Hizbullah Best Loser representative to Parliament, stated

If it is normal that a Muslim girl fall in love with a Hindu boy, I am all the same against mixed marriage like all religions everywhere. As for the kidnapping itself, I have nothing to say on this subject (5-Plus Dimanche, 1996).

Samioullah Lauthan, the Minister of the Environment (who is also Muslim), noted:

This type of situation raises a fundamental question, in my opinion, of knowing if the religious education of the girl came out well. If such is the case, the daughter should have known the perimeters within which she was called upon to act. Of the other part, a point strictly Muslim, the Muslim daughter must marry a man of the same culture as she. With a good religious education, one could bypass the source, so that such a problem didn't arrive with Nesha. But I am aware that there are parents who accept that their children marry into another religion for material reasons. But my experiences permit me to say that 75% of mixed marriages do not work for multiple reasons. But I condemn the kidnapping, because this is not legal (5-Plus Dimanche, 1996).

No single community has the political or economic clout to assert cultural-specific interests which conflict with society as a whole. Economic and political resources are widely dispersed and communities are cross-cut by conflicting class-based interests. The existing civil culture therefore perpetuates itself by punishing non-cooperators and passive non-punishers.¹⁰ Ethnic based cooperation is unable to overcome this obstacle because individual defectors are rooted out before radical ideas can spread.

Ironically, the peace enjoyed by Mauritius is probably linked to its colonial past. A small minority of French colonists were able to instill a culture of moralistic retribution originally through the threat of force. While the original

impetus for civic cooperation has disappeared, the French set up a self-perpetuating cultural feed-back of moralistic retribution which now maintains democracy in a plural society.

Conclusion

While political scientists have long utilized game theory and pay-off models to predict social phenomena, culture has often been left out of the equation. In plural societies like Mauritius, the culture is central in defining collective action. Communalism is qualitatively differentiated by Mauritians from forms of collective action, such as social class, which interests are not defined specifically by culture. Thus when wealthy Hindus, Chinese, and Franco-Mauritians act in ways to protect their interests, such as lobbying for a tax benefit, Mauritians would define such behavior as simple human nature, and in no way communalism.

Communalism in Mauritius encompasses all forms of culturally defined collective action which creates inter-group conflict. Culture can provide the impetus for and shape collective action in several ways. Culturally learned values, beliefs, and preferences shape the interests of individuals. Members of an ethnic group, in sharing a cultural corpus, will often find that their interests coincide, while conflicting with the interests of members of other ethnic groups. Each individual member of an ethnic group may find it in his or her own best interest to coordinate behaviors with con-ethnics to obtain commonly desired goals.

On the other hand, culture also plays a fundamental role in the perpetuation of cooperative collective action. The evolved reliance on culture and the dependency on frequency-

dependent transmission has set the stage for the perpetuation of maladaptive behaviors and the maintenance of ethnic group boundaries. Those groups which subscribe to individually maladaptive forms of altruism may spread because the behavior is group-adaptive.

While culture is implicated in the emergence of both forms of collective action, the specific mechanisms and pay-off matrices for these phenomena greatly differ. These differences have a profound influence on the specific forms of group behavior which emerge from the ethnographic record. At the same time, it is often difficult to differentiate coordination from cooperation. Costs and benefits can be difficult to assess and pay-off matrices are difficult to model. For these reasons, Mauritians subsume all forms of collective action under the term communalism when (1) culture is a central force in defining interests, and when (2) culture-groups are brought into conflict.

Mauritians thus deal with communalism by institutionalizing it as they stamp it out. Many will even go as far as to deny its existence, telling the resident anthropologist that all ethnic groups in Mauritius live in complete harmony. Ethnically defined coordination, being driven by culturally defined interests which are maximized in a rational manner by isolated individuals, are more easily predicted and manipulated. The Best Loser System was formulated precisely to accommodate culturally learned preferences in shaping the interests of groups. Even the Constitution draws attention to and validates the role of culture in shaping interests.

At the same time, ethnic cooperation is dealt with quite differently. The validity of such behavior is repudiated and instances of it are repressed. When cases of ethnic

cooperation do occur, such as the kidnapping, bystanders rely on a civil culture of moralistic retribution to quell them. Thus when Mauritians tell foreigners that the country is free of communalism, in a sense they are being truthful. Ethnic cooperation, whenever it created conflict, is rapidly rooted out, and thus not present. The potential problem of communalism, however, is omnipresent.

The system works, in part, because no culture group has a clear grip on political or economic power. Ethnic cooperation is quickly stamped out by a coalition of the remaining groups whenever conflict is created. If the Hindu community was a vast monolithic community which monopolized political-economic resources, it would be possible for Hindu nepotistic ethnic cooperation to become firmly established, bringing ethnic groups into conflict, a situation more in line with traditional models of plural societies. A similar situation may have occurred in Sri Lanka, for example.

But in Mauritius a commonly shared civil code draws the line between ethnic cooperation which is commendable charity, and ethnic cooperation, which is condemnable fanatic communalism. Denying the legitimacy of ethnic cooperation and the immediate enforcement of negative sanctions keep such beliefs from spreading when they do emerge. Mauritians are thus correct, if one really stretches it at least, when they deny the existence of communalism based upon ethnic cooperation. Such ideas are quickly rooted out and extinguished as soon as they manifest themselves, before they have a chance to metastasize throughout the ethnic group, so they are only transient while quite real.

Eriksen noted that Mauritians make 'a sharp distinction between public and private life, where inter-ethnic unity (or rather non-ethnically based social organization) is demanded in every context perceived as public...[and]...the officially acknowledged 'diversity' is ideally to be confined to "private life",' (Eriksen, 1988). Ethnic coordination and cooperation are subsumed under the rubric of diversity rather than communalism, so long as they do not cross the boundary into public life, so long as ethnic groups are not brought into conflict by the ethnically defined collective action.

It seems, then, that peaceful ethnic relations in Mauritius are built upon the underlying structure of dispersed interest groups. The multitude of competing powers and cross-cutting conflicts of interest minimize instances of ethnic coordination and prevent the run-away spread of ethnic cooperation. This product of history has worked to the advantage of all Mauritians, whose peaceful plural coexistence has permitted the growth of a stable economy and fostered a high standard of living.

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Notes

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- ² According to Le Mauricien on the 16th of November, 1995, the vote to amend the constitution broke down as follows:
For: 41 deputies (MSM 24, RMM 11, MTD 2, MMSM 3, IND 1)
Against: 1 (IND 1)
Absent: 3 (MSM 1, PMSD 1, IND 1)
Abstentions: 21 (PTr 7, MMM 10; OPR 2, MSM 1, RMM 1)

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- ³The RMM (Renouveau Militant Mauricien) splintered from the MMM in August 1993 to join a coalition with the MSM, (Bowman, personal communication).
- ⁴Except for the two seats allocated to delegates from the dependency of Rodrigues, where neither predominate coalition had candidates on the ticket.
- ⁵Real names are used as they have become a mater of public record given the inordinate amount of press coverage.
- ⁶The highly slanted press coverage is a clear indication of the ethnic tension between the Muslim and Creole communities, a complex issue deserving it own treatment elsewhere.
- ⁷The press coverage probably did not help because the newspapers transmitted quite different ideas and information. One could imagine, however, a cultural idea which uses the popular press as a host for reproduction. That was not the case here.
- ⁸There is no correlation between beverage choice and ethnic ownership of the bottling companies. While Muslims drink Pepsi over Coke, they equally prefer Sprite over 7-Up. Sprite is bottled by the competing company, owned by members of the Franco-Mauritian community. Another complicating factor is the fact the Muslims in Mauritius have increasingly identified with the Arab world. Coke was for many years banned by Arab nations for doing business in Israel. Thus Mauritian Muslims may have chosen Pepsi over Coke as a sign of solidarity with the Arabic world, just as many Muslim Mauritians suddenly began to mark Arabic as their ancestral language, rather than Urdu of Bhojpuri (Hookoomsing, 1986).
- ⁹The first Prime Minister of Mauritius, S. Ramgoolam, was forced to appoint a Supreme Court Justice to head a commission on corruption in 1979. The report highlighted ministerial corruption and two ministers resigned. The undeniable existence of corruption again became evident in 1985 when four Mauritian MPs, traveling on their diplomatic passports, were arrested in Amsterdam for smuggling Heroin, (Bowman, 1991)
- ¹⁰One becomes an accomplice to a crime by virtue of knowledge of the event and failing to take socially prescribed actions, such as informing the authorities.