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THE CHALLENGE OF HYBRIDITY: MORMONISM IN MAURITIUS,

1980–2020

by

Marie Vinnarasi Chintaram

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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2021

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ABSTRACT

The Challenge of Hybridity: Mormonism in Mauritius, 1980–2020

by

Marie Vinnarasi Chintaram, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Philip L. Barlow
Department: History

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emerged within the Mauritian landscape in the early 1980s after the arrival of foreign missionary work. With a population of Indian, African, Chinese, French heritage and other mixed ethnicities, Mauritius celebrates multiculturalism, with many calling it the “rainbow nation.” Religiously, Hinduism dominates the scene on the island, followed by Christianity (with Catholicism as the majority); the small remainder of the population observes Islam or Buddhism. Although Mauritian society equally embraces people from these ethnic groups, it also has historically marginalized communities who represent a “hybrid” of the mentioned demographic groups. This article, based on ethnographic research, explores the experiences of Mauritian Latter-day Saints of Indian descent as they navigate the challenges and implications of membership in Mormonism. Specifically, this article focuses on how US based Mormonism has come to embrace the cultural heritage of people from the Indian diaspora; and how Mauritian Latter-day Saints from the Indian diaspora perceive their own belonging and space making within an American born religion. This case study presents how the local and intersecting adaptations of language,

race, and local leadership within a cosmopolitan society like Mauritius have led to the partial hybridization of the Church into the hegemony of ethnic communities within Mauritian Latter-day Saint practices. These merging of cultures and world views prompts both positive and challenging religious experiences for Mauritian Church members. This article illustrates the implications and pressures of the Church trying to globalize its faith base while adapting its traditionally Anglocentric approaches to religious practices into multiracial, multicultural cosmopolitan communities such as Mauritius.

(128 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Challenge of Hybridity: Mormonism in Mauritius, 1980–2020

Marie Vinnarasi Chintaram

This thesis focuses on the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius. This thesis illustrates the implications and pressures of the Church trying to globalize the faith, correlating Mormonism with and conforming it to cosmopolitan communities such as Mauritius.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The trajectory of my life changed in 2015. I was at a crossroads in my life, working toward my undergraduate degree as a nontraditional student. After years of being a stay-at-home mom, I was wondering what my next steps should be after graduation. Serendipitously, I noticed a flyer on the bulletin board of my church advertising an event related to the history of Mormonism. One of the presenters caught my attention: Taunalyn Rutherford, a Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies doing historical ethnographic research on Mormonism in India. Her paper piqued my interest because of the connection to my ancestral land. I reached out to her and learned more about her ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in India.

In November 2015, Taunalyn presented her research at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in Atlanta and invited me to attend. I was pleasantly surprised to find a community where religion is investigated rigorously, interlaced within a spectrum of insider and outsider perspectives. While attending the conference and speaking to presenters, it hit me that I would thrive in academia. I wanted to become a professor and dedicate my career to recording the voices of the marginalized. It was in Atlanta that I decided to pursue a Master's in History or Religious Studies with a focus on Global Mormonism. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my dear friend, Taunalyn Rutherford, for her valuable input on my thesis and her support.

I would especially like to thank my committee members, Drs. Phil Barlow, Christopher Conte, and Ravi Gupta, for their support and assistance throughout the entire process. Professor Philip L. Barlow, who at the time was the Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture at USU, and my dissertation committee chair opened the

doors to the limitless possibilities in academia. Our meeting at the Mormon History Association (year) was nothing short of a coincidence. Professor Barlow's incomparable knowledge of Mormon History and direct advice pushed me to do my best. He has been a great mentor throughout this laborious process. It is an honor to call him a mentor and a friend. I also thank him for introducing me to Ravi Gupta, the Charles Redd Chair of Religious Studies at USU. I thank Professor Ravi Gupta for providing insightful comments on my dissertation. Professor Christopher Conte offered valuable suggestions for improving this work and for helping me navigate the turmoil of the IRB process application. To my many friends and colleagues who offered their encouragement, moral support, and patience as I worked my way from the initial proposal to this final document, I also want to express my sincere gratitude. This work is dedicated to my beloved parents, Marcel and Marceline Kishna Chowriamah, who, through their Catholic faith and Indian heritage, fostered a deep love of learning in me and my brother, Gnanapragrassen, and to my children, Isha, Nikhil, and Milan, who always thought that I was doing too much homework. I hope that each one of you never gives up as you discover your talents and gifts throughout your learning journey. Finally, to my husband, Jay (Kailash): you are a pillar of strength, and I thank you for supporting me through this wildest journey as a graduate student. It has been a rollercoaster ride, and I wouldn't have made it so far without you.

Marie Vinnarasi Chintaram

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, while living two oceans away from Utah, American-born Lori Palmer documented how Mormonism was being translated on the island of Mauritius. During a Church meeting, she observed a mother sitting on the pew with her son. “When I first met her,” Lori Palmer recalled, “she had worn red powder sprinkled in the part of her hair, a small diamond on her right nostril, and a red tiki dot between her eyebrows.”¹ Since her baptism, this formerly Hindu woman no longer wore her red tiki dot or her nose stud and “had also traded her soft, flowing sari for a skirt and blouse similar to that worn by the sister missionaries.”² Lori, herself a Latter-day Saint convert, reflected on this experience as she hoped that her new Indian sister in the gospel would “find an inspired balance between her cultural heritage and the heritage she adopted when she joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”³ The official Church magazine featured Lori’s article almost 30 years ago, but the cultural, ethnic, and identity tensions that her story illustrated continue to affect The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worldwide.⁴

Lori’s article brings to mind the conversation around faith, local adaptations, and the positionality of privilege among various ethnicities and races. For example, Lori tells her story from her perspective as a white, American Latter-day Saint woman experiencing cultural and religious diversity on an island in the middle of the Indian

¹ Lori Palmer, “At Home on the Island of Mauritius,” *Ensign*, March 1991, accessed March 5, 2019, accessed July 13, 2020, <http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/ensign/1991/03/at-home-on-the-island-of-mauritius>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ In future mentions, I will refer to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as “the Church,” or “the Latter-day Saint Church. The terms Saints, Latter-day Saints, and Church member will be used interchangeably in this work.

Ocean. Second, Lori's story underscores the elephant in the room concerning global diversities within Mormon communities: the ability of Mormonism to accommodate local cultures and identities. If Mormonism can accommodate cultural and local adaptations in its theology, who is defining these boundaries within the Church? Is it the Church leaders in Salt Lake City, or local leaders around the world? Or will the worshippers themselves take responsibility for striking an "inspired balance" in navigating their cultural identity within their new faith? "I learned that the gospel has room for cultural differences," reflected Lori in her article.⁵ But is it wishful thinking for Lori and others to believe that the Church communities in cosmopolitan societies will be able to balance Mormon theology with diverse, multicultural heritages?

With a population of Indian, African, Chinese, French heritage, and others of mixed ethnicities, Mauritius celebrates multiculturalism, and many call it the rainbow nation. Indians form the dominant ethnic group on the island, followed those of African descent (Creoles), Franco Mauritians, and Chinese Mauritians. Although the Mauritian society equally embraces people from these ethnic groups, it also marginalizes anyone who represents a "hybrid" of the distinct demographic groups.

Growing up, I was one of these hybrids. I grew up in one of the rare Catholic-Indian households in Mauritius. We spoke Kreol, watched the daily news, and American movies dubbed in French, memorized all the latest Bollywood songs and attended British-based public schools—all the characteristics of a typical Mauritian family. Yet, my parents also raised me in an unconventional home—a Catholic-Indian household—in which our daily rituals incorporated both ancestral Indian culture and Christian religious

⁵ Lori Palmer, "At Home on the Island of Mauritius."

practices. My private space and the public sphere frequently clashed during uncomfortable moments that reminded me that the “rainbow nation” embraced different races, cultures, ethnicities, and religions only so long as the dominant ethnic-religious groups did not mix. For example, Mauritius embraces African Catholics and Indian Hindus, but the dominant culture marginalizes Indian Catholics because they hybridized the distinct demographic categories imposed by the dominant culture. Coming from an Indian heritage, raised speaking Kreol and French by a Catholic family on an island off the coast of Africa, and currently living in Utah as a newly naturalized citizen of the United States, I am currently a Latter-day Saint married to a Church member who was raised Hindu.⁶ Certain social pressures intrinsic to my diverse background have provoked my curiosity about the implications of acculturation and the value of examining interactions between different cultures and religions through a historical lens.

Joseph Smith established The Church of Christ –later “The Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”– in New York on April 6, 1830, with himself as the first prophet.⁷ The Church attracted a religious community who believed in a living prophet as well as in a set of ancient scriptures (the Book of Mormon) coming from the Ancient Americas. The first members practiced polygamy, which they believed to be a higher law from God and migrated outside of the United States to a new territory (Utah) where they could worship

⁶ Kreol is the vernacular Mauritian French-based language and was developed as the slaves’ language during the French colonial era in Mauritius. See Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite, Power and Anxiety in the Face of Change* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2015), 29.

⁷ “Joseph Smith: Prophets of the Restoration,” *Church History*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/prophets-of-the-restoration/joseph-smith?lang=eng>.

freely. In 1971, the Church reached 3 million members with over 5000 church units (called wards and branches) across the globe.⁸

The first missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in Mauritius, a small island located off the east coast of Madagascar, in 1979. At the time, Mauritius's population of over 950,000 included a long-established Indian population.⁹ Sixty-nine percent of Mauritians are of Indian descent (seventeen percent of that number are Muslim), twenty-eight percent are of mixed African ancestry, three percent are of Chinese descent, and two percent are of European descent.¹⁰ Religiously, Hinduism dominates the scene on the island, followed by Christianity (with Catholicism as the majority); the small remainder of the population observes Islam or Buddhism. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emerged within this complicated society in the early 1980s.

In the 1970s, Ellen Sookhoo, Henri Babajee, Marlene Padiachy, and Monique Padiachy—all Latter-day Saint Mauritians living in Europe and the United States— spearheaded the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius.¹¹ Following their conversion to Mormonism in the 1970s, they wrote to the Church

⁸ “Growth of the Church,” *Newsroom*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/topic/church-growth>; “Worldwide Statistics,” *Newsroom*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics>; “The Annual Report of the Church,” *Ensign*, July 1972, accessed August 25, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1972/07/the-annual-report-of-the-church?lang=eng>.

⁹ Hal Hyde Hunter, “The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Mascarene Islands, 1987,” MS 13093, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; “Mauritius: Chronology,” *Global Histories*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories/mauritius/mu-chronology?lang=eng>; “Mauritius Population Overview,” *World Population Review*, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/mauritius-population>.

¹⁰ Rosabelle Boswell, “Unravelling le Malaise Creole: Hybridity and Marginalization in Mauritius,” *Journal of Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12 (2005): 197.

¹¹ A mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a geographical administrative area to which church missionaries are assigned.

headquarters in Salt Lake City to request that missionaries be sent to their homeland. In September 1979, The Church assigned Joseph T. and Ruth Edmunds, an American couple, to establish the Church in Madagascar, Réunion, and Mauritius. In January 1980, the Edmunds visited Mauritius for a month, contacting relatives of the Mauritian Saints living abroad and inviting members and friends of the Church to contact them through the local newspaper, *Le Mauricien*. Two years later, in 1981, the Church organized the first branch on the island. The government of Mauritius officially recognized The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1985.¹² Since then, the Church has established three local congregations (Rose-Hill, Phoenix, and Flacq) on the island.¹³

The Church's challenging encounter with the complicated cultural context of Mauritius reveals many of the complexities of religious conversion. Indian Mauritian Latter-day Saints are constantly negotiating their faith in conjunction with their Indian cultural norms, practices, and identities in a space where the majority of Latter-day Saints are of African descent (mixed or black Mauritians of African descent), and where the leaders are often either white expatriates living permanently on the island or white missionaries temporarily serving in the Southeastern African region. Exploring the intersections between race, ethnicity, religion, and identity in Mauritius offers a rich opportunity to examine how the Church is tackling this situation. More broadly, Mauritius's case can inform discussions of the presence of Christianity in the Global South.¹⁴

¹² "Mauritius: Chronology," *Global Histories*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The *Global South* is an emerging term which refers to countries seen as low and middle income in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean by the World Bank. See "Global South," *Wikipedia*, last modified September 5, 2019, accessed June 5, 2020, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_South.

This thesis illustrates the pressures Church missionaries face who are trying to globalize the faith, correlating Mormonism with local cultures and conforming faith practices to cosmopolitan communities such as Mauritius. According to Immanuel Kant, cosmopolitanism is defined as “being a citizen of two worlds.”¹⁵ The concept of cosmopolitan as it applies to societies first emerged during ancient Greek and Roman societies but was revived in the increasingly interconnected postcolonial world of the 1990s. Since then, the interpretations of the concept of cosmopolitanism have varied, ranging from “elite Western individuals who were the fullest expression of European bourgeois capitalism and colonial empires” to forces of globalization within societies that, provoke the resistance of the local... [creating] “a dialectic between the global and the local.”¹⁶ The dialectic between the global and the local may take the form of differentiating and negotiating local adaptations, race, and power among Mauritian Latter-day Saints. When applied to societies, then, the term “cosmopolitan” indicates that the societies either have been heavily influenced by globalized, capitalist economies or that the societies have been shaped by a mixture of colonial powers and local cultures. The nature of the conversion to Mormonism in Mauritius, therefore, opens the door to questions of race and power within the Church on both a global and local level.

This thesis will examine the ways in which the Church is embracing the cultural heritage of Indian Latter-day Saints as well as how Indian Church members are negotiating their religious and ethnic identities in a society in which Indian is

¹⁵ Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies*, page 18, Theory, Culture & Society 2002 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 19(1–2): 17–44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17; Robert Schreier, “Cosmopolitanism, Hybrid Identities, and Religion,” *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context* 40 (January 2011): 26.

synonymous with Hinduism. **In this thesis, I explore a) the challenges and implications to the Church arising from their embrace of the cultural heritage of people from the Indian diaspora; and b) the challenges and implications to Mauritian Latter-day Saints from the Indian diaspora because of their embrace of Mormonism.**

The thesis examines these relationships through a historical perspective in a postcolonial setting, spotlighting the understudied voices and perspectives from several fields, including Mormon studies, conversion studies, ethnic studies, Creole studies, diasporic studies, and postcolonial studies. This historical study of the ways in which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius has translated Mormonism into a predominantly Hindu, postcolonial setting opens doors to deeper conversations within the scholarship mentioned above.

Contribution

The thesis draws on and contributes to three lively scholarly arenas: Mormon Studies, Conversion Theory, and Ethnic and Racial Studies. It adds to the first of these—the growing interdisciplinary field of Mormon Studies—by dissecting the history, culture, and power structure within Mormonism through the Mauritian case study. This case study also probes the complexities and limitations of Christian religious conversion in a cosmopolitan society.

The Scholarship of Mormon Studies

In the early 20th century, American scholars predicted that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would experience an increased flux of membership and either become “the first American-made world religion” or be categorized as “a new religious

tradition.”¹⁷ Since then, Religious Studies scholars continue to debate the fate of the Church as a global religion. Scholar Rick Philip claimed that the Latter-day Saints Church is an American faith transposed to other countries.¹⁸ Global Christianity historian Jehu Hanciles offered a similar view on the fate of Mormonism in the 21st century.

Hanciles reflected on the growth of the Church, stating:

An inbuilt or programmatic resistance to enculturation puts Mormonism out of step with other major Christian traditions that are flourishing [in the global south]. The centralized control of form and content that marks Mormonism means that the Church takes on a decidedly American image in non-Western contexts at the expense of local creativity and rootedness. To some extent, this pattern reflects the strong power differential between Utah and indigenous communities worldwide. It also denotes inherent limitations in Mormonism’s capacity to globalize.¹⁹

Both Philips and Hanciles pointed out that until the Church begins adapting to local cultures and reducing the Americanized rhetoric, the Church will not be able to fully internationalize at the grass-roots level. Historical sociologist Armand Mauss also argued that the fate of Mormonism will ultimately have to be “Japanized, Francized, and Argentinized (and so on around the world)” in order for scholars to consider it a world

¹⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* (New York: Columbia Press, 2005); Seth L. Bryant, Henri Gooren, Rick Phillips, and David G. Stewart, Jr. “Conversion and Retention in Mormonism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 771; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987)

¹⁸ Rick Philips, “Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism,” *Novo Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10 (August 2006): 53-68.

¹⁹ Jehu J. Hanciles, ““Would That All God’s People Were Prophets: Mormonism and the New Shape of Global Christianity,” in *From the Outside Looking In*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Matthew J. Grow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 365.

religion.²⁰ In other words, the Latter-day Saints Church will not be able to become a global religion until the formal institution in Salt Lake City changes its policies to allow for more local adaptations.

On the other side of the debate, there are scholars who claim the Latter-day Saints Church is gradually metamorphosing into a global faith. Philip Jenkins, a scholar of world Christianity, predicted that “the face of Mormonism will, literally, become darker, as more and more of the members come from the global South...[and] that change will be far more than merely an ethnic shift, as those new members will be raising questions quite different from those affecting other regions.”²¹ Jenkins’ statement indicates that Mormonism is indeed becoming a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, globalized church. However, this globalization of the Latter-day Saints faith comes with a caveat: primarily white, homogenous American males run the Utah-based centralized Mormon enterprise, thus complicating the claim that the Church is globalizing. Many scholars agree that more research and data are needed to illustrate and assess the Latter-day Saint religious activities worldwide. This thesis aims to offer such evidence regarding the complexity of the relationship between the formal and informal institutions within the Church, entering into conversation with scholars’ arguments about Mormonism’s status as a global religion.

The Scholarship of Conversion Studies

²⁰ Mauss, Armand L. *The Angel and the Beehive: the Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 205.

²¹ Philip Jenkins, “Letting Go: Understanding Mormon Growth in Africa,” in *From the Outside Looking In*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Matthew J. Grow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 349.

In 1962, Chieko Okazaki became the first non-Caucasian to serve as a general board member in the LDS church worldwide. On March 31, 1990, the Church leaders called her to serve as the first counselor in the Relief Society presidency for seven years. Born in Hawaii in 1926, Okazaki grew up in a Japanese Buddhist family and joined the LDS church at the age of 15.²² After her conversion, Okazaki gave an interview where she recalled her life experiences, including her religious conversion from Buddhism to Mormonism:

I brought Buddhism with me. Buddhism teaches love for everybody. The Buddhist values are not limited just to the people in the Buddhist faith. They include the whole wide world. When you talk to the Dalai Lama, you can feel a love that he has for all humankind. He doesn't preach, "You must belong to my church." He preaches, "You must become better people because of what I am telling you." Christians, Muslims, Buddhists go to listen to him, and they become better Christians, better Muslims, and better Buddhists because of the values and morals that he teaches. He makes you think, "I can become a better Christian because of what I heard." He is a messenger or a disciple of God, in a different way. I came to the Church, having all these values. The Church didn't teach me that.²³

During the interview, Okazaki expounded upon the positive experiences and challenges she faced when joining the Church, which led the interviewer to ask why she

²² Greg A. Prince, "'There Is Always a Struggle': An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45 (Spring 2012): 112; Chieko N. Okazaki, "Baskets and Bottles," *Liahona*, April 2018, accessed August 25, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2018/04/baskets-and-bottles?lang=eng>.

²³ Greg A. Prince, "'There Is Always a Struggle': An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45 (Spring 2012): 128.

stayed loyal to the Latter-day Saints faith. She responded, “I stayed because it was God and Jesus Christ that I wanted to follow and be like, not individual human beings.”²⁴

Years later, Okazaki went on to become one of the best-selling authors in the Latter-day Saint community. Never shying away from talking about racism, women’s issues, and sexual abuse, Chieko spoke to women of all races, including stay-at-home moms, working moms, divorcees, and single women. Latter-day Saints women felt connected to her because of her candid, authentic discussions about her conversion and life experiences.

Okazaki’s conversion illustrates how conversion can be multidirectional, organic, and confrontational, as “different societies and cultures encounter and interact with one another, in both colonial and postcolonial locations,” causing religious institutions and practitioners to celebrate, adapt, and collide, contesting their shared religious space.²⁵ Okazaki’s conversion story debunks the myth that converts abandon their previous religious faith completely once they convert to a new faith tradition. She embraced her new faith while unequivocally reminding her new Church community that her previous religious experiences made her who she is. Okazaki’s strategy of adapting Buddhist teachings to fit her new faith may provide new insights for studies of hybridity in religious conversion.

Early scholars who delved into the scholarship of conversion studies described conversion as a dramatic, sudden change followed by a forceful rejection of previously held religious beliefs.²⁶ Today, by contrast, religious scholars “view the majority of

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

conversions as taking place gradually over a period of time and as less dramatic and radical,” as converts consciously and subconsciously pick and choose which bits and pieces from each religious faith to renounce and embrace.²⁷ Okazaki’s narration is one of many illustrating how religious practitioners live religious hybridity.

The surprising growth of new religious movements within a more secularized world has caused more scholars to investigate the various processes of religious conversion. The field of conversion studies is tracking, recording, and examining their findings; in doing so, scholars have begun to detect a series of patterns among converts. This thesis aims to add to the growing body of evidence regarding conversion experiences in order to inform scholarly understanding of the dynamic and malleable processes by which conversion occurs.

Hybridity: The Scholarship of Racial and Ethnic Studies

Another area of scholarship with which this thesis engages is Ethnic Studies. Specifically, the field of Ethnic Studies explores the nuances and ambiguity of cultural hybridization, its opportunities, and limitations on the Mauritian landscape. Scholars of cultural hybridity argue that hybridization is not a recent product of the “consequences of cultural globalization,” but rather that hybridization has always existed, albeit in limited and confined spaces.

Due to increasingly porous transnational borders, the effect of hybridization is spreading widely, thus challenging the practices, ideas, representation, interactions, and norms of homogenous societies. Yet, the fact that hybridization “sometimes takes place at

²⁷ Ibid.

someone's expense" reminds us of the power struggle between groups of people.

Additionally, it can potentially erase the memory of "regional traditions and local roots."²⁸

Post-colonial scholar Mary Louise Pratt introduced the term "contact zones," which she defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."²⁹ The daily experiences of Mauritian communities are "contact zones." This thesis leverages the various voices and perspectives of Mauritians to explore the evolution of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in such an environment.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: History of Mauritius

The first chapter explores the history of multiculturalism in Mauritius, where multiethnic, multireligious, and multiracial communities experience everyday life on approximately 2,040 square kilometers (790 square miles) of land. In order to adequately understand the contemporary aspects of the Mauritian experience, it is crucial to explore the historical context of the construction of Mauritian identity, which has "endured European colonization and where society remains ethnically hierarchical."³⁰

Chapter 2: Mormonism in Mauritius (1978–1999): Race and Local Adaptations

This chapter provides an overview of the historical evolution of the Church in Mauritius from 1978 to 1999. There is a dearth of scholarly work on the history of the LDS Church in Mauritius, which makes it difficult to establish a historiography on the

²⁸ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 7.

²⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33-40.

³⁰ Rosabelle Boswell "Unravelling le Malaise Creole," 196.

subject. However, drawing from the archival resources of the Church History Library, former missionaries' journals, and oral history interviews of the Mauritian members, this chapter establishes a timeline for the period 1978 to 1999. Several primary and secondary sources demonstrate the changes, progression, and challenges of the Church in Mauritius, including conversion narratives among Mauritian members. Finally, this chapter highlights conversations on race and local adaptations among Mauritians and deconstructs Mauritians' religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities within a Latter-day Saint context.

Chapter 3: Mormonism in Mauritius (2000–2020)-Race and Local Adaptations

Chapter three continues the discussion on Mormonism, race, and local adaptations to Latter-day Saints' practices in Mauritius. With the support of primary and secondary archival as well as oral history interviews, this chapter dissects the tension between the formal and informal establishments within Mormonism, paying particular attention to the Indian Latter-day Saints' community in Mauritius.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis focuses on the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius and, more specifically, the experiences of Mauritian Latter-day Saints of Indian descent. This thesis, therefore, fills a gap in the historical narrative around local accommodations within Mormonism in Mauritius. In addition, the following historical analysis of Mormonism in Mauritius offers broader insights on how the Church is engaging with cosmopolitan societies, given the tensions between the formal Salt Lake-based headquarters and the local cultures in various postcolonial settings. The expansion of the Church globally will continue to test the Church in terms

of local adaptations. Therefore, this thesis seeks to outline the strengths of the Church and its membership in the Global South as well as define prevailing challenges. It elucidates how local adaptations, race, and local leadership within a cosmopolitan society like Mauritius have led to the partial hybridization of the Church and the hegemony of ethnic communities within the Church, prompting both positive and challenging religious experiences for Mauritian members.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF MAURITIUS

Mauritians are comfortable sharing various public spaces such as public schools, workplaces, and concerts. Yet, in the religious sphere, most Mauritians are still divided along racial and ethnic lines. In many cities and towns on the island, it is common to see a Catholic Church, a Mandir, a Kovil, and a Mosque in the same neighborhood. Hindus pray at the Mandir and Kovil, Muslim Mauritians attend the mosque, and Catholics go to the Catholic mass. By worshipping at their respective religious buildings, each ethnic community maintains a distance during religious worship. When converts of many ethnicities and races, attend The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all members, regardless of race and ethnicity, worship in one place together. To the white expatriates or North American Church leaders overseeing the Church in Mauritius, all the members are the same: Mauritians. But that is not the case. In Mauritius, dominant ethnic communities interact with marginalized ethnic communities, making the relationships between Mauritian brothers and sisters in the gospel more nuanced and complex.

“In Mauritius, we are proud of our multiculturalism society. Mauritius stands out for its unique blend of cultures, races, religions, and celebrations thanks to its ancestral lines that are very diverse. But when all the ethnicities and races are united under a common religious faith, which in this case is Mormonism, suddenly, race, ethnicities, and cultures become a taboo subject,” said Samantha, a Mauritian Latter-day Saint woman.³¹

Why does this woman feel it is taboo to discuss race, ethnicity, and culture in a country that prides itself on its multiculturalism? To answer this question, it is essential to

³¹ All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 21, 2020.

first explore the history of Mauritius's ethnic communities and their interactions with each other. This chapter covers the history of Mauritius briefly through various lenses—race, culture, religion and politics, and ethnicity. Chapter 1 also offers a multifaceted perspective on the history of religiosity in Mauritius and will help situate how Mauritian members at the intersection of their “rainbow nation” experienced an American-born Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

History of Mauritius

Before the arrival of European settlers, no indigenous communities lived on the island. Around 1510, Portuguese explorers sighted the island, named it Ilha do Cirne (Island of Cirne), but made no attempt to colonize it. In 1598, the Dutch made their way to the island Mauritius and renamed it in honor of Prince Maurice of Nassau, a Stadtholder of Holland. The Dutch settlement introduced sugarcane to the island and brought slaves from Madagascar to cultivate the land. Scholars hypothesize that either natural disasters or poor leadership and poor management of the colony led the Dutch to desert Mauritius in 1710.³²

On June 27th, 1715, the French took over the ownership of Mauritius and renamed it Ile de France. The French East Indian Company dominated slave trading in the Indian Ocean by bringing slaves from Mozambique and West Africa to Mauritius. The French East Indian Company also shipped indentured servants (artisans and laborers) and slaves from India to Mauritius in 1728, greatly diversifying the ethnic and religious makeup of the population. Although most of the Indians who came to Mauritius during this time period

³² J. Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius* (Stanley, Rose-Hill, Mauritius: Ed. de l'Ocean Indien, 1999), 7, 9, 11.

were Hindu, some of them were practicing Muslims and Christians.³³

French Colonial Era

The French colonial era began with new ethnic groups emerging on the island. The following demographic groups populated Mauritius during the French colonial era (1715 – 1810): white French planters who owned slaves; the gens de couleur, a result of mixed relationships between the white planters and African or Indian slaves; the Creoles (African slaves or individuals of mixed ethnicities); and Indians (free and slaves).³⁴ The majority of Indians were Hindu, but a minority of them were either Muslim or Christian.³⁵ Creoles comprised the largest demographic group, followed by the gens de couleur, with Indians as the minority. As we will see in this chapter, the downfall of the French colonial power to the British empire will indefinitely alter the makeup of Mauritius society.

In 1724, King Louis XV reinforced the Code Noir—a series of laws to secure the French colonies’ primary commodity—sugar cane—and to safeguard the French authority in the colonies. From Article 2 of the Code Noir, the Catholic King Louis XV declared that “All our slaves living on our islands shall be baptized and taught in the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion.”³⁶ The French Empire and the Catholic leaders

³³ Ibid., 11-24, Benedict Burton, *Indians in a Plural Society: A Report on Mauritius* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1961), 16; Vijaya Teelock, *Mauritian History: from Its Beginnings to Modern Times* (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 2009), 106-107; Shawkat M. Tooranwa, “We Were Here First: The Rhetoric of Identity and Anterior among African-American Muslims and Muslims in Mauritius,” *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 8, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 6.

³⁴ Jean Claude de l’Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille races: Au Temps de l’Ile de France* (Mauritius: Ed. Le Printemps, 2004), 56; Jean Claude de l’Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats: La Periode Anglaise* (Mauritius: Ed. Le Printemps, 2007), 19.

³⁵ Marcel Chowriamah, “Preserving a Multidimensional Heritage in a Plural Society,” special issue, *Journal of Mauritian Studies* 5 (2010): 93.

³⁶ Amédée Nagapen, *The Indian Christian Community in Mauritius* (Port-Louis, Mauritius: Roman Catholic Diocese of Port-Louis, 1984), 4; James L. Watson, *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 158-159.

felt compelled to ‘save’ the slaves by imposing Christianity on them as a way to atone for Ham’s sins. In the Bible, Ham saw his father Noah naked, and, as a result, Ham and his descendants were cursed by Noah. Since the beginning of the slavery enterprise, Christianity played a substantial role in justifying slavery; it also was the backbone of slavery, since the colonizers were Christians themselves. Colonizers rationalized the slave trade by arguing that Africans were descendants of Ham and therefore deserving of bondage because of Ham’s sin.³⁷

On the island, the French priests taught catechism to the slaves but went against the King’s orders and abstained from baptizing them. This is because the French planters refrained from baptizing the slaves solely for economic and exploitative purposes.³⁸ After visiting the island in 1773, Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre related his experiences on the island by publishing *Voyage a l’Ile de France*. He detailed slavery lives and its atrocities:

I have never known men so wretched in terms of morality as the landowners, for they constantly mistrust their blacks and live among them as if surrounded by the enemy, their hate always leading them to cruel punishment and injustice.³⁹

Prior to living in Mauritius, a minority of the Indian slaves converted to Christianity in India. For the majority who were Hindu, the process of Christianization differed slightly for them compared to the African slaves. For instance, male Hindu Bengalis underwent a “process of depersonalization” in eliminating their Indian

³⁷ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2006), 69-71; Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir ou le Calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: P.U.F. Pratiques Théoriques, 1987), 65; Vijaya Teelock, *Mauritian History: from Its Beginnings to Modern Times*, 121.

³⁸ Vijaya Teelock, *Mauritian History*, 121.

³⁹ Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Journey to Mauritius (Lost and Found: Classic Travel Writing)* (Massachusetts, Interlink Books, 2002), 178.

identities.⁴⁰ The French masters forced them to marry African slaves, changed their names to French ones, required them to eat a slave diet, and imposed French Kreol as the mandatory language in the colony. Stripped of their significant religious and cultural markers, Indian male slaves quickly assimilated and “within the span of one or at most two generations... suffered total loss of whatever link they might maintain with their Indian origins.”⁴¹ Male Hindus lost their cultural and ethnic identity by marrying African women, thus assimilating to African ethnicity.

In 1735, Ile de France welcomed Mahe de Labourdonnais as the new French governor on the island. Labourdonnais put the island on the map as a significant sugarcane producer by increasing the importation of slaves from Africa and India. By 1740, between 5,000 and 10,000 African slaves lived in Mauritius, primarily coming from Mozambique. Today, scholars know that the number of Indians who came from Southern India and Bengal during French time was significantly lower as compared to African slaves.⁴² As a result, Mauritians of Indian heritage comprised only a minority of the non-European population on the island.

Among the Indians (including slaves, freemen, and artisans) in Mauritius were a small number of free Christian Indians. Initially from Pondicherry and other southern states in India, these Indians were Catholics and had converted to Catholicism as the result of Jesuit or Capuchin missions in India.⁴³ In Mauritius, they settled amongst

⁴⁰ Amédée Nagapen, *The Indian Christian Community in Mauritius*, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Vijaya Teelock, *Mauritian History*, 111-113; Amédée Nagapen, *The Indian Christian Community in Mauritius*, 5-6.

⁴³ Amédée Nagapen and Ashwin Nemchand, “The Indo-Catholic Community: A Component of the Indentured Population,” *Angaje: The Early Years – Explorations into the History, Society and Culture of Indentured Immigrants and their Descendants in Mauritius, Volume 1* (Pointe aux saïles: Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, 2012), 93.

themselves and lived in in Camp des Malabar, an Indian settlement located in Port-Louis. Some of them were wealthy free Indians who also owned slaves. Consider J. Denis Pitchen, a Catholic Tamilian, appointed by the French administration, to be the leader of the Camps Malabars in 1784. Pitchen, a wealthy free Indian Catholic, owned slaves. It was not uncommon for free Indians and gens de couleur to own slaves.⁴⁴

The French colonizers described the Indians on the island as merely “les Indiens,” not noting or understanding the variations of Indians within that community, which included slaves, artisans, free, Hindu, Christians, and mixed-race Indians. They also resented the new wave of free Indians because they resisted assimilation to the French culture; unlike Indian slaves, who were forced to assimilate, free Indians preserved their Indian cultural identities by wearing traditional Indian clothes. It was common to see Indian women wear their sarees and men wearing their turbans and Indian attire, and this manner of dressing marked the Indian immigrants as outsiders.⁴⁵

Some of the French planters were also subjected to the process of assimilation. Since male Franco-Mauritians significantly outnumbered female Franco-Mauritians, Franco-Mauritian men looked elsewhere for lovers and wives among African and Indian women.⁴⁶ The children that resulted from these mixed partnerships were born free, and, later on, became known as ‘gens de couleur’ (people of mixed ethnicities). Although most of the Frenchmen moved toward interracial (Creole and Indian) partnerships, a few French planters argued for keeping the French blood pure. This small group of Franco-

⁴⁴ Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite, Power and Anxiety in the Face of Change*, 31; Amédée Nagapen, *The Indian Christian Community in Mauritius*, 14-15.

⁴⁵ Vijaya Teelock, *Mauritian History*, 146-147.

⁴⁶ Jean Claude de l’Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille races: Au Temps de l’Ile de France* (Mauritius: Ed. Le Printemps, 2004), 115-116.

Mauritians—locally known as the “grand Blanc” (white elite)—started to experience tension with colored people due to a racial disparity and the colored’s lack of privileges.⁴⁷

By 1767, the population of slaves was 15,027, with 3,163 French elite settlers and 587 gens de couleur.⁴⁸ The colored people, although lower in status than the grand Blanc, enjoyed higher social standing than, and also looked down upon, freed slaves due to skin pigmentation and class status. The effect of colorism permeated through the colony, always giving an economic, financial, and emotional advantage to the colored people of lighter pigmentation. As a result of these inequalities, bitter resentment emerged between the colored people and the Creoles.⁴⁹

British Era

The shifting demographics on the island as a result of the Indians worried the Franco-Mauritians: “The fear took hold from the sugar aristocrats, [they feared that] the Indians must harbor resentment towards them due to the horrible treatments they received.”⁵⁰ This is because, despite the presence of the British empire, the elite Franco-Mauritians continued to dominate the political scene on the island. Indians, now the majority, decided to claim equal rights due to the After an intense battle between the French and British, the latter conquered the island in 1810 and renamed it Mauritius. The British had no intention to expand or settle on the island, however, and they allowed the wealthy French planters to preserve “their language, laws, religion, and customs...”⁵¹ Despite the shift of colonial power to Great Britain, the French continued to exercise stronger

⁴⁷ Jean Claude de l’Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 115-116, 172-173.

⁴⁸ Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite*, 30.

⁴⁹ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 46, 56, 62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 156, 159.

⁵¹ J. Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius*, 45.

economic and cultural influences on the island. Even today, the French impact continues to shape the Mauritian society.

During the period of British rule, sugarcane continued to be the main commodity for trading on the island. Thus, an increase of slaves in Mauritius, imported by the French and British, gave a boost to the global sugar trade. From 1823 to 1850s, sugar production increased from 11,000 tons to over 121,000 tons.⁵² In the 1820s, Britain renewed its debate on the abolition of slavery, causing tension in the British colonies that relied on slave labor. By then, Mauritius had over 20,000 slaves. Negotiations continued between the British Empire and the British colonies. Abolitionists argued that the slave owners did not deserve any financial compensation, which angered French plantation owners in Mauritius.⁵³

The year 1833 marked the introduction of the Slavery Abolition Act, and a few years later, the British Empire attempted to implement a similar measure on the plantations in Mauritius. Still, the French planters did not strictly adhere to it. The Franco-Mauritians knew that the slavery business would be ending soon, so they demanded compensation and received it from the British administrations. Many Franco-Mauritians used this compensation to expand sugarcane enterprises.⁵⁴ Additionally, between 1810-1830, the colored people forcefully requested that they, too, share the privileges bestowed from the elite Franco-Mauritians.⁵⁵ For instance, the lack of access to education among the colored people caused them to protest against such discrimination. Anchored in the Catholic Church, Ile de France moved towards Christianizing the slaves,

⁵² Ibid., 50-51.

⁵³ Ibid., 45-46.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 45-49

⁵⁵ Jean Claude de l'Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 82-84.

the colored people, and a few of the Indians in the late 1840s. The Catholic Church in Mauritius was all for expanding their congregations as long as the colored people and former slaves accepted “the established order” and did not advocate for their rights.⁵⁶

By 1829, the British Empire brought indentured laborers from India to Mauritius. The new wave of indentured laborers from India—from Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Bihar—were described as “passive and submissive,” desirable attributes from the perspectives of elite French planters and British administrators.⁵⁷ The living conditions for the Indian laborers were deplorable, and corporal punishments were common. Despite these brutal hardships, most indentured laborers fulfilled their contracts, usually working 5 to 6 years in the sugarcane fields. After completion of their agreement, many of them moved out of the plantation to start businesses or other jobs on the island.

By the end of 1866, there were 120,269 Indian laborers in Mauritius, many of whom had bought parcels of land on the island. Meanwhile, tensions ran high between the elite planters and the British officials on the island due to the increased use of English in administrative affairs. Additionally, the British rebuked the French colonizers for the Indians’ brutal treatments.⁵⁸

Pre-independence

In the 1880s, Indians outnumbered the French Mauritians. The elite Franco-Mauritians, fearing a backlash against leadership by the Indians, demanded constitutional reform.⁵⁹ Some of the Franco-Mauritians proposed a reform that would give political and

⁵⁶ Hubert Gerdeau “Religion et Identite Creole a L’ile Maurice,” *Histoire et Missions Chrétiennes* no. 12 (2009): 62. Translation: “a accepter l’ordre établi, a ne pas contester leurs nouvelles conditions de vie.”

⁵⁷ Jean Claude de l’Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 108-109.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 175-177

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

administrative power solely to themselves. Through an election process, the British official administration selected the Parti Mauricien, a party representing the Franco-Mauritians.⁶⁰ During this time period, a few Indians and colored people worked their way up the socioeconomic ladder and sought higher education in France and England. Most Creoles, by contrast, still lagged behind due to the fact that the government made no effort to secure educational opportunities for them.

The visit of Mahatma Gandhi to the island in October 1901 transformed the limited political involvement among Indians. During his visit, Gandhi reminded the Indians of their lack of representation in the elections and encouraged them to seek reform and demand equal rights. Gandhi's visit had a huge effect. Throughout the 19th century, colored people and Creoles demonstrated a lack of interest in participating in politics.⁶¹ In the early 20th century, however, a few Creoles and colored people entered the political arena. Dr. Maurice Cure, an educated colored man who won the election in the district of Plaines Wilhems, organized a political rally demanding political, social, and economic reforms for all Mauritians regardless of race and ethnicity. In February 1936, Dr. Cure and Pandit Sahadeo, a follower of Gandhi, created the Mauritius Labour Party (Parti Travailleiste or PTr). The PTr advanced a platform that included demanding more rights for the workers.⁶²

By the end of World War II, the process of decolonization was well underway globally. Mauritius was also experiencing its anti-colonial movement. As more slaves revolted on the sugar plantations, a small number of Indian intellectuals seized the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 192-195

⁶¹ Ibid., 199-201.

⁶² Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite*, 57; Jean Claude de l'Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 232-234.

moment and pushed for more involvement in politics. Pressured by the Indian community, British government officials drafted a new constitution, which the Franco-Mauritians and the Indo-Mauritian community then debated vehemently. In February 1948, against the will of the Franco-Mauritians, the British government adopted a new constitution. All inhabitants, including women over 21 years old, gained the right to vote, thus increasing the number of voters among the Indian community substantially. With only one Franco-Mauritian—Jules Koenig—elected, the 1948 election marked the end of the Franco-Mauritian hegemony in Mauritius.⁶³

The PTr continued to work relentlessly for social reforms, but the emergence of new Indian leaders set the party on a different trajectory. The Indianization of the PTr was slowly gaining popularity among the Indo-Mauritians, causing many colored people to leave the party.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the Parti Mauricien, rebaptized as Parti Mauricien Sociale Democrate (PMSD), began recruiting new members from the colored people community and Creole population, with Jules Koenig, a Franco Mauritian, and Gaetan Duval, a *gens de couleur*, as their leaders. Realizing that a coalition was a key factor in winning the election, Ramgoolam, the PTr leader, joined forces with other minority groups, too. For instance, the PTr created an alliance with the Muslim Committee of Action (CAM) led by Abdool Razack Mohamed. The Independent Forward Block (IFB), a pro-Hindu political party, also joined the coalition.⁶⁵

Between 1961-1967, both coalition parties (PTr/CAM/IFB and PMSD) launched a series of negotiations with the British colonial administration about the potential

⁶³ Jean Claude de l'Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 247-248.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁵ J. Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius*, 92-97.

transition to self-government. Tensions were high since the PTr/CAM/IFB was in favor of self-governance, whereas the PMSD preferred a partial self-government; the PMSD wanted to maintain Mauritius' status as a British Overseas territory. The question of sovereignty became the central theme in the election of 1967.⁶⁶

In the spirit of fair representation of all the ethnic communities, the British administrators and the local political parties proposed a new electoral system in 1967. The new system divided Mauritius into 20 constituencies with 3 legislative seats in each constituency. The British government established a system of best loser with 8 seats reserved to balance the religious/ethnic representation between parties. The “best loser” system gave the 8 reserved seats to whichever religious/ethnic group(s) had zero representation among the elected officials, ensuring that every demographic group—Indians, Franco Mauritians, Creoles, the Chinese, and colored people—would have representatives in Parliament.⁶⁷

In August 1967, the pro-independence coalition (PTr/CAM/IFB) won the election, and the journey to independence began. The pro-independence coalition also established a Hindu hegemony on the island. Members of the PMSD feared tremendous retaliation from the Indian communities, leading many Franco-Mauritians and gens de couleurs to immigrate to Australia and South Africa. On March 12, 1968, Mauritians all gathered in the Champ de Mars to witness the birth of a new nation, with Seewoosagur Ramgoolam as the first Prime Minister.⁶⁸

Le Mauricianisme

⁶⁶ Jean Claude de l'Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 189.

⁶⁷ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-Building and Compromise in Mauritius* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 10.

⁶⁸ J. Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius*, 95-97; Jean Claude de l'Estrac, *Mauriciens, Enfants de Mille Combats*, 268-271.

Donne to la main prend mo la main	Give me your hand while you take my
La main dans la main	hand
Anou batir nation Mauricien	Hand in Hand
Ki to Hindou, ki to Muslman	We will build the Mauritian nation
	Whether you are Indian, whether you are
Ki to Creole, ki to ene Blanc	Muslim
	Whether you are a Creole, whether you
Ki to Hindou, ki to Muslman	are white
	Whether you are Hindu, whether you are
Ki to Sinois, ki to enn Chretien	Muslim
	Whether you are Chinese, whether you are
Tous c'est ki finn né dans sa pay la	Christian
Pé bisin marsé la main dans la main	Everyone who was born in this country,
	Needs to walk hand in hand

In the early 1960s, before Mauritian independence, Mauritian pro-independence activists and their British colonizers were already negotiating with each other. “At that time, the country was divided between those [Mauritians] who were for the Independence project and those who were against it,” recalled local singer Bhagal Gowry.⁶⁹ Dispelling communal sentiments among the different ethnic and religious communities in Mauritius, Gowry’s Mauritian séga *Donne to la main prend mo la main* (Give me your hand while you take my hand) showcases the nascent stage of *Le Mauricianisme* on the island.⁷⁰

Because of the intermingling of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and languages, the newly independent Mauritian government began promoting the island as the “rainbow nation.” Interestingly, the title “rainbow nation” is also problematic, as Mauritians remain

⁶⁹ Mario Moutia, “Bahal Gowry, Auteur De «Donne to La Main, Prend Mo La Main»: «Je Suis Fier Que Cette Chanson Aide à Façonner L'unité Nationale»,” *Le Defi Media Group*, 2018, accessed April 27, 2019, <http://defimedia.info/bahal-gowry-auteur-de-donne-lamain-prend-mo-la-main-je-suis-fier-que-cette-chanson-aide-faconner-lunite-nationale>.

⁷⁰ The *Séga* is a Mauritian music genre and is sung in Mauritian Kreol. It has origins in the music of slaves, and the music was usually made with traditional instruments like the ravanne and the triangle. The *Séga* was historically sung to protest injustices in Mauritian society. See “Séga (genre),” *Wikipedia*, last modified July 5, 2019, accessed June 5, 2020, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sega_\(genre\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sega_(genre)); *Le Mauriciannism* is a term “designed to unite the country’s diverse ethnic group under the banner of nationhood.” See Boswell, “Unraveling Le Malaise Creole,” 31.

racially, culturally, and ethnically segregated while still embracing Le Mauricianisme. While many westernized nations (including the U.S.) view multiculturalism as a minority topic and encourage assimilation among immigrants living in their adopted countries, Mauritius, by contrast, celebrates multiculturalism as a positive aspect of everyday life. Many Mauritian touristic brochures advertise multiculturalism by showcasing the diversity among the locals.

While some tourists may consider these advertisements cliché, the sentiment accurately reflects Mauritian society. The island is a classic example of a nation thriving as a multicultural society because it emphasizes and encourages its citizens to embrace a national identity as well as an ethnic identity. This dual identity (national and ethnic) is not seen as hindering but rather as enhancing the mutual respect and recognition between different ethnic groups in Mauritius.⁷¹

In Mauritius, the term *Lakorite* is a Mauritian Kreol word (with no literal translation in French or English) that means learning to “get along well with others, wherever one lives, whomever one’s neighbors are” in a land of diversity. The concept *Lakorite* works well in Mauritius because living with an abundant diversity of religions and cultures provides daily opportunities to understand and accept differences. For example, throughout the island, it is common to hear the Azan (Arabic chant) in early mornings, daily prayer rituals at the Hindu temples, or the bells at the Catholic churches. Also, it is natural to see Mauritians sharing treats for either Divali, Eid celebrations, Chinese New Year, or Assumption day with their friends, neighbors, and coworkers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Over the years, the Mauritian government

⁷¹ Caroline Ng Tseung-Wong, Maykel Verkuyten, “Multiculturalism, Mauritian Style: Cultural Diversity, Belonging, and Secular State,” *Journal of American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 6 (May 2015): 680-685.

used the concept of Lakorite to put out the fire whenever smaller factions of dissidents promoting religious or ethnic extremism challenged social cohesion among Mauritians.

When Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, many countries considered Mauritius to be a positive example of the success of multiculturalism. However, American anthropologist Burton Benedict observed segregation between ethnic groups in Mauritius in the 1970s. “The ethnic divisions of Mauritius are changing,” wrote Benedict at the conclusion of his book, *Indians in a Plural Society*, “They are no longer mere categories but are becoming corporate groups. The danger of communal conflict increases.”⁷² The complexity of the Mauritian population reveals how Mauritians are willing to live side by side but not together.

Ethnicities in Mauritius

Multiculturalism in Mauritius masks the complicated power structure between ethnicities. Some Mauritians hold a strong belief that one ethnic group is far superior to the others, thus potentially cultivating a sense of resentment among ethnic groups. The loss of social cohesion, socioeconomic power, and stability in a multicultural society negatively affect education, job security, and politics. Thus, to better grasp the underlying tension between the various ethnic and religious groups, it is necessary to examine analytically the makeup of Mauritian society.

The French and British colonial periods continue to impact postcolonial Mauritius, where power struggles among competing ethnic groups permeate Mauritian life. Since the beginning of colonization in Mauritius, Hindus have identified with their ancestral land of India. Likewise, Mauritian Chinese identified with China, Franco-

⁷² Benedict Burton, *Indians in a Plural Society: A Report on Mauritius* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1961), 13.

Mauritians with France, and Mauritian Muslims of Indian ancestry identified most with their religious homeland: The Middle East region. The gens de couleur, a mixed-raced community with two racial groups, have a different concept of an ancestral home. Because of mixed-race ancestry, the skin color spectrum of members of one colored family will often vary from lighter (white Franco-Mauritians) to darker (Creole) pigmentation. Depending on their skin color, people in this group may be more likely to relate to France as their ancestral home while struggling to accept Africa as their own. This is still the case today. The Creole community stands apart from the other ethnic groups in Mauritius in the sense that they do not strongly identify with any country of origin.⁷³

Mauritians associate most ethnic identities with a specific religious tradition. For example, most Indian Mauritians are Hindu and Franco-Mauritians, gens de couleur, and most African Mauritians are Catholics, to the extent that African (or “Creole”) becomes synonymous with Christianity. Indian becomes synonymous with Hinduism, and Muslims of Indian descendant identify with the Islamic faith; similarly, Sino-Mauritian becomes synonymous with Christianity and Buddhism. Indeed, the Mauritian census only asks about religious identity; there are no questions about ethnic identity, since ethnic identities are synonymous with religious identities. For this reason, Indian Mauritians who are Latter-day Saints identify as Christians only—never as Indian, since Indian is synonymous with Hinduism.

Creole population

⁷³ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 44-45.

The history of the Creole community is better understood in light of Creoles' relationships with the Franco-Mauritians, the gens de couleur, and the Catholic Church. According to anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Mauritius is home to approximately 200,000 Creoles.⁷⁴ Yet Creoles, despite the fact that they have inhabited the island for longer than most demographic groups, struggle to find their place within the rainbow nation because of their historical disenfranchisement, institutional discrimination, widespread poverty, and experiences of discrimination.⁷⁵

The majority of Creoles live as second-class citizens on an island where Hindus govern the political landscape, the Franco-Mauritians dominate the financial sector, and Chinese and Muslim families own most of the businesses. There are widespread negative stereotypes of Creoles as being lazy, uneducated, and wasteful—stereotypes that haunt Creole communities and identities. Nevertheless, a few Creoles have broken away from the devastating stereotypes. Among these outliers, a few are politicians, journalists, and Catholic priests—all activists working toward the recognition of the Creoles in Mauritius and concrete solutions for healing their community.⁷⁶

Historical records indicate that slaves exported to Mauritius came from Mozambique. However, historians have recently traced the origins of these slaves with the help of markers of distinction such as language, customs, and dialects to more acutely pinpoint their countries of origin. Historians discovered that slaves on Mauritius came not only from Mozambique, but also from central Tanzania, Malawi, Guinea, and

⁷⁴ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominator*, 14-15.

⁷⁵ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 42-43; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominator*, 15.

⁷⁶ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 71.

Madagascar.⁷⁷ However, regardless of their origins, members of the Creole community “do not identify themselves with their country of origin, if we take this to be Africa,”⁷⁸ recorded Dr. Burton during his fieldwork on the island in the early 1960s. Today the Creole community, still feeling homeless, seeks to navigate where they belong culturally, ethnically, and politically in their homeland. Culturally and ethnically, limited access to education, economic opportunities, and unequal power structures marginalizes the Creoles community.

Today, approximately 10,000 Franco-Mauritians, most of whom are Catholics, reside on the island and still maintain a position of superiority within the private sector.⁷⁹ In a predominately non-white society like Mauritius, Franco-Mauritians understand their privileges and “perceive others as competitors vying for their privileges.”⁸⁰ Based on his studies done in 2015, Anthropologist Tijo Salverda argued that “In Mauritius, ‘white’ is still equivalent to power.”⁸¹ Franco-Mauritians are also aware of the strong feeling of animosity towards them. They avoid drawing attention to themselves, marry within the white community only, socialize only with other Franco-Mauritians, work mainly in the private sector, and for the most part, live away from non-white communities on the island. They partly share the public space with other communities but never feel the need to embrace the other communities. Despite sharing the same faith, Franco-Mauritians and the Creole community view the Church differently.⁸² For example, the Creole community

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

⁷⁸ Benedict Burton, *Indians in a Plural Society: A Report on Mauritius* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1961), 33.

⁷⁹ Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite*, 2, 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁸¹ Ibid., 189.

⁸² Ibid., 183

felt neglected by the Catholic Church, while the Franco-Mauritians enjoyed a more privileged position in the Catholic Church. All of these markers indicate that “in Mauritius, white skin colors mean privilege.”⁸³

Historically excluded from and overlooked by the Church, Creoles continue to experience discrimination. Since the French colonial era, Catholicism meant French hegemony, which in turn translated to elitism and power concentrated in the hands of Franco-Mauritians. Franco-Mauritians considered the Creoles to be second-class citizens.⁸⁴ For instance, during the colonial and early independence times, the Catholic Church only allowed white Christians to enter churches. Hence, priests placed a crucifix in front of churches to mark the place where former slaves were to pray. When Catholic authorities eventually permitted Creoles to attend mass and pray in the various churches on the island, the Church reserved the front pews for the white families attending mass. It took several decades for Catholic authorities to allow Creoles to sit anywhere they wished in churches. Despite this discrimination, some Creoles continued to stay in the Catholic Church. Boswell reflected on this paradox:

In the absence of a singular homeland from which to obtain social and cultural prestige, Creoles have turned to the [powerful] Roman Catholic Church for these resources. This partly explains why some Creoles...are also unhappy about the fact that the Church has not acted as a cultural institution for their support, because some Creoles perceive the orthodox Churches as their spiritual and cultural home.⁸⁵

⁸³ Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite, Power and Anxiety in the Face of Change* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2015)

⁸⁴ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

In the early 1990s, the Catholic Church timidly acknowledged its lack of involvement in championing the emancipation of slaves during the colonial era. Still, race distinction continues to play a role in the Catholic Church. For example, in 1949, Jean Margéot, a Franco-Mauritian, became the first Mauritian Bishop and, in 1988, Cardinal. Following his death, Maurice Piat, another Franco-Mauritian, became the second Franco-Mauritian Bishop. Only recently has the Catholic Church in Mauritius ordained priests of African descent. In Mauritius, skin color matters. White is considered fine, and black is considered dirty,” argued Tijo Salverda.⁸⁶ Because the Catholic Church on the island has historically been dominated by Franco Mauritians, Creoles have a complicated relationship with the Catholic church.

While the head of the Catholic Church is still a Franco-Mauritian, an emerging group of Creole priests is slowly changing the landscape of the Catholic Church in Mauritius. Among them is Father Roger Cerveux, a voice who spoke about the social and racial discrimination of Creoles. Father Roger Cerveux, the first Creole to sing the liturgy in Kreol during mass, worked tirelessly among the Creoles and coined the phrase “Malaise Creole,” referring to their feelings of alienation. Not only did he criticize the government, but he reminded the Catholic Church of its responsibility towards the Creole community.⁸⁷

I believe that among the cultures that exist in Mauritius, the Creoles are among those who suffer the most. I don't mean to say that there aren't any destitute people elsewhere. But there is a huge concentration [of the destitute] among the

⁸⁶ Tijo Salverda, *The Franco-Mauritian Elite*, 189-190.

⁸⁷“NÉCROLOGIE – Père Roger Cerveaux: Une voix qui s'éteint,” *Le Mauricien*, May 19, 2013, accessed September 15, 2019, <https://www.lemauricien.com/article/necrologie-pere-roger-cerveaux-voix-qui-seteint>.

Creoles, the majority of whom are Catholic. As a result, the Catholic Church has a responsibility toward them.⁸⁸

Today, the Catholic Church is reaching out to the Creole community, spearheading the process of decolonization. “There is a continuing dialogue between the Church and its Creole parishioners, for the Church needs parishioners to advance its mission in the country and Creoles need the Church for spiritual and political support.”⁸⁹ The Church’s efforts are working, and the number of Creoles engaged with the Catholic Church is growing. Thanks to changes the Church is making to atone for its past, Boswell notes that “Christianity holds a special appeal to Creoles in that it offers them a chance to publicly redeem and reconstruct their identity.”⁹⁰

For a long time, the Franco-Mauritian community controlled the management of the Catholic Church. Part of the process of decolonization, the Catholic Church attempted to gain increased trust from the Creole community to atone for the mistreatments of Creoles during colonial times. Specifically, the Catholic Church launched programs to engage the Creole community by teaching Creoles ecclesiastical and administrative leadership skills. Today, the grooming of Catholic Creoles is “shaping [the] Creole identity to the extent that in general conversations with ethnically different others, the Creoles are often referred to as Christians rather than Creoles.”⁹¹ The Catholic Church is offering the Creole community respect and dignity, opening doors for the Creoles to

⁸⁸ This English translation has been taken from Cerveaux’s original French, which states “Je crois que parmi les cultures qui existent à Maurice – ajoute le prêtre –, le mal-vivre se trouve parmi les créoles qui sont le plus dans *difé* (c’est-à-dire ‘dans le feu, dans les difficultés’). Je ne veux pas dire qu’il n’y a pas de démunis ailleurs. Mais il y a une grosse concentration chez les créoles. Qui sont à une très forte majorité catholiques. D’où la responsabilité morale de l’Église envers eux.” See Hubert Gerbeau, “Religion et identité créole à l’île Maurice,” *Histoire et missions chrétiennes* 12 (2009); 12-13.

⁸⁹ Rosabelle Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, 78.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 87, 69 and, 78.

access positions of power without feeling threatened by the dominant ethnic group: Indians. Slowly, the Catholic Church bridged the gap between Church leaders and members of the Creole community.

Still, Creoles' feelings of resentment toward the Indians linger. Daily life reminds the Creoles of the injustice and poverty they face—and the comparative difficulty they experience with respect to the Indians in climbing the social, political, and economic ladder. Aware that they are a minority faith in Mauritius, the Catholic institution is juggling between, on the one hand, advocating for the Creole community without instigating communal sentiments and, on the other hand, maintaining a good relationship with the government. Due to a small number of Indian Catholics present on the island, the Catholic officials “wish to promote Christianity as a faith for all ethnic groups. However, Creoles seem to want the opposite.”⁹² In other words, the Creole community believes that they have finally found a space within the Catholic Church that evokes a stronger sense of belonging.

The Indian Population

In the early 1800s, around 2 million Indians left India to work in foreign lands such as Reunion Island, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Singapore, the Caribbean, and other countries through the Indian indenture system.⁹³ Today, scholars are investigating global Indian immigration using the lenses of ethnic studies, linguistic studies, political studies, and other disciplines.

Histories of the indentured laborers settling in European colonies describe the tensions between the Indian diaspora and other racial groups. In the Caribbean, Indo-

⁹² Ibid., 73.

⁹³ Kevin Kenny, *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 35.

Caribbeans are a minority community compared to the Creole population, and, as a result, “a hybrid Creole culture in the Caribbean privileges blackness over Indianness... [and] this type of identification excludes a “coolie” or indenture culture because of its “primitiveness.”⁹⁴ Mauritius is one of the few places within the Indian diaspora where the Indian community comprises the majority ethnic group and where Indo-Mauritians and continue to hold strongly onto their ethnic, cultural, and religious Indian identities. However, Mauritians of Indian descent and Creoles still clash from a social, economic, religious, and cultural perspective. The hostile relationship between Indo-Mauritians and the Creole community shapes Mauritian lives in their private and public spaces.

Before examining this strong animosity between Indians and Creoles, it is important to understand the evolution of the Indian population in Mauritius. As mentioned above, French colonizers brought African slaves as well as a small number of Indians laborers and slaves to develop Mauritius. By the end of the French colonial era on the island, Mauritius had 84,799 people of African descent, making 91% of the total population Creole. Indians and Franco-Mauritians were the minority ethnic groups.⁹⁵ Under the British rule, plantation owners brought more Indian indentured laborers to replace the Creoles in the sugarcane fields in Mauritius. The indentured laborers came from various parts of India. Today, Indo-Mauritians are categorized into four subgroups: les indiens (or Hindi-speaking Indians), Tamil, Telegu, and Marathi.

Unlike the French colonizers, the British government favored an approach of allowing Indians to preserve and maintain their religious and cultural traditions, whether

⁹⁴ Srilata Ravi, “Indo-Mauritians: National and Postnational Identities,” *L’esprit Createur* 50, No.2, (2010): 30.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

they were Hindus (as the majority were), or Muslim or Christians (as only the minority were). During the British colonial time, the indenture labor system often brought an entire Indian village to Mauritius, thus solidifying stronger relationships among the Indians on the island. Steeled by their religious and cultural identities, Indo-Mauritians resolved to maintain their ethnic identities despite being away from the motherland. Today, there are 624,000 Indians on the island, with the Hindi-speaking community as the dominant group.⁹⁶

Scholars and religious authorities claim that India's caste system, or jati, dates back to the 1500s. The Brahmins (who are the higher caste), Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are the four main groups within the caste system. Within each main category of the caste system comprised subgroups. Each caste member is loyal to its caste community and favors marrying within that community. But scholars have argued that although the caste system worked well in India, this system has struggled to thrive in the Indian diaspora.⁹⁷ Oddevur writes:

There [in Mauritius], castes do not form important social units, and intercaste relations are unimportant. One reason given for this is that the economic and political systems in the host societies where indentured Indian laborers were introduced had conditions that were not conducive to the maintenance of caste.

The indenture pattern of emigration tended to weaken the social restrictions governed by caste. Caste was not an important principle of social organization in

⁹⁶ Rosabelle Boswell, "Unravelling le Malaise Creole," 197.

⁹⁷ Burton, *Indians in a Plural Society: A Report on Mauritius* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1961); Schwartz Barton M, *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities*, (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967).

the plantations, and all Indians were laborers (coolies) doing the same kind of work and sharing the same living conditions.⁹⁸

Because indentured laborers came from many regions of India, maintaining the caste system proved to be difficult on a multiracial island. Nevertheless, Mauritians continued to practice taxonomic divisions. Endogamous marriages are still highly favored on the island. For example, it is still common for many Hindus to marry within their subgroups (i.e., Tamilian girls marrying Tamilian boys within their caste). Yet, the effect of globalization is slowly blurring the lines of intra-ethnic, intercaste, and inter-ethnic marriages in Mauritius.⁹⁹

On a governmental level, the Hindi-speaking majority maintains a strong foothold in the political parties. The Hindi-speaking Hindu community constitutes 60 percent of the Indians on the island; 33 percent of the Indian community is from South India, and 7 percent is from Maharashtra. In terms of the caste categories, 13 percent of Hindi-speaking Mauritians are from the Brahmin and Kshatriya, 27 percent are from the lower castes, more than half are from the middle caste.

The middle caste is divided into many subcastes, including Kurmi, Koiri, Ahir, Kahar, Teli, Noniya, Kumhar, and Lohar. A few Hindus belong to each subcaste, thus making it difficult to marry and preserve endogamous marriages. Fearing losing their position in the caste system, the middle caste adopted a new term, Vaish, which

⁹⁸ Hollup Oddvar, "The disintegration of caste and changing concepts of Indian ethnic identity in Mauritius." *Ethnology* 33 (Fall, 1994): 27.

⁹⁹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Common Denominators*, 60-61.

represents a new endogamous unit.¹⁰⁰ The Vaish offers greater flexibility for intermarriages within the middle caste.

As the Vaish experienced growth, they realized their strength in number and privileges.

Scholar Oddavar writes about the impact of the Vaish community in the political arena:

The Vaish caste population is the largest and therefore likely to determine the selection of prime minister of the island. Not only is it expected that any future prime minister will be a Hindu but also from the Vaish community.

Because the Indians of Hindu faith comprise the majority in Mauritius, many Mauritians assume that the Prime Minister will always be Hindu from the Vaish caste. Indeed, Mauritius has had many Vaish Prime Ministers over the past several decades.¹⁰¹

It is worth noting that the election of 2000 was unusual in the history of Mauritius. Following their election in 2000, Aneerod Jugnauth and Paul Berenger agreed that Jugnauth would serve the first three years as the Prime Minister and Paul Berenger would serve the following two years. Thus, Sir Aneerod Jugnauth (2000-2003) shared a prime ministerial post with Paul Berenger (2003-2005). This was the first time that such an agreement occurred in Mauritian history. Paul Berenger, a Franco Mauritian, was the first non-Hindu to serve as Prime Minister. Since 2017, Pravin Jugnauth, son of Aneerod Jugnauth, has been serving as the Prime Minister of Mauritius. This dominance of the

¹⁰⁰ According to Encyclopedia, Vaish is an upper class in the Hindu tradition, the Vaisyas are the lowest level of the “twice-born” (*dvijas*). They are commoners, but not a servant group. They undergo the sacred thread ceremony (*Yajnopavita*), as do the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. See “Vaisyas,” Encyclopedia, accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/vaisya>.

¹⁰¹ List of the Indo-Mauritians (Vaish) who have held the position of Prime Minister: Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Sir Aneerod Jugnauth, Navin Ramgoolam (son of late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam), Pravin Jugnauth (son of Sir Aneerod Jugnauth). Paul Berenger is the only Franco-Mauritian to have the Prime Minister of Mauritius. “List of prime ministers in Mauritius,” *Wikipedia*, accessed October 21, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_prime_ministers_of_Mauritius.

Vaish community in the political arena demonstrates not only their monopoly compared to other ethnic communities but also that they have “openly challenged the hegemony, dominance, and privileges obtained by the high castes (Brahmin/Babujee).”¹⁰²

Still, Hindi-speaking communities understand the importance of majority and minority within the Mauritian context. Today, Indo-Mauritians descent—whether they are from Hindi speaking communities, Tamil communities, Telegu communities, or Marathi communities—organize themselves into socio-religious groups (Sanatan Dharma Temple Federation, Mauritius Telugu Maha Sabha Associations, Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation, Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation). These groups are subdivided into caste groups and members in each caste lobby for privileges within the government. Scholar Oddavar argued that:

By organizing themselves in sociocultural associations, these groups evolved as important interest groups bargaining for their share of state resources (particularly employment distributed through political patronage). In this respect caste groups may appear as corporate groups for political purposes... With the passing of political power to the Hindus, caste has taken on new dimensions as political interest groups.¹⁰³

Today, Hindi-speaking Mauritians continue to serve as the dominant group in the government. They share the educational and socioeconomic privileges among themselves, excluding, to some extent the other Indian communities (Tamils, Telegus, and Marathis). But the primary community who is excluded on an ongoing basis is the

¹⁰² Hollup Oddvar, “The disintegration of caste and changing concepts of Indian ethnic identity in Mauritius.” *Ethnology* 33 (Fall, 1994): 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24.

Creole community. For a long time, the Hindu dominant government never manifested this exclusion openly. Even though a few Creole leaders, Creole activists, Creole clergy, and local newspapers brought attention to the matter, the government ignored their pleas, until 1999.

The Kaya Episode

On February 21, 1999, Joseph Reginald Topize, a Mauritian musician of African descent also known as Kaya, was murdered in prison in Mauritius. He had been imprisoned for smoking marijuana during a concert promoting Marijuana decriminalization. Through his music, Seggae (a fusion of reggae, sega supported by African and Indian instruments), Kaya had raised awareness about the hardships Creoles faced, the danger of communalism on the island, the positive emphasis on Mauritian national identity, and the lack of racial harmony.

Kaya's death resulted in a three-day riot on the island. These riots were significant, given the fact that the only other time people rioted on Mauritius was during the fight for independence. I was still living in Mauritius when Kaya died, and I remember vividly the fear, anger, and tension permeating the island. Riots erupted in Creole suburbs, and curfews were implemented nationwide. The vitriolic reactions of the Creole community shocked the majority of Mauritians and the neighboring countries. Some experts said that the riots were long overdue:

[The] Creoles, who make up almost a third of the population, resent the political power of Hindus and the economic dominance of the Mauritians of French origin.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ "Reggae rage in Mauritius," *The Economist*, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/international/1999/02/25/reggae-rage-in-mauritius>

Kaya's death triggered an underlying issue on the island. As one the local newspaper reported on the 19th anniversary of Kaya's death, "The events of February 1999 left deep wounds among the population." His death brought to the surface the lingering effects on communalism in Mauritius and deep resentment against the Hindus.

Conclusion

Religious studies scholars, Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, who writes on religious conversion, stated:

Conversion establishes new boundaries; secondary identifications of ethnicity and nationalism often complicate new conversion identities shaped by religious communities that transcend geopolitical limitations.¹⁰⁵

Chapter 1 has reflected on the nascent stage of Mauritius, outlining the complicated and complex history between Indo-Mauritians, Creoles, and Franco-Mauritians arising from the colonial periods. It also deconstructed the relationships between religious traditions (Hinduism and Catholicism) and ethnic identities. Like the Catholic Church, Mormonism offered Creoles a safe religious space where they enjoyed upward mobility in spite of their marginalized socioeconomic status in Mauritius. When Indians began joining the Church, Creoles felt threatened, since Indians are the dominant group culturally, ethnically, and religiously on the island. What is the role of an American-born religious tradition such as Mormonism in Mauritius? How does conversion in Mormonism interact with a cosmopolitan society like Mauritius?

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine in more depth how Creoles, Indians, and Franco-Mauritians interact in a Latter-day Saint branch, their new common religious space.

¹⁰⁵Rambo and Farhadian, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 771.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY
SAINTS: ETHNICITIES, RACE, AND LOCAL ADAPTATION IN MAURITIUS
(1978-1999)



On February 25, 1982, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organized its first branch in Mauritius. Six years later, Elder J. Ashton offered a dedicatory prayer in Mauritius, stating, “We know this land is a link between Western and Eastern cultures. . . . We dedicate this beautiful island . . . in accordance with thy present and future plans for not only the growth but the prosperity and peace that the gospel can bring.” The picture above shows the Mauritian Latter-day Saints of various ethnic communities who were members of this branch in 1982. Over the years, the branch’s demographics shifted, and the once multiracial, multiethnic community became more racially homogeneous.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ “Mauritius: Chronology,” *Global Histories*; “Mauritius: Reunion Dedicated for Missionary Work”, *Ensign*, March 1989, accessed August 30, 2019,

This chapter discusses the experiences of Mauritian Latter-day Saints in relation to local adaptation, race, and power from 1978 to 1999. Starting with the beginning of the Church in Mauritius, this chapter offers an account of the first Mauritians to be baptized in Mauritius, as well as the missionary couples (the Edmunds, the Veerharens, and the Gledhills) and single missionaries who began missionary work on the island. Research on these early Mauritian Saints (Alain Kheeroo, Marlene Padiachy, and Monique Padiachy) also opens the conversation to how race, ecclesiastical authority, and local adaptation played out in a Mauritian context. The chapter concludes with several case-studies of conflicting interpretations of incidents within the congregation, providing us with grist to grapple with the issues of local adaptations, ethnicities, and cultural identities among Mauritian Latter-day Saints.

On January 2, 1980, Joseph and Ruth Edmund arrived in Mauritius after living in La Reunion since October 1979. Originally from California, the Edmunds flew halfway around the world to La Reunion as representatives of the Church under the International Mission. Prior to coming on this mission, Joseph Edmund served as the mission president in the Franco-Belgian mission. While residing in Curepipe, Mauritius, the Edmunds placed an announcement in a local newspaper, *Le Mauricien*, inviting the Mauritian people to learn about the Church. Within that month, a few Mauritians, including Harry Bhagal, Vjas Mohabeer, and others, responded to the advertisement placed in the newspaper. During their stay, the Edmunds also met Dell Shuman, a member of the Church working at the American Embassy in the capital, Port-Louis. Aware of the ending of her assignment in Mauritius, Dell Shuman informed them of the arrival of her embassy

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1989/03/news-of-the-church/mauritius-reunion-dedicated-for-missionary-work.html?lang=eng>.

replacement, Darla Jean “Duffy” Evans, who was also a member of the Church. Duffy Evans had served as a missionary in the Franco-Belgian mission with Joseph Edmund as her mission president. Both the Edmunds’ and Duffy Evan’s fluency in French removed the language barrier between them and the locals.¹⁰⁷

On February 1, 1980, after assessing the situation in Mauritius, the Edmunds returned to Reunion island to continue their missionary work. In October 1980, the Edmunds decided to come back to Mauritius to welcome Theodore and Nita Veerharen, the first expatriate missionary couple to live in Mauritius for more than a year. Theodore, a native from Germany, and Nita, an Australian, lived in Palo Alto, California, before their mission call to Mauritius. Three months after the Verhaarens’ arrival on the island, Preston and Isabelle Gledhill, originally from Utah, joined them in Mauritius. In 1935, Preston had previously served a proselytizing mission in France, which gave him a linguistic advantage in Mauritius.¹⁰⁸ Like the other missionary couples living in Mauritius, the Gledhills came with a specific assignment: “The charge we were given from our mission presidency was to make friends and to create goodwill. We passed out Article of Faith cards and made friends of all the businesses which surrounded us. We inserted ads in the *Express* and in the *Le Mauricien*.” Indeed, the ads paid off.¹⁰⁹

Peter, a Mauritian of African and Indian ethnicities, responded to the announcement from the Gledhills:

When I saw the advertisement, curiosity piqued my interest, and I tracked the location of their place. A few days later, I found the American couple living in

¹⁰⁷ Hal Hyde Hunter, MS 13093.

¹⁰⁸ “Missionary Database,” *Church History*, accessed September 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/missionary/individual/preston-ray-gledhill-1915?lang=eng>.

¹⁰⁹ Hal Hyde Hunter, MS 13093.

Rose-Hill. They introduced themselves as Isabelle and Preston, not as Sister or Brother. Isabelle shook my hand, offered me a large glass of juice, and a plate of cookies. I was surprised by their friendliness and hospitality. My mother worked as a maid for a Franco-Mauritians family. So, I know how it is like [for us, Mauritians of color]. But here, with the Gledhills, I wasn't with the [typical] white people in Mauritius. I was surprised by the way they welcomed me.

Two months later, after learning about the Church via the Gledhills, Peter met the Verhaarens for the first time on a Sunday at their home in Curepipe. There, Mauritians, including Peter and the Narraidoo family, attended the first sacrament meeting on the island with the Gledhills, the Verhaarens, and Duffy Evans.¹⁰⁰ Peter recalled his first experience at the sacrament meeting:¹⁰¹

It was our first time that we understood that we needed to read the Book of Mormon. It was our first sacrament, and the blessing of the bread was new to us. [Coming from the Catholic faith], I was familiar with the wafer and the wine, but with the bread and water, it was a little bit hilarious. Even for singing the hymns, they played the hymns on an audiocassette—all the Church materials, including the Book of Mormon and the hymns. Overall, we did not know what we were doing. None of us [Mauritians] were members of the Church yet. I remembered thinking, 'what are they doing to us?' Now that I think about it, it was a little bit funny.

¹⁰⁰ Sacrament meeting is the term for a regular Latter-day Saint worship service, usually held each week on Sunday, where the sacrament (similar to communion) is offered to the members of the Church. Sacrament meetings include music, talks, testimonies and prayers.

¹⁰¹ Hal Hyde Hunter, MS 13093, 1-4.

Peter's first year in the Church relates closely to the experiences of many potential members introduced to the Church for whom the rituals of the Church are largely unknown. In her work focusing on Mormonism in India, religious scholar Taunalyne Rutherford illustrates a similar example in which early Saints in India recreated sacrament meetings in their home without prior experience of sacrament meetings. John Murala, one of the early members, whose uncle brought the gospel from Samoa to India, recalled his first experiences of sacrament meeting, "TV had just come into the market in Hyderabad, and we had to 'wind' up the meeting before the movie show started at 7 pm! Sometimes [sacrament meeting] used to start late at 6 and so my uncle, as the branch president, used to say, 'Come on let's finish fast, the movie time, movie time, movie time.'"¹¹² Like Peter, Murala also "looks back and laughs at what they would do in those [early] days."¹¹³ The two examples mentioned above illustrate how church missionaries and their family members frequently needed to improvise the content and structure of sacrament meetings for uncomprehending Mauritian during the nascent stage of church activities on the island.

The second Sunday of sacrament meeting, Duffy Evans invited Peter and other Mauritian for dinner at her house. Dinners at Duffy's house soon became a tradition. To this day, Peter still remembers his many dinners at Duffy's place:

Duffy lived in Floreal, a *quartier de riche* (a wealthy neighborhood). Since she worked for the embassy, she lived where a lot of Franco-Mauritian resided. She made us feel welcome and made American food for us. It was a lot of food, a very

¹¹² Taunalyne. "Conceptualizing Global Religions: An Investigation of Mormonism in India." PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, (10744217).

¹¹³ Ibid., 51-52.

typical American meal. We had never seen so much food like this before. As I sat on her deck, eating and chatting with her and our friends, I couldn't believe where I was. [As a person of color], this was unthinkable. We were eating and enjoying ourselves in Floreal! Usually, the whites on the island do not mix with the colored people, let alone eat with them.¹¹⁴

Drawing from Peter's reaction to the Gledhills and Duffy Evans, people of color—including Creoles—perceived whiteness as powerful. During colonial times, the Franco-Mauritians controlled Mauritius; in post-colonial Mauritius, the Franco-Mauritian community still exerted power on the island. Today, Franco-Mauritians continue to distance themselves from the locals, thus reinforcing their sense of superiority and exclusiveness. Mauritians like Peter, had only been exposed to one type of white community: the Franco-Mauritians community. Consequently, the Mauritian Latter-day Saints were surprised by the egalitarian way in which white American Saints treated Mauritians. Cosmopolitan societies like Mauritius provide fertile ground for exploring links between race and hegemony.

The American missionaries shattered the stereotypes associated with white people on the island. Peter reflected on the differences he noticed between Franco-Mauritians and the American missionaries, stating, "At no point did I feel that it was a trap or that they [the couple missionaries and Duffy] wanted to buy our conversion when it comes to Mormonism. At the very beginning, I felt that there was something true to it, and I felt their love for us."¹¹⁵ The behaviors of the white American missionaries towards Mauritians of various ethnicities began changing the narrative of whiteness among local Mauritians

¹¹⁴ Male interviewee's transcript dated April 5, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

attending the church meetings. Specifically, the white missionaries destabilized Mauritians' notion of whiteness as being synonymous with power and colonialism, as many Mauritians of color began seeing white people as brothers and sisters in the gospel rather than as the perpetrators of racially-based hierarchies.

The Dilemma of Race and the Priesthood Restriction

The Church in Mauritius took root after the global lifting of the Priesthood restriction toward members of African ethnicity in 1978.¹¹⁶ Today, no records open to researchers indicate whether race and the priesthood were part of the conversation during missionary discussions in Mauritius.¹¹⁷ The Church policy regarding the Priesthood restriction toward black members raised questions regarding the black experience in the Latter-day Saint Church. But there is a scholarly gap on how the Priesthood restriction affected members of other ethnicities. For example, how did it play out in the early church history in Mauritius? The following section provides an overview of the salience of race in the evolution of Mormonism and how racial issues impacted Mauritian members of the Church from all ethnic backgrounds. First, however, it is important to provide more context on the historical intersection of race and Mormonism.

A few months after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 6, 1830, in New York, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson—all members of the Church—left their loved ones to preach the

¹¹⁶ district is the power and authority of God. Second, in mortality, priesthood is the power and authority that God gives to man to act in all things necessary for the salvation of God's children, see "Priesthood," *Gospel Topics*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/priesthood?lang=eng>.

¹¹⁷ In June 1978, the priesthood ban was lifted in the Church, allowing "all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood. See Official Declaration 2, "Official Declaration 2," *Study Helps*, accessed on May 12, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/official-declaration-2?lang=eng>.

gospel to Native American tribes in the Eastern United States. After moving from New York to Ohio, church members relocated to Missouri, which they later left in the late 1830s due to relentless persecution by the mobs. Latter-day Saints found refuge in Illinois, where they, along with Joseph Smith, founded the city of Nauvoo. On April 19, 1843, while teaching the Quorum of the Twelve in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith declared, "...don't let a single corner of the earth go without a mission."¹¹⁸ His declaration prompted zealous missionaries to leave the United States and share the gospel in South America and other parts of the world.

Meanwhile, a 22-year-old African American named Elijah Abel joined the Church in Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1836, Abel received the priesthood as an Elder, a Seventy, and participated in temple rituals. Unlike Abel, who benefitted from the Priesthood powers during Smith's presidency, Jane Elizabeth Manning James, another early member of African ancestry, faced obstacles in accessing to temple blessings because of her race.¹¹⁹ James was baptized in 1842 in Canaan, Connecticut. Desiring to be among the brothers and sisters of her new-found faith, Jane started her trek to Nauvoo on foot in 1843, accompanied by several other members of the Church in 1843.¹²⁰ In her biography, she records:

We walked until our shoes were worn out, and our feet became sore and cracked open and bled until you could see the whole print of our feet with blood on the

¹¹⁸ "Proclaim Glad Tidings to All the World," *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-12?lang=eng>.

¹¹⁹ "James, Jane Elizabeth Manning," *Century of Black Mormons*, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/james-jane-elizabeth-manning#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-625%2C0%2C3309%2C3288>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

ground. We stopped and united in prayer to the Lord, we asked God the Eternal Father to heal our feet, and our prayers were answered, and our feet were healed forthwith.¹²¹

After walking 800 miles to Nauvoo, Jane met Joseph and his wife, Emma, who welcomed her into their home. The Smiths invited her to stay with them until the Saints found proper accommodations for Jane. In March 1844, James received her patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith's brother, Hyrum Smith. Patriarchal blessings include a declaration of a person's lineage in the house of Israel [from Biblical figures] and contain personal counsel from the Lord."¹²² Today, members continue to receive their patriarchal blessings, which include information about their lineage. In Jane Manning James's blessing, Hyrum Smith stated that "a promise through the Father of the New World coming down in the lineage of Cainaan [sic] the Son of Ham... [God] that changeth times and seasons and placed a mark upon your forehead, can take it off and stamp upon you his own image."¹²³ Jane Manning James's patriarchal blessing reaffirmed the curse placed upon people of African descent because of their dark skin color. This probationary blessing also promised Jane that God would lift the curse at a later time. James's patriarchal blessing brought her both joy and burden into her spiritual life. Years later, Jane and her loved ones were among the Latter-day pioneers to make the trek to Utah territory, where Jane remained an active member until her passing in 1908. After Joseph Smith's death in 1844, Church members continued to be subjected to violent

¹²¹ "Jane Manning James Autobiography, Circa 1902," MS 4425, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹²² "Patriarchal Blessings" *Gospel Topics*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/patriarchal-blessings?lang=eng>.

¹²³ "James, Jane Elizabeth Manning," *Century of Black Mormons*.

persecutions known as the “Mormon War in Illinois,” and an inner turmoil among the Church leadership provoked a schism among the community.¹²⁴

A majority of the church members chose Brigham Young as the successor of Joseph Smith. As conflict agitations progressed, Brigham Young and other church leaders began making plans to leave Nauvoo. In mid-1847, Brigham Young and his followers began the Mormon exodus west, hoping to build a new Zion free from the tentacles of the United States of America. Armed with experiences of collective trauma and desiring religious freedom within a framework of exile, Church members were less interested than other Americans in the looming Civil War. Regarding the early members’ aloofness toward the political divide around slavery, Armand Mauss notes that “hardly any [19th century] whites, Mormon or non-Mormon, believed in a racial equality or intermarriage.”¹²⁵

Following their beloved prophet’s death, the missionary endeavor continued, with Brigham Young taking charge of the Church’s vision in expanding Mormonism globally. On August 28, 1852, during a special conference held in Salt Lake City, Young reinvigorated Smith’s dream by announcing the expansion of the missionary program on the African continent. Paradoxically, in 1852, Brigham Young cemented the fate of individuals of African descent by asserting that “Any man having one drop of the seed of [Cain] ...in him cannot hold the priesthood, and if no other prophet ever spake it before I will say it now, in the name of Jesus Christ, I know it is true, and others know it!”¹²⁶ To

¹²⁴ John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press), 1995. Footnote on Mormon War in Illinois

¹²⁵ Mauss, Armand L. *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 214.

¹²⁶ Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 159.

this day, scholars continue to dig into the past to help understand why the Church opened the door to formalizing the priesthood and temple restrictions with regards to one racial group worldwide. Church leaders formalized the priesthood restrictions by using various arguments to justify their actions.

From the early 1850s to 1978, the most common argument used to rationalize the priesthood and temple ban of black members was the “inferior status,” or less valiant status, of black members during premortal life—an existence that Latter-day Saint theology holds to have included all human beings.¹²⁷ The stories of early black Latter-day Saints depict the experiences of a twice-marginalized community that has expanded the narrative of Mormonism’s evolution. The black Saints were marginalized first because of the racism embedded in American culture (in large part as a legacy of the transatlantic slave trade), and second because of the Church’s belief that Africans (and thus African Americans) are the descendants of Cain. Elijah Abel’s and Jane Manning James’s stories of faith opened the door to conversations regarding the evolution of Mormonism in the context of racial disparities throughout the world, particularly among Mauritian members.

Two early members of Indian descent (Marlene and Monique Padiachy) joined the Church in Europe before the lifting of the Priesthood ban. The stories below illustrate how the issue of the Priesthood and temple restrictions affected members of Indian and mixed ethnicities.

Between 1977 and 1978, Marlene and Monique, two Indo-Mauritian sisters living in France, began to attend the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and eventually

¹²⁷ Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 214, 376; “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

decided to join the Church. After going through the missionary discussions, two young missionary leaders interviewed the sisters regarding their upcoming baptism. At the end of the interview, one of the missionaries asked the following question: “Would you accept that the black race started with Cain?” Upon hearing this question, both Marlene and Monique were “confused and dumbstruck” as to why the missionary asked this specific question. Since Marlene and Monique had no experience on the subject matter, they cautiously agreed to the statement above. One of the missionaries then went on to explain that the sisters had no need to worry about blacks and the priesthood dilemma because of their Indian ethnicity. “That question shocked me,” recalled Monique. She later inquired to her sister Marlene, “Why did they ask us this question?” On February 1978, despite lingering questions about ethnicity and race troubling them, both Marlene and Monique joined the Church.¹²⁸

A few years after their baptisms, Monique was invited to another member’s house for dinner in France. Around ten members were part of the dinner—all Caucasian French members except for Monique. During the dinner, conversation on the topic of race and ethnicity in the Church came up, and opinions were exchanged. One of the members explained to Monique the reason she was darker: “The reason why your skin is darker is because you were neutral when the plan of salvation was presented. Neither did you choose Christ or reject Him,” said that member. Monique was puzzled, appalled, and hurt that members would think such things regarding members of color. “I cried after

¹²⁸ Rutherford, Taunalyn, Joe Chelladurai, and Vinna Chintaram. "Race and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in India." *Mormon Studies Review* 7 (2020): 55-57. Accessed October 5, 2019. doi:10.5406/mormstudrevi.7.2020.0052.

coming home from that dinner,” recalled Monique of that night. “But I prayed to Heavenly Father and asked Him whether I was indeed less valiant in the pre-existence—whether my skin color was an indication of my action in pre-mortal life.” In 1984, Monique received her patriarchal blessing in France. It talked about her Heavenly Father’s love for her and her obedience in the pre-mortal life. “My patriarchal blessing saved my life and my testimony of the Church,” reflected Monique. Monique believed that her patriarchal blessing answered her question and legitimized her valiancy in the pre-existence. For Jane Manning James, by contrast, the patriarchal blessing was not as reassuring. The white patriarchs who gave these women their blessings addressed the question of race differently, but both responded to it based on their social and historical context: Hyrum Smith lived during the era of slavery, while Monique’s patriarch lived during the postcolonial era.

Scholars need to address the issue of race and power structures among Mauritian Church members since it is a critical (yet understudied) component of these members’ experiences. Peter, one of the first members to join the Church in Mauritius, noted that analyzing the priesthood in the context of race helps us to better understand the complexity of race restrictions within Mormonism:

During my early years in the Church, none of the missionaries talked about the priesthood restriction. But looking back now, I can say that we [male Mauritians] were lucky because if the Church had landed in Mauritius years before the lifting of the ban, we would have been in deep trouble. After my baptism, I remembered receiving my Aaronic priesthood. Still, I did not know what to do with my priesthood blessing. It was a few years later that I studied the importance of the

Priesthood and learned about the restrictions. I never asked any of the Church leaders regarding that topic. But I know that I was lucky to get away with it.

To this day, research on how priesthood power affects people of Indian descent in Mauritius is limited. More archival documents are needed to unravel the implications and repercussions of priesthood and temple bans among Church members in Mauritius.¹²⁹

Local Adaptation and Ethnicities

This section delves deeper into the nuances of cultural and ethnic identities among the Church members in the cosmopolitan society of Mauritius. The following case study is about Nathan's experiences in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint, which reveal layers of complex issues where ethnicities, cultures, and faith are constantly competing in a Latter-day Saint setting. Nathan is of Indian descent but grew up Catholic. He started investigating The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1989 and later joined the Church in Mauritius. In 1994, Nathan married Rachel, a Mauritian girl of Indian and Creole descent who was also raised in the Catholic Church. At that point, Nathan stopped attending the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and married Rachel as a Catholic.

Nathan and Rachel's wedding ceremony illustrates how some Mauritians of Indian descent negotiated the relationships between their ethnic heritage and religious beliefs. Father Besses, a French Jesuit priest who lived in India for several years before transferring to Mauritius and heavily supported the Catholic Indian community in Mauritius, celebrated the marriage ceremony in Mauritius in French, Tamil, and Hindi.

¹²⁹ Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

At the beginning of the marriage ceremony, both Nathan and Rachel lit up the Kuttu Vellaku lamp while the choir sang a hymn in Tamil or Hindi.¹³⁰ Throughout the ceremony, the choir sang hymns in French, Hindi, and Tamil. Phillip Jenkins, a scholar studying the impact of acculturation among non-westernized countries, writes about the importance of the translation of religious texts, noting that translating “the scriptures [and hymns] into local languages [is] itself a key to concession to native cultures.”¹³¹ Jenkins claims that “the mere act of translation proved that no single language was privileged as a vehicle of salvation.”¹³² This argument that westernized languages are not considered as the only “[vehicles] of salvation” is important; translation gives a degree of importance to the local or ancestral languages. By choosing to use languages such as Tamil and Hindi in religious ceremonies, Mauritian Indians pushed toward the decolonization of Catholicism in the global south, and, more specifically, on the island of Mauritius.

While Nathan and Rachel chose to wear western attire for their wedding, many of their Hindu and Christian female guests wore sarees. During the wedding ceremony, Nathan and Rachel’s parents joined them in front of the altar. There, both Nathan and Rachel sought the blessings of their parents by touching the feet of their parents and in-laws.¹³³ The culminating point of the wedding ceremony occurred when Nathan and Rachel exchanged their wedding rings, and Nathan tied the thaali around the bride’s neck.¹³⁴ Nathan and Rachel’s wedding demonstrate how the bride and groom honored their

¹³⁰ Kuttu Vellaku is an Indian traditional lamp, usually made out of brass.

¹³¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 140.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹³³ In Indian culture, it is common to see Hindus touching the feet of their elders, parents, or a priest with their right hand to seek for their blessing while the parents or elder touches the child’s head with their right hand to show their approval.

¹³⁴ For Indians, a thali a yellow thread attached around her neck, signifying that you are a married woman.

ancestral heritage in a Christian ceremony through various aspects such as languages, music, clothing, visual expressions, and culinary traditions. In return, these ‘intentional’ behaviors provided a safe space where Mauritian Indian Catholics experienced intercultural threads of hybridity and Christian theology.

A few years after their wedding, Nathan introduced his wife to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which she eventually joined in 1996. But after coming back to the Church, Nathan started to notice some ethnic tension among Church members:

When we started attending Church, I noticed that there was a division in the branch. Everyone was watching for their own kind. We are taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that ‘we are all one.’ But the reality is that in our country [Mauritius], multiculturalism can create a divide in the Church. It feels like first we are Indian or Creole, then we are Latter-day Saints.¹³⁵

In Mauritius, Mauritians negotiate their double consciousness, where their national identity and ethnic identity compete constantly. In Nathan’s case, he experienced his double consciousness in relation to his ethnic (Indian) and religious (Latter-day Saint) identities. For Nathan, to be a Latter-day Saint within the Mauritian context was to assimilate and be a Creole. According to Nathan, this is because:

In Mauritius, the Creoles think that the Catholic Church is for the Creoles only. Most members in the Mormon Church are Creoles coming from a Catholic background. Because the [Latter-day Saint] Church emphasized that we are a Christian church, Creoles in the [Latter-day Saint] Church think they should be

¹³⁵ Male interviewee’s transcript dated March 25, 2020.

the number one priority in the Church and not you (Indians). When you say you are a Mormon in Mauritius, it means that you need to become like a Creole. As an Indian, you feel like this is not your place. There is a silent clash among Church members in Mauritius. No one talks about it, but you can feel it.¹³⁶

For Creoles, Christianity is for the Creole community. As Nathan mentions, most Church members in Mauritius are Creoles who were raised in the Catholic Church. His statement, “In Mauritius, the Creoles think that the Catholic Church is for the Creoles only,” reveals the pivotal point in understanding the current situation of Mormonism in Mauritius: Converts continue to maintain their understanding of their previous power structure from their past religious faith. Aware of the tense relationships among Creoles, Indian Catholics, and the Catholic Church, Nathan noticed the subtle behaviors of Creole members towards Indian members in the Latter-day Saints Church in Mauritius. Since he had seen a strong minority of Indian Mauritians assert themselves in the Catholic Church, he felt frustrated with the disrespectful way some Creoles treated him in the Latter-day Saints Church. Nathan experienced cognitive dissonance because the teachings of Latter-day Saints did not reflect the reality of how branch members in Mauritius treated each other.

Creoles have long been marginalized by Mauritian society, including by the Catholic Church in Mauritius. However, the Catholic Church continues to make amends for their failures and is speaking on behalf of Creoles regarding social issues affecting this community. Creole Latter-day Saints feel resistance toward Indians who join the Church because Indians are from the dominant ethnic group and hold more economic

¹³⁶ Male interviewee's transcript dated March 25, 2020.

power. In a country dominated by Hindus, Creoles in the Church feel threatened by the notion of Indians flooding the Latter-day Saints community and coming to dominate there, too. Feeling that they have already been deprived of many privileges that other ethnic communities enjoy on the island, Creoles understandably want to maintain some spheres as safe spaces where Creoles hold power, including the Latter-day Saint Church.

Matthew, another Indian Mauritian Latter-day Saints, echoed Nathan's sentiments, stating:

It is already hard to be an Indian who has converted to Mormonism in Mauritius, and the only place where you are supposed to get the support is the Church [in Mauritius], and you don't get it. As a Latter-day Saint, you are shunned by your family and the Indian community. But changing my faith doesn't mean giving up on my Indian culture. But in Mauritius, you have to become like a Creole to be accepted in the Church.¹³⁷

Matthew's comment, "you have to become like a Creole to be accepted in the Church," speaks volumes. The Indian Mauritian Saints feel pressure to conform to the Creole culture in order to be accepted. For example, singing hymns in Tamil or Hindi is an indication of Indianizing the Latter-day Saints Church in Mauritius; hence they experience social pressure not to sing in these languages. Indo-Mauritian Latter-day Saints feel that they are frowned upon for retaining their Indian cultural identity.

The marginalized Creole Latter-day Saints felt that they had already lost many privileges on an island where Hindus are the majority and dominate the government. For Creoles, Christianity is for the Creole community. As members of a marginalized ethnic

¹³⁷ Male interviewee's transcript dated May 1, 2020.

group in Mauritius, the only place where Creoles have had safe space on their own has been in Christian communities. When Catholic Creoles converted to Mormonism, they felt legitimized to claim their safe, religious space in which they could be the majority. As a result, Indians Latter-day Saints feel out of place. Indian Latter-day Saints want to maintain their cultural heritage while still embracing their Latter-day Saint identity, but this balancing act is difficult when the Creole majority in the Mauritian LDS community does not welcome them.

The Mauritian case study shows that converts do not cross over to a new religious community with a clean slate. Rather, they bring with them their cultural and previous religious beliefs.

The Diwali Saga

The next case study looks at the pressures and implications deriving from local adaptation within Mormonism in Mauritius. In general, the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints meet every Sunday to worship together. In addition to Sunday worship, members are encouraged to meet for wholesome activities, where they are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the Saints” (Ephesians 2:19). The main objective of these activities is to “foster unity and personal growth” and “giving [members] a sense of belonging and mutual support” within their congregation.¹³⁸ The following case study explores the interactions between cultural, ethnic, and religious identities in the Latter-day Saints branch in the 1990s in Mauritius.

¹³⁸“Activities,” *General Handbook: Serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/20-activities?lang=eng>.

Historian Peter Burke defines hybridity as “an umbrella covering a variety of different phenomena and processes.”¹³⁹ In other words, hybridity refers to any attempt to blend elements of two or more cultures in a single act. The first model of hybridity and acculturation, which I will analyze is the celebration of the Diwali festival in Mauritius. The following interviews of former Indian Latter-day Saints, a current practitioner (*gens de couleur*) of Latter-day Saint faith, and a current practitioner who is Indian offer different perspectives of this event in the Church in Mauritius.

Diwali, which literally means “a row of lights,” is a Hindu festival. Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated in different ways and by several religious traditions (including Jains, Sikhs, and Christians) with the primary focus on the triumph of light over darkness. The historical narratives of the Diwali festival vary from the celebration of the harvest season to the start of a New Year, but the most well-known is the epic Hindu story of the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana. Cast out from the northern kingdom of Ayodha, Lord Rama, his wife Sita, and his brother Lakshman experienced perilous adventures by fighting against Ravana, a force of evil. After 14 years of exile, the trio started making their way back to the northern part of India. During their journey, Hindus lit Diyas (earthen lamps) in their honor to celebrate the conquest of good over evil. Since then, Diwali has become known as the symbolic celebration of light overcoming darkness. Hindu members of the Indian diaspora celebrate Diwali as a religious observance, but for Indians of other faiths, Diwali is “a celebration of one’s

¹³⁹ Peter Burke, *Hybrid Renaissance: Culture, Language, Architecture*, (New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 2; Marc David Baer, “History and Religious Conversion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28.

Indian identity.”¹⁴⁰ Some Indian members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints wanted to communally honor their Indian cultural identity and the symbolic triumph of light over darkness, which prompted them to propose hosting a Diwali branch activity.

The Indian Perspective

In the late 1990s, the branch in Mauritius decided to celebrate the Diwali festival, not as a Hindu celebration but a celebration of the Indian culture. It is noteworthy to understand that in Mauritius, Indian culture is synonymous to Hinduism. Diwali is a public holiday on the island, and so it is a well-known festival. At the time, the Branch president, a Franco-Mauritian who had lived abroad for years, moved back to Mauritius. The Relief Society President, a recent convert of Indian descent, proposed the idea of celebrating an Indian cultural event to the Church leaders in Mauritius. Both Nathan and his wife, Rachel, attended the event and related their experiences:

The Diwali branch activity was a hit. Since we live in a multiracial and multiethnic country, we wanted to bring that Indian cultural touch in the Church activity. They were approximately 60 people attending. We had Indian food and Indian sweets. We all got dressed up in Indian attire. We put little diyas on the front lawn of the Church. The LDS Church emphasizes family history and family heritage. This is our heritage.¹⁴¹

As happy as the celebration was for Nathan and Rachel, not all members of the branch in Mauritius approved of the event. Nathan explained, “After the Diwali celebration, some members of Creole descent were not happy that there were Indian

¹⁴⁰ “Deconstructing Diwali”, *New India Times*, October 28, 2011, accessed June 5, 2020.

¹⁴¹ Male interviewee’s transcript dated March 25, 2020.

lamps during the activity. They said that it was Hinduism. They complained to the branch presidency.” Nathan and Rachel felt alienated by this hostile response. They did not understand the reason for the hostility. Nathan reasoned, “When we became Latter-day Saints, it doesn’t mean that we need to change our cultural heritage and forget where we came from.” Like other Indians in the Church, Nathan expected to be able to bring his culture with him to the LDS Church. However, Nathan explained that the reaction made him feel as if the branch was “asking [him] to completely uproot his identity because [he] chose to join the Church.”¹⁴²

The Diwali incident illustrated the constant negotiation that occurs within the Latter-day Saint community in Mauritius. Among some demographic groups in the Latter-day Saint community, such as the Franco-Mauritians and Creoles “... there still are many people who are able to switch between cultures as they do between languages or linguistic registers, choosing what they consider to be appropriate to the situation in which they find themselves.”¹⁴³ The Diwali episode blurred the lines between religion and cultural identity for Indo-Mauritians, however, showing that not all Latter-day Saints can switch between various parts of their identities with equal impunity. The experience of Indo-Mauritians in terms of their attempts to integrate their Mormon faith with their Hindu cultural identity opens the door to conversations on hybridity. Some Indo-Mauritians who have converted to Mormonism have sought to create a hybrid version of their Indo-Mauritian Latter-day faith by infusing it with elements of their Indian traditions and culture—elements that, although historically associated with Hinduism, only carry

¹⁴² Male interviewee’s transcript dated March 25, 2020.

¹⁴³ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 143.

cultural or communal (as opposed to religious) significance for these Indo-Mauritian Latter-day Saints.

The Creole perspective

During one of the interviews, Rebecca, a member of Indian descent, related an experience during a Relief Society meeting around 2016:

Two or three years ago, the topic of culture came up during one of the Relief Society lessons. Jane, a Church member who is Creole, shared an example of how sometimes culture can be a hindrance for the Saints. Jane shared how she and her family reacted to the Diwali celebration held at the Church in Mauritius. While waiting for her husband to get back home, Jane and her children were getting ready to attend the Diwali night at the Church. At that time, the Church building was in the city of Quatre-Bornes. When Jane's husband got home, he told them that they were not going to the activity. This was because, on his way home, Jane's husband had driven by the Church building and saw lights lit up all around the Church. He stated that they [Church members] were celebrating Diwali in the Church. Jane went on to say that once we join the [Latter-day Saint] Church, we should cut off all the cultural ties related to our previous faith.¹⁴⁴

After Rebecca related this story, I asked her if anyone in the Relief Society meeting made any comments following this sister's remark. "No, no one said anything," recalled Rebecca. "Even though I am of Indian descent, I stayed quiet, too. I think this is because most members in the Church are Creoles, with a few Indians." Rebecca did not feel comfortable speaking up because, as an Indian, she was in the minority, indicating

¹⁴⁴ Female interviewee's transcript dated March 24, 2020.

that the multiculturalism that is embraced in Mauritius at a national level does not permeate all subcultures.

Converts generally feel that part of embracing a new religious tradition requires giving up previous religious practices. However, not all religious practices have religious significance; some may only have cultural or social significance. In this case, the Diwali example shows that Jane saw the Diwali celebration as a Hindu religious festival. For Indo-Mauritians, however, Diwali may not have any religious significance; Diwali may instead just be an Indian cultural holiday that they wish to celebrate without any Hindu religious overtones. The controversy surrounding the Diwali event in the branch raises questions about the fluidity between culture and religion for Indo-Mauritians and other Mormon converts. Are the Church leaders equipped to understand the various and sometimes conflicting cultures and ethnicities in Mauritius, or in countries where there is tremendous diversity? The Diwali celebration happened only once in Mauritius, but it exposed the underlying tension between the different ethnic groups that, in Mauritius, are historically associated with religions other than Mormonism.

The *Gens de couleur* Perspective

Some non-Indian Latter-day Saints who are members of the Church enjoyed themselves during the Diwali celebration. Esther, a Church convert and a member of the *gens de couleur* who has fair skin, recalled her experience of celebrating Diwali at Church:

The Relief Society President at that time was a woman of Indian descent who grew up Hindu and was a new convert. Since Diwali is a public holiday in Mauritius, this Relief Society President asked the Branch President if the Church

could do a Diwali branch activity, focusing on the cultural aspect of the celebration.¹⁴⁵

Esther noted, “This was not about Hinduism. It was about the celebration of light over evil.” Esther enjoyed the celebration. She explained:

We were all dressed up. I borrowed a saree from one of my Indian friends. My friend helped me to wrap the saree around. The members made Indian food and Indian sweets. There were lights everywhere in the Church’s front veranda and front yard. Members of all ethnicities wore sarees, churidar, and even the Elders wore the kurta. We all had a wonderful time.

When asked whether she ever felt offended that the branch decided to do the Diwali branch activity, Esther laughed:

Look, my grandfather was a Franco-Mauritian, and he married a Creole woman. I have cousins who are half Muslims, half Tamilian, half Chinese, etc. In my family, it is a mix of cultures, ethnicities, and religions. I can proudly say that I come from a ‘true Mauritian family.’ Regarding the Diwali activity, I think some members overreacted because they do not understand the difference between culture and religion. Everyone knows in Mauritius that Diwali is the festival of lights. It means victory of good over evil. For us, Latter-day Saints, where do we first mention light in our Church history? When Joseph Smith was in the woods, he prayed, and, before witnessing the presence of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, he felt the presence of darkness surrounding him. It was the light that broke

¹⁴⁵ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 20, 2020.

through the darkness. The Indian Relief Society President, who suggested having Diwali at Church focused only on Indian culture, not the religion.¹⁴⁶

The statement “This was not about Hinduism” scratches the surface on the debate about the appropriate boundaries between culture and religion. In Jane’s case, Diwali represented Hinduism, while for Nathan, Rachel, and Esther, the Diwali activity at Church represented an Indian cultural celebration. For decades, scholars and religious practitioners have been debating and arguing about the dividing line between culture and religion. To what extent are they separate entities? Where do we draw the distinction between what constitutes cultural practices accompanying converts into a new religious tradition, and what constitutes former religious practices intruding into and adulterating the new faith community? Lastly, how does hybridity play a role in the celebration of Diwali by Indo-Mauritian Mormons? The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not the only Christian faith wrestling with such questions. For example, the Indo Catholics in Mauritius celebrate Diwali in the Catholic Church: Mgr. Maurice Piat, a Franco-Mauritian, often officiated a Diwali Catholic mass in Mauritius in order to make Indo-Mauritian converts feel more welcome. On the opposite side of the spectrum, some protestant pastors in Texas forbade their Indian practitioners from celebrating Diwali, arguing that it is “a major Hindu festival, Christ is not part of the celebration.”¹⁴⁷ In the case of Mormonism, to what extent will the Church embrace hybridity when it comes to its theology and practice? And more importantly, which approach—embracing hybridity

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ “Can Christians celebrate Diwali,” *Deseret News*, October 22, 2014, accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.deseret.com/2014/10/22/20551063/can-christians-celebrate-diwali>.

as a necessity for attracting diverse congregants or rejecting hybridity as an adulterant of the faith— will dominate the Latter-day Saint theology?

Conclusion

Historian scholar Baer argues that the process of conversion is divided into four categories: acculturation, adhesion or hybridity, syncretism, and transformation.¹⁴⁸ This thesis focused primarily on one of the categories mentioned by Baer: hybridity. Chapter 2 analyzed the relationships of interviewees with their Latter-day Saint faith, demonstrating that hybridity affected the interviewees' religious and cultural spaces differently depending on their ethnicity. Creoles were able to hybridize Mormonism with their local cultures and traditions successfully, while Indo-Mauritian Saints faced challenges to their attempts at hybridization. One example of the successful hybridization of Mormonism with Creole culture is the use of the Kreol language during worship services. The use of Kreol in the Church demonstrates that, to some extent, the Church is willing to adapt to local cultures. However, the backlash following the Diwali celebration in the branch in Mauritius underscores that there are limits to what the Church's local leaders will accept when it comes to local adaptations.

Historian scholar Peter Burke argues that hybridization “sometimes takes place at someone's expense,” reminding us of the power struggle between groups of people.¹⁴⁹ This case study demonstrated that the attempts at hybridization are accepted only so long as Mauritians stay within their respective ancestral religious spaces—namely, Christianity for Creoles, gens de couleurs, and Franco-Mauritians and Hinduism for Mauritians of Indian descent. For the Creole Latter-day Saint community, the process of

¹⁴⁸ Marc David Baer, “History and Religious Conversion,” 23.

¹⁴⁹ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 6.

hybridization in Mauritius is an ongoing positive experience, as the Kreol language and Creole culture are gradually influencing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius. In the case of the Indo-Mauritian Latter-day Saints, by contrast, hybridity is limited as the Creole-dominated Church in Mauritius is less willing to adapt to Indian culture. The skepticism about incorporating elements of Indian culture into the Latter-day Saint community likely stems from the fact that Mauritians of Indian descent are associated with the Hindu religion as well as from the segregated form of multiculturalism that permeates Mauritius.

In other words, Indo-Mauritian Latter-day Saints likely find resistance toward their attempts at local adaptation due to the cultural tendency of Mauritians to embrace diversity only so long as different demographic groups remain separate and independent. The Church's reluctance to embrace local Indian cultural adaptations is alienating Indo-Mauritians from the Church and undermining the diversity within the Mauritian Latter-day Saint community. Yet, one can argue that because Creoles continue to be politically and socially excluded by the Indian dominated government, Latter-day Saints Creoles are reluctant to give up their power privilege in the Church in Mauritius, thus demonstrating that race and power relations on the island influence the Church. The broader implication for Mormonism is that in cosmopolitan societies like Mauritius, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' willingness to be open to the idea of consciously embracing local adaptations from every ethnic group will create a multicultural theology, where all of them are invited to "come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female... all are alike unto God."¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ 2 Nephi 26:33 (The Book of Mormon).

CHAPTER IV

MORMONISM IN MAURITIUS (2000–2020)-RACE AND LOCAL ADAPTATIONS

Introduction

Scholars Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian stated that “Conversion occurs in all directions.¹⁵¹” Chapter three continues the discussion on the conversion of Mauritian Latter-day Saints in relation to local adaptations, race and power, and the role of the Church leadership. From 2000-2020, the Church in Mauritius witnessed significant changes, including the creation of branches in Rose-Hill (1985), Phoenix Branch (2004), and Flacq Branch (2017); the adoption of Kreol-language services in the Rose-Hill and Flacq branches; the introduction of an English-speaking group within the Kreol and French-speaking Phoenix branch; and the effects on the creation of the first Mauritian district.¹⁵²

With the support of oral history interviews, I focus on two issues in this chapter. First, I explore the tension between the formal and informal establishments within Mormonism in Mauritius. Second, I examine how Mauritian Saints from Gen Y and Generation Z are living their faith. Do these younger generations (born after 1980) challenge the formal Church institution? Are they more open than older Mauritian Saints

¹⁵¹ Rambo and Farhadian, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 1.

¹⁵² “Mauritius: Chronology,” *Global Histories*; According to the Church’s official website, congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are organized geographically, and members attend worship services near their home. Each member belongs to a ward or branch. Small congregations are called branch. See “Wards,” *Newsroom*, accessed March 28, 2020, <http://newsroom.churchofjesus-christ.org/article/ward>; Most congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are organized geographically into stakes, which are similar to Catholic dioceses and are made up of individual congregations called wards. In areas where there are fewer Church members, Latter-day Saints may be organized into a district, which is a smaller version of a stake. Each district is made up of branches. See “District,” *Newsroom*, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/district>.

(those born before 1980) to exhibiting flexibility when it comes to local adaptations and race? Do they demonstrate greater flexibility when it comes to expressing their faith in a way that is intertwined with their ethnic identity? To address these questions, I will probe a case study—analyzing examples of how Mauritian Church members have sought to adapt religious traditions to their cultural identities through a temple wedding.

Weddings within a Latter-day Saint context

The sanctity of marriage is recognized and advocated by many religious and non-religious traditions. But views on marriage after death vary tremendously from one tradition to another. For the majority of Christians, marriage is recognized as a commitment that lasts only until death. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe that marriage is sacred and eternal. According to the Church’s doctrine, “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God,” and members are encouraged to strive for a temple wedding in order to achieve eternal exaltation (explain).¹⁵³ Moreover, the Church’s theology teaches members that families have the possibility to be together forever, beyond the grave.

In 1836, under Joseph Smith’s direction, Church members completed their first temple in Kirtland.¹⁵⁴ Today, over 150 temples are operated globally, and the ongoing construction of temples suggests that the “higher temple marriage rates are indicative of greater levels of religious participation.” Temples are important because they are the only

¹⁵³ “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Basic Resources*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>.

¹⁵⁴ “List of Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Wikipedia*, last modified June 25, 2020, accessed May 7, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_temples_of_The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints#Dedicated:_19th_century.

place where Saints can perform rituals and covenants opening the doors for “family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave.”¹⁵⁵ Only members who live according to the higher law are allowed to enter the temples.¹⁵⁶

When the Church started in Mauritius, the closest temples where Mauritians could participate in temple worship were the Bern Switzerland temple (dedicated in 1955) and the London England temple (dedicated in 1958), a 12-hour flight from Mauritius. On August 24, 1985, Church leader Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the Johannesburg South Africa temple, reducing the travel time for Mauritian members to a four-hour flight. Based on the Church archives, we have no information regarding the identity of the first Mauritian member living on the island who attended the temple in Europe or South Africa. However, building on oral history interviews, this chapter explores the temple experiences of Mauritian Church members, including the second generation of Mauritian Latter-day Saints.

Temple experiences can be problematic for converts. In many cases, most of their loved ones are not members of the faith, which limits their ability to participate in the wedding ceremony. In such cases, Church leaders encourage couples to hold a ring ceremony after the wedding in the temple, at which, under the authority of a local church leader, the bride and the groom exchange their wedding rings in front of families and friends.

¹⁵⁵ “About a Temple Sealing,” *Temples*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/what-happens-in-a-temple-sealing?lang=eng>.

¹⁵⁶ For members to enter the temple, they need to be interviewed by their local church leaders to determine their worthiness to enter the temple. See “Temple Recommends,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 12, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/26-temple-recommends?lang=eng>.

For Latter-day Saint members of Indian descent, weddings are even more complicated because, in addition to navigating the challenges of incorporating non-Mormon relatives into the marriage celebration, they also face the challenge of adapting wedding ceremonies to fit their cultural and ethnic identities. How do members of different ethnic identities reconcile their cultural identities with Mormonism? More specifically, how do Mauritian Indian Latter-day Saints navigate the nuances of planning an Indian Latter-day Saint wedding?

“I’ve always wanted an Indian wedding,” said Ruth¹⁵⁷ as she told me about her wedding experience. Ruth grew up in Mauritius and came from a Hindu background. She joined the Church in the 1990s and served a proselytizing mission for the Church. In 2016 she married her husband-to-be, who is white American. Most of her family members are not members of the Church, although a few are former Latter-day Saints. Ruth’s wedding experience illustrates the negotiations that take place when converts choose to marry in a Latter-day Saint temple and want to include their cultural ethnic elements. Ruth wrote about her wedding experience:

When I was getting married, I chose to have an Indian wedding, which meant I had to sit down and figure out what elements constitute an Indian wedding that was religious [Hindu] and ... what was cultural, in that they represented my cultural heritage [that] I was proud to showcase, celebrate, share and [at the same time show respect toward] the temple sealing. I had to give a lot of thought to that, and I struck a balance that I was comfortable with.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 18, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Like most Latter-day Saints, Ruth chose to marry in a temple. However, since her guests were either non-members' or former members of the Church, she tried to figure out how to have a temple ceremony and still be sensitive and inclusive of her loved ones during this special occasion.

The temple wedding took place on a Friday. While many women from the western world dream of getting married in a white dress, most Indian women, including myself, dream of wearing a saree or lehenga for our wedding day.¹⁵⁹ Ruth decided to wear a lehenga, a two-piece outfit with a long skirt and a blouse, usually with intricate Indian embroidery works on it. Ruth's mom, who is a former member of the Church, bought a white saree with a silver border for her daughter. A Relief society sister used the saree to sew Ruth's temple lehenga. Usually, the lehenga's blouse is cut short, leaving the midriff open. However, because Latter-day Saint members who attend the temple must wear temple garments covering the midriff, Ruth chose to alter her traditional blouse to make it long enough to cover her midriff. Other Indian Latter-day Saints who wear the sacred temple garments also learn to modify their Indian outfits to accommodate the Church norms regarding appropriate temple attire. Ruth's example illustrates that she took responsibility for incorporating her Indian heritage in her wedding. Ruth explained to me that prayer and divine revelation helped her to make the decision to have a temple marriage with an emphasis on her Indian heritage:

¹⁵⁹ A saree is originally from India and is typically a long piece of cloth and is wrapped around the waist while one end is draped over the shoulder. A saree is usually from 4.5 to 9 meters in length; A lehenga is a full skirt, usually ankle length with an Indian blouse (choli).

My patriarchal blessing¹⁶⁰ talks about my ancestors and the blood that flows in my veins. They [my ancestors] were righteous, and they paved the way for me to accept the gospel, and they were all Indians. So, I think when I am celebrating them, by celebrating the culture and sharing the culture with my family right now, and any children that I might have, I am okay with my decision. I did my best as a Latter-day Saint.¹⁶¹

By using the patriarchal blessing as means of seeking “personal revelation and instructions from Heavenly Father,” Ruth leveraged her agency and her faith to explain her decision of having a hybridized Latter-day Saints–Indian cultural wedding.

After the temple wedding, the wedding party gathered at an Indian restaurant for a wedding dinner. The following day, Ruth and her husband had an elaborate ring ceremony that included Indian traditions. For example, Ruth’s bishop officiated the wedding ceremony under a mandap. A mandap is a covered structure with pillars, usually made of wood and decorated with garlands of flowers. Mandaps are common in Hindu weddings. Hindu wedding ceremonies take place under the mandap. Ruth’s friends had built the mandap and decorated it with flowers and light. Ruth’s brothers wore kurtas, and her bridesmaids wore sarees.¹⁶²

The ring ceremony began with the bride and groom sharing their vows and exchanging rings. Scott placed toe rings on Ruth’s toes, and the groom and bride

¹⁶⁰ Patriarchal blessings include a declaration of a person’s lineage in the house of Israel and contain personal counsel from the Lord. It contains personal revelation and instructions from Heavenly Father, who knows our strengths, weaknesses, and eternal potential. Patriarchal blessings may contain promises, admonitions, and warnings. See “Patriarchal Blessings,” *Gospel Topics*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/patriarchal-blessings?lang=eng>.

¹⁶¹ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 18, 2020.

¹⁶² A kurta is a collarless shirt usually worn in India and many parts of South Asia.

exchanged Malai, wedding garlands. The toe rings signified that Ruth was a married woman; the exchange of garlands represented the unification of two souls and becoming one. As the couple performed each Indian tradition in front of the guests, the bishop explained the significance of the Indian traditions. Ruth explained that before the wedding happened, she had talked to her bishop and explained how she and her fiancé envisioned their temple wedding and ring ceremony. Ruth remembered that the bishop said, “You tell me what to say, what to do, and I will do it.”¹⁶³

During our interview, Ruth reflected on her family’s experience at the ring ceremony:

I think my family really appreciated it. My mom had planned to come [from Mauritius], and she was unable. It was really hard for her not to attend. We talked over the phone on the day of the wedding. [Because my mom picked her sarees], I felt like MY mom was with me in spirit. My brothers really appreciated being included.

Analysis of the wedding

Ruth’s example demonstrates that Latter-day Saint women have used their agency and spirituality to customize their faith in accordance with their ethnic and cultural identity. Lisa Clayton writes on the intersection of religious women and the act of agency:

These women [Latter-day Saints] and others seek and receive divine revelation and then act for themselves—or exercise agency—as a result. They share their experience with an aspect of their religion that has often been misunderstood by

¹⁶³ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 18, 2020.

those, not of their faith. Secular culture and feminist theory have often diminished conservative religious women as people who do not act independently...¹⁶⁴

In Ruth's case, she acted according to her understanding of her relationship with God, which taught her that the "gospel's message is about hope...and eternal families."¹⁶⁵ She also acted upon her strong desire to promote inclusivity in her faith and transform her wedding experience into a unique expression of both her culture and her faith. Scholar Catherine Brekus analyzes the framework of agency within a religious tradition:

'Agency' today has become virtually synonymous with emancipation, liberation, and resistance. When historians write about agency, they often imagine an individual in conflict with his or her society who self-consciously seeks greater freedom... Because historians have implicitly defined agency against structure, they have found it hard to imagine women who accepted religious structures as agents.¹⁶⁶

Brekus makes the argument that when analyzing religious women, scholars should expand the definition of agency, opening the doors to further conversations about the role of conversion and personal agency. Ruth and a few other colored women, including me, who chose to wear their traditional ethnic gowns for their weddings, can be described as outliers in the Church because they chose to "build a history that increases self-confidence in their capacity to act."¹⁶⁷ Building on Brekus's comment, I argue that

¹⁶⁴ Lisa Thomas Clayton, "Revelation," in *Mormon Women Have Their Say: Essays from the Claremont Oral History Collection*, eds., Claudia L. Bushman and Caroline Kline (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 145-146.

¹⁶⁵ Female interviewee's transcript dated April 18, 2020.

¹⁶⁶ Catherine A. Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History* 37 (2011): 72.

¹⁶⁷ Lisa Thomas Clayton, "Revelation," 166.

listening to women—especially women of color—who act according to their personal revelation in interpreting their faith by “exercising choice within a social and theological structure—either of their choosing or inheritance” will promote a multicultural Latter-day Saint theology.¹⁶⁸ In general, many Latter-day Saints women of color inherit many forms of insecurities from their colonial background; as a result they face barriers in learning to articulate and speak their thoughts. When women of color are asked why they prefer to wear white wedding gowns as opposed to their traditional attire in the temple on their wedding days, one Mauritian Latter-day Saint woman stated, “I think they are afraid to ask. They have never seen it in the Church magazine. They don’t know if it’s even possible to wear their traditional wedding gown in the temple. They don’t know if it’s okay or not, and they are afraid to speak up.”¹⁶⁹

This sense of insecurity arises from the lack of cultural markers in temple experiences. Yet the official Church website states that “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experiences strength from its diversity.”¹⁷⁰ On the website, there are many pictures of couples of various racial diversities standing in front of the temple.¹⁷¹ These pictures are positive examples demonstrating that the Church embraces its global membership. Yet, these same pictures also posit the issue of cultural identity among members of the Global South. None of the pictures of the bride and groom on the Church

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 153.

¹⁶⁹ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 13, 2020.

¹⁷⁰ “Diversity and Unity in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Gospel Topics*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/diversity-and-unity?lang=eng>.

¹⁷¹ Please see one example of a family of diversity on the official Church website. See “Johannesburg Temple Closed a Month Reopens,” *Newsroom*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed, June 10, 2020, <https://news-za.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/johannesburg-temple-reopens?imageView=happy-black-family.jpg>.

website show any bride wearing a traditional wedding gown, whether it be a saree or African dress. Indeed, pictures of Latter-day Saint women and men of color wearing traditional outfits are only showcased during the General Conference times in the Church magazine and on its websites. These examples illustrate that the Church is readily open to a body of diversity in the Church as long as they conform to western attire. Traditional outfits are only seen in the Church's magazine during events such as the general conference.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is slowly becoming comfortable with greater ethnic diversity and, to some extent, cultural diversity, but not when it comes to temple weddings. Having never seen any examples of women of color dressed in their traditional gowns for their temple weddings, many women of color, including Mauritian women, choose not to wear sarees or lehenga. Additionally, at Ruth's wedding and my own, support from a local Church leader was vital for facilitating a hybrid temple wedding experience. Scholars to date have not sufficiently studied this hybrid approach of incorporating cultural traditions into the religious practice of Mormonism.

The second aspect which this chapter focuses on is the use of vernacular languages in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it expands globally. As of 2015, the Book of Mormon has been translated into 97 languages.¹⁷² The Church places an important value on translating Church materials, including the scriptures, teaching manuals, hymnals, Church magazines, and many other forms of spiritual teaching tools.

¹⁷² "Book of Mormon in 110 Languages," *Ensign*, May 2015, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/05/news-of-the-church/book-of-mormon-in-110-languages?lang=eng>.

This thesis looks at how the Church is responding in a multilingual nation such as Mauritius. After noting the primary language(s) used during worship services among Latter-day Saints in Mauritius and how representative these languages are of the island, this chapter will analyze the nature and relative success of the Church's ambition to welcome members of diverse ethnic backgrounds into its membership.

As mentioned previously, Kreol is the unofficial dominant vernacular for the majority of Mauritians. Most Mauritians are fluent in French, given that it is the major language of newspapers and media. Government officials use English for written communications and legislation, and teachers use English in public schools. In addition, the government and sociocultural groups promote the use of ancestral languages (Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Hindi, and etc...) among ethnic communities. The mosaic of languages in Mauritius puts many Mauritians in an advantageous position for seeking educational opportunities and jobs overseas. But the multilingual characteristics in Mauritius also open the door for complex interaction among ethnic groups. Anthropologist, Patrick Eisenlohr who writes on the promotion and challenges of language in Mauritius argued:

Cultivation of ancestral languages as components and mediators of "ancestral cultures" is part of a hegemonic notion of cultural citizenship, according to which Mauritians are primarily conceived as subjects with origins in other parts of the world and ongoing commitments to diasporic "ancestral cultures." Accordingly, full membership in a Mauritian nation is formed by the cultivation of such "ancestral cultures," while the Creoles, having recognized claims on an "ancestral culture," inhabit a more marginal position in the nation.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Patrick Eisenlohr, "Creole Publics: Language, Cultural Citizenship, and the Spread of the Nation in Mauritius," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 4 (2007): 974.

While it is true that many ethnic communities are attached to their ancestral languages for various reasons, including political gain, social and economic benefits, I agree with Eisenlohr that the multilingual environment in Mauritius carries a double burden. The French and English languages are the vestiges of colonial power. Today, Mauritian society considers the French and English languages as elite languages for the upper-middle-class Mauritians, and Kreol is looked down upon despite considerable efforts from the government and pedagogues to promote the Kreol language. Consequently, it is worth studying the relationship between language, race, power, and local leadership in the Mauritian Latter-day Saints congregations.

In addition, the Creole community cannot solely claim Kreol, the Mauritian vernacular, as its own, since most Mauritians—regardless of their ethnic backgrounds—use it in their everyday lives. To many Mauritians, the Kreol language “is central to what many regards as the only unifying cultural process supporting a Mauritian national identity.”¹⁷⁴

In light of the controversies over language, my research regarding the Church in Mauritius sought to answer the following questions: How is the Kreol language accepted in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Rose-Hill, Phoenix and Flacq branches?

Since the beginning of the Church in Mauritius, the Church leaders have conducted meetings in French. There is no record of the reactions of Mauritian members regarding the mandatory use of the French language at Church. From 1980 till 2004, Church members in Mauritius used French during worshipping time. However, my oral

¹⁷⁴ Patrick Eisenlohr, “Creole Publics,” 975.

history interviews with some Mauritian members revealed that the members feel uneasy when it comes to the languages used at Church.

Deborah joined the Church in Mauritius in the 1990s (find the name of the branch and Quatre-Bornes). She continues to be active in the Church and currently lives outside of Mauritius. In her interview, she reminisced about her first year in the Church in Mauritius:

The French thing was a weird thing [at Church]. French scriptures, French hymns, and everybody was pretending to be like the French people. It felt awkward. Very few members [at Church] spoke Creole. There was one woman who was a Church leader of Creole descent, and she made me feel welcome and comfortable.

Everyone speaks Kreol in Mauritius. It is a spoken language, not a written language. I think lessons should be in Kreol, and talks should be in Kreol. When talks are given in French, it sounds too formal or posh; it makes people back away. It intimidates people who are not fluent in speaking French or English. Then they think, “Oh, this is an upper-middle-class church.” Mauritians don’t mind having the scriptures in French, but if they have to speak and engage in French only, then it is a problem.¹⁷⁵

Deborah’s comments echo a former member, Neil’s, comment on the Church meetings in French and English:

One day, I was driving by the Rose-Hill chapel with one of my co-workers, and I told him that I used to go to this Church there. “It is called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church.” My co-worker

¹⁷⁵ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 13, 2020.

said, “I heard of that Church. I could never go there; only people that speak French and English can attend Church there.”¹⁷⁶

Deborah and Neil’s comments and reactions touched on a sensitive point regarding the political, economic, and ethnic associations that different languages carry. In public spaces, colonial languages such as French and English compete on the national level with ancestral languages such as Hindi while the Kreol language is under-valued, unofficial vernacular. Scholar Patrick Eisenlohr who researches on the Kreol language in Mauritius argued:

Not only were French and Mauritian Creole radically different languages, but they also represented opposed ideological vantage points, one associated with the old colonial order and the small but wealthy Franco-Mauritian community that still controlled most of the economy, the other the language of the "people" and their emancipatory aspirations.¹⁷⁷

The irony of the Latter-day Saint case in Mauritius is that the Creole community had distanced itself from “emancipatory aspirations” in the Church. By avoiding using Kreol during worship time, Mauritian Latter-day Saints have consciously or subconsciously established themselves as members of the upper-class. Because Mauritian society marginalizes the Creole community, the Creole members of the Church have favored the French language over their native tongue in church, to reinforce their sense of social upward mobility.

¹⁷⁶ Male interviewee’s transcript dated March 25, 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Patrick Eisenlohr, “Creole Publics: Language, Cultural Citizenship, and the Spread of the Nation in Mauritius,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 4 (2007): 982.

In January 2004, Church leaders overseeing the Indian Ocean region divided the Rose-Hill branch into two branches: Rose-Hill and Phoenix. The Rose-Hill branch continued to hold its meeting in the Rose-Hill chapel; the Phoenix branch met in a rented building in Vacoas as the Church began construction of the new Phoenix chapel. The creation of the Phoenix branch also came with a twist, with Mauritians and expat Latter-day Saints coming together in one branch.

Mauritius is best known for its tourism sector, but over the years, it has also developed as a financial hub for many foreign investors. Today, Mauritius attracts many foreigners from Europe, India, and Africa. In the late 1990s, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mauritius experienced an influx of foreign members, which I will refer to as expat Latter-day Saints. Some of these expat Latter-day Saints spoke English and settled down in Mauritius, leading to ‘a new normal’ during Church worship.

Since the majority of the expats transitioned to the Phoenix branch, the Phoenix branch adapted its practices and guidelines regarding Church languages. Joanna, a life-long Church member in Mauritius, explained, “Sunday school and Relief society [including Priesthood classes] were done in both French and English. The sacrament meeting was done in English and French. Depending on the speakers, there was always a translator available [during Church meetings].”¹⁷⁸ The Rose-Hill branch, which did not have as many as expat Latter-day Saints, continued to conduct Church meetings in French.

In the 2000s, the Church leaders in Rose-Hill transitioned to Church worship in Kreol with the limited use of French for the sacrament prayers and hymns. The Church

¹⁷⁸ Female interviewee’s transcript dated April 20, 2020.

body in the Rose-Hill branch is comprised mainly of people of African ancestry along with a few Indo-Mauritians. However, Church members in the Rose-Hill branch and other branches still debate which language(s) should be used in Church—Kreol, French, or English.

In 2019, I traveled to Mauritius for three weeks and planned to attend both the Rose-Hill and Phoenix branches. The last time I had visited Mauritius was in 2013. When I visited the Rose-Hill branch, I noticed that although members used the Kreol language during Church meetings, some members spoke French when informally addressing each other. Based on my observations at the Rose-Hill branch, Mauritian Saints prefer to use the French language as a way to show that they have moved up the social ladder. In Mauritius, as in many postcolonial countries, languages carry strong implications regarding people's class and socio-economic status. In Mauritius, the Franco-Mauritians maintained their French language as their primary language; the gens de couleurs and the Creoles speak Kreol but feel a stronger connection to French as opposed to English. This choice of languages reflects the fact that the gens de couleur and Creoles tend to feel more affinity toward the French colonial power. Indo-Mauritians, by contrast, feel more affinity toward the British colonial power and prefer English.

Before I continue describing the changes within the Phoenix branch, it is essential to understand the leadership structure descending from the top or general, the Mission presidency, to the district presidency, and finally to the local branch presidency.

In the Phoenix Branch, Church members are constructing a different narrative regarding the use of languages. As mentioned above, Phoenix branch Church leaders run services in French and English with only a touch of Creole. This use of both French and

English reflects the fact that in 2017 the Phoenix Branch underwent a significant development: with the approval of the Madagascar mission presidency, two distinct groups emerged into the branch—the English-speaking group and the French/Creole speaking group. The English-speaking group mainly consisted mainly of white expats living in Mauritius, while the French/Creole speaking group consisted mainly of native Mauritians.

The Madagascar mission president oversees all of the missionaries serving in Mauritius and members of the district of Mauritius. Since the beginning of the Church in Mauritius, mission presidents in the Indian Ocean region have all been white members coming from an American or European background; many of them previously served in two-year missions in francophone countries. We should also note that many colored Latter-day Saints have only recently become members of the Church; most members with seniority in the Church are white Americans and Europeans. The Church decided which people to send to Mauritius based on candidates' experience with missionary work in French-speaking countries and based on their history with the Church. Since most lifelong members with knowledge of French are white, it is understandable that predominantly white members rose to the top of the list as being most suitable for establishing the Church on the island.

In 2017, Church leaders organized the first Church district in Mauritius. Specifically, the Rose-Hill, Phoenix, and Flacq branches joined to form the district of Mauritius. Leading the district of Mauritius is an Afrikaner South African leader; he is the District President, and he serves with two Mauritian counselors of mixed Indian and African ancestry. At a lower level of leadership under the District presidency are the

three branch presidencies in Mauritius. Each branch presidency is made up solely of local members, most of whom represent African ethnicities.¹⁷⁹

Regarding the languages used at Church, members in the Phoenix branch, regardless of race, had mixed reactions to this change. Paul grew up in Mauritius and is of mixed ethnicities but identifies primarily as Creole. Paul joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1980s in Europe. There, he attended a ward, learned about the basic principles of the gospel, and fostered new friendships. His first impression of the Church in one of the cities in Europe left a strong impression in his memory. There, he got a glimpse of what a global Church should look like:

My first experience as a member of the Church, I was in a multicultural ward.

There were white members and African members in the same ward. One day, the bishop of the ward invited me over for dinner with the missionaries. The bishop was wealthy, and he came to pick me up from my place. I felt uncomfortable, and I felt very small. [For example], a Franco-Mauritian inviting you to his place, that doesn't exist in Mauritius. After dinner, I told him that I could take the train, but he insisted on dropping me at my house. That's something that you will never see in Mauritius. Here [in this Church in Europe], I saw a culture in the Church that is different. I saw a fraternity between members, and that touched me deeply.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ The Church is led by 15 apostles. The most senior apostle is the president of the Church, and he selects two other apostles as counselors. These three functions as the First Presidency, which is the highest governing body of the Church. Twelve others form the Quorum of the Twelve — the second-highest governing body of the Church. Together, the First Presidency and the Twelve oversee the entire Church. Church members trace this organizational structure to the New Testament. See “Organizational Structure of the Church,” *Newsroom*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/topic/organizational-structure-of-the-church>.

¹⁸⁰ Male interviewee's transcript dated April 16, 2020.

Paul's first experience in a multicultural ward impacted him profoundly. He experienced the functioning of a multicultural ward in which diverse people of different social classes felt welcomed and felt as if their voices were heard. A few years after living in Europe, Paul moved back to Mauritius. Since then, he has served in many callings and has witnessed the highs and the lows of Church activity in Mauritius.

During our interview, he related a conversation he had with a recent convert from the Phoenix branch. Paul explained that two to three years ago, a newly baptized member asked him, "Why are the white members in a different room while the people of color are in another room [during Church worship]?" Paul told me, "I explained to him that it wasn't a question of skin color but more of a language barrier."¹⁸¹ I cannot help but wonder if Paul's argument convinced the new member regarding the Church structure in Mauritius.

As seen previously in the Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2, ethnic hegemony continues to influence Mauritians and Mauritian Church members.

This section of Chapter 3 looks at linguistic hegemony among the Latter-day Saint community in Mauritius. It explores the following questions: How do local Mauritians and expat members interact in the Church in Mauritius, and what does language have to do with it? How does the nature of these interactions affect the Church leadership on the island? Does the Church in Mauritius follow the same formula as other countries who have experienced an influx of expats in their Church congregations, i.e., by creating an international branch (commonly known as the expats' branch/ward)?

¹⁸¹ Male interviewee's transcript dated April 16, 2020.

During my stay in 2019, I also attended the Phoenix Branch. This was my first time attending the Phoenix branch since its construction in 2006. I arrived at 9 a.m. before the 9:30 am Church meeting. I saw familiar faces as well as new faces in the branch and enjoyed visiting with the congregation. Some members explained to me the breakdown of the sacrament meeting and classes. As the majority in number, the Mauritian members typically congregate in the chapel for sacrament meetings to be held in French and Kreol; the English speakers, on the other hand, attend the sacrament meeting in a smaller room. Before the sacrament started, I was told that only native English speakers were allowed to attend the English-speaking group; exceptions were made only for the spouses of native English speakers. The local members of the Phoenix branch told me that they felt confused, shocked, and hurt that Church leaders had implemented such measures in their branch. They explained that none of the leaders within the mission presidency or district presidency or local presidency had sought their input regarding the creation of two groups in the branch. One member related her experience to me:

We [as Mauritians] don't have any problem with having native English-speakers with us [in Church meetings]. But we don't know if they are interested in being with us. We, the colored people, all agree that they should be with us [during Church meetings]. This is a barrier [in the Phoenix branch] ... When they are with us, we make an effort to learn English. I am learning English, and now I can understand when they speak English.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Female interviewee's transcript dated April 30, 2020.

Members also explained that at first, the segregation of members by language made it appear as if there were two different branches within the Phoenix branch: a church for white members and a church for people of color. Elizabeth, another Mauritian Church member, offered her perspective regarding the situation in the Phoenix branch:

Now, in the Phoenix branch, the foreigners are doing their class separately, and the Mauritians are doing theirs separately too. But for a long time before this division, how come they [Mauritians and foreigners] were able to do Sunday school all together [with the help of translators]?¹⁸³

Since the creation of the two groups, one in English and one in French, the demographics in the congregation have shifted slightly, adding new complexities. A few African members studying in Mauritius joined the Phoenix branch; most of these African members attend the English language service.

My Sunday in the Phoenix branch, I decided to attend the first portion of the church meeting with the English-speaking group and the second portion (Sunday school) with the local Mauritian members. When I entered the Relief Society room for the English-speaking sacrament meeting, I noticed a small crowd mainly composed of white expat members with only a few African members. As the sacrament meeting started, the branch president—who is of Chinese, Indian, European, and African descent—conducted the meeting in English, which is not his native tongue. As the first opening hymn started, I heard the same hymn being sung in French by the Mauritian members in the chapel. After the bread and water were distributed among the members, instead of listening to the talks given by the English-speaking members in the Relief Society room, I joined the

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Mauritian members in the chapel. One of the local members spoke in Kreol about her experiences as a convert. The second speaker, the district president, spoke in English as a missionary translated his talk into French.

The stark contrast between the two sacrament meetings in the Rose-Hill and Phoenix branches raises questions regarding linguistic hegemony among the different racial and ethnic communities in the Church in Mauritius. The use of the Kreol language in the Rose-Hill branch is one of the positive signs of hybridization and decolonization in the Church. Still, ancestral languages such as Hindi, Tamil or Urdu are not even on the radar of local church leaders in Mauritius, since for Creoles, who dominate numerically do not perceive non-European languages as the languages for Christianity. This means, for example, that members whose background is Indian often feel disadvantaged in relation to Creoles. Progress in one linguistic arena also signifies inhibition in another. Karen, a Mauritian Latter-day Saint woman who joined the Church in her youth, spoke on the lack of linguistic diversity at church in Mauritius. She stated:

I think members have forgotten how to feel the spirit in different languages when singing hymns. For example, I don't understand any Indian languages, but when one of my friends' mom, who is Christian, sings hymns in Tamil or Hindi, I can feel the spirit. Music is universal. You don't always need to understand the words, but it's the spirit that it brings in your heart that matters. After all, we are singing about God.¹⁸⁴

Karen's comment illustrates a change in attitude among some of the Mauritian Latter-day Saints of a younger generation. This thesis demonstrates that the Rose-Hill

¹⁸⁴ Female interviewee's transcript dated April 13, 2020.

branch can indeed implement various aspects of hybridization in Church experiences. Currently, the Rose-Hill is embracing a form of hybridization by using the Kreol language at Church. However, will the local leaders in Mauritius and regional leaders in the Southeast African region become more cognizant of integrating more greater languages in Latter-day religious space in Mauritius? We do not know yet if members of the Rose-Hill branch will only support a limited form of hybridization since Indian culture reminds them of the Hindu hegemony on the island. On a macro level, the Church leaders in Salt Lake, overseeing the church affairs globally, recognize the importance of translating their messages into several languages. Nevertheless, the Church has also had some hiccups when dealing with the myriad of languages in worldwide events such as general conferences.

Twice a year (April and October), more than 20,000 people from all around the world gather together in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, eager to listen to the leaders speak at a two-day (Saturday and Sunday) conference. Members at home or at a church building often watch this live semiannual worldwide conference, at which the leaders, both male, and female, expound on the teachings of the gospel. The first general conference in Salt Lake City occurred in 1848, with Brigham Young as the President of the Church. Since then, and up until 2014, all general conferences have been in English. As Mormonism expanded, the Church made room for translation services during conference time. Today, the Church provides a live translation of the messages in more than ninety languages. By comparison, proceedings of the United Nations are translated into six languages. During conference sessions, the Church also provides voice-overs for non-English members. In addition, twice per year Church publishes conference talks in

multiple languages in the Church's magazine, *Liahona*, and on the Church's official website.

In 2014, the first presidency included an American, Thomas S. Monson, as the president of the Church with Henry B. Eyring, also an American, as the first counselor and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, a German, as the second counselor. Dieter F. Uchtdorf was the second non-English native speaker to serve in the first presidency.¹⁸⁵ A few weeks before the October 2014 General Conference sessions, the Church released a communication informing members that Church leaders who are non-English native speakers would have the option of speaking in English or in their native tongue. "English subtitles will be shown on screens in the Conference Center, and a live English interpretation will be provided for all other English-language broadcasts including satellite, cable, television, and the Internet," stated Dale Jones from the Church's Public Affairs office.¹⁸⁶ This was a first for the Church.

The announcement of a new format during the October 2014 conference provoked both surprise and joy for many members around the globe. Many international members rejoiced at this decision. One member commented that "It was a smart move. I think it was a way to make a statement saying we are an international church, and so we're going

¹⁸⁵ Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Monson named 16th president of LDS Church, selects Eyring and Uchtdorf as counselors," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 4, 2008, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=8164315&itype=NGPSID#:~:text=by%20Henry%20B.-,Eyring%2C%20first%20counselor%2C%20left%2C%20and%20Dieter%20F.,Building%20in%20Salt%20Lake%20City>.

¹⁸⁶ Larry Richman, "General Conference Speakers Now Can Use Native Language," *Church News*, September 11, 2014, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/general-conference-speakers-now-can-use-native-language?lang=eng>.

to embrace that even though we are in Salt Lake City, Utah.”¹⁸⁷ Others centered their opinions around the fact that the Church is still viewed as an American Church. For example, another member commented, “it’s really nice because they [friends of the Church] get to see that it’s not only an American church but that there are international people in positions that are linked to the Church.”¹⁸⁸ During the October 2019 conference, many members wondered who among the non-English speakers would choose to speak in their native tongue.

Yet, during the October 2014 conference, out of the 32 speakers, there were six non-English native speakers, and only four of them opted to deliver their messages in their native tongue. These four members were: Elder Chi Hong (Sam) Wong, who spoke in Cantonese; Elder Eduardo Gavarret, who spoke in Spanish; Elder Carlos A. Godoy, who spoke in Portuguese; and Elder Hugo E. Martinez, who spoke in Spanish.¹⁸⁹

In addition, at the following conference held in April 2015, the Church backtracked on its willingness to incorporate more international languages during conference time. "Decisions about general conference proceedings rest with the First Presidency who have decided that all talks for this weekend's sessions will be given in English," explained Eric Hawkins, spokesman for the Church.¹⁹⁰ To date, the Church has provided no official reasons as to why talks in native languages have been suspended indefinitely. Many speculate that it was a logistical nightmare to coordinate translating

¹⁸⁷ Anmarie Moore, “Speakers use their native language at 184th Semiannual General Conference,” *The Daily Universe* October 8, 2014, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://universe.byu.edu/2014/10/08/general-authorities-speak-in-their-native-language-at-184th-semiannual-general-conference>.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Woodruff, “LDS church: No conference talks in native languages this time,” *KUTV*, October 4, 2015, accessed May 19, 2020, <https://kutv.com/news/local/lds-church-no-conference-talks-in-native-languages-this-time>.

from a non-English language to English and back to non-English languages for the international members. Undoubtedly, it takes a lot of ingenuity from the audio engineers, translators, and other Church departments to coordinate multilingual general conference sessions. Nevertheless, I believe that one factor in the decision may have been the dominant English-speaking Church members' reluctance to adapt to different languages during conference time.

Members whose mother tongue is not English are used to listening to Church leaders coming from Salt Lake City who visit their homeland; they are used to local translators sharing their messages. This practice continues to happen worldwide, including in Mauritius, where I have seen leaders (mostly Americans) use Mauritian Church members or missionaries to translate their talks. Consequently, non-English-speaking members have had years of practice watching a UN-style voice-over general conference or reading subtitles of conference talks from a screen, often at a Church building in a different time zone.¹⁹¹ For most Church members whose first language is English, no adaptation was required to watch and listen to conference talks at the conference center or in their pajamas over a bowl of cereal at home. The move to allow non-English speakers to have the option of delivering their talks in English or their mother tongue was one step forward in showcasing an image of a global Church—a move that was possibly curtailed by the reactions of English-speaking communities within the Church. We will never know if indeed the Church headquarters felt blindsided

¹⁹¹ The voice-over style is best described as “the original speaker can still be heard in the background, so that the audience is aware that the translated voice over is acting as an interpretation of what is being said.” See “Case Studies,” *Matinee Multilingual*, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://matinee.co.uk/projects/what-is-a-un-style-voice-over>.

by the reactions of *English-speaking members*. The four non-English native speakers in the October 2014 conference had a choice between English, the most common language understood in many nations, and their mother tongue. By choosing to speak in their native language, they intentionally tried to globalize Mormonism by acknowledging the linguistic diversity of Latter-day Saints. The Church headquarters in Salt Lake City understood that change was needed, but their backtracking on offering speakers a choice of language illustrates that perhaps the change came too abruptly in October 2014.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 illustrated that the Church is present in many cosmopolitan societies such as Mauritius and that it embraces a limited form of cultural diversity locally and globally. Still, the Church in general, fails to comprehend how to build a multicultural theology instead of imposing a standard Americanized version of the gospel. Despite the Church's limitations in adapting to its global membership, this chapter also demonstrated that practicing Mauritian Latter-day Saints such as Ruth and Karen embrace Mormonism and use personal revelation to fill the gap when the Church's formal instructions are unclear regarding hybridity between faith and ethnic and cultural traditions.

Religious scholar Taunalyn Rutherford whose work has been groundbreaking regarding Mormonism in India stated:

Pioneering converts who hail from non-Christian traditions will act as important bridges and “translators” as the church builds institutional resources to operate in genuinely pluralistic environments. The prominence of these bridge figures, as well as the pure necessity of adapting to local contexts if substantial conversations

are desired, will necessitate and facilitate localization and indigenization in the church.¹⁹²

In Mauritius and abroad, Ruth, Karen, and many other Mauritian Church members are acting as “bridge figures,” connecting their faith with their cultural and ethnic identities. While Rutherford’s words reflect the importance of non-westernized bridge makers for globalizing the Church, these “bridge makers” also bear an undue burden in having to navigate the nuances of Mormonism without clear guidance from the centralized Church administration in Salt Lake City, Utah. As long as Church leaders at the headquarters and in local areas demonstrate uncertainty toward the indigenization of the Church, members living in non-westernized countries, like Mauritius, and Saints of color in diverse nations will “remain in the footnotes, endnotes, or even in the addendum of Mormonism, but never in the main text except as a complement to the larger white narrative.”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Taunalyn Rutherford, “The Internationalization of Mormonism,” 51.

¹⁹³ Ignacio M. Garcia “Thoughts on Latino Mormons, Their Afterlife, and the Need for a New Historical Paradigm for Saints of Color,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 14, accessed June 1, 2020, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V50N04_12.pdf.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In his book, *Common Denominators: Ethnicity, Nation-building, and Compromise in Mauritius*, anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen stated, “Mauritius has been self-consciously multiethnic since its inception as a society nearly three hundred years ago, and may for that reason have a lesson to teach the rest of us.”¹⁹⁴ Mauritius is a multi-cultural, multiracial, and multireligious nation. With a lack of an indigenous population, Mauritians of all ethnic or racial communities can argue equal claim to the land. Like many citizens of cosmopolitan societies, Mauritians are proud of their openness, inclusion, and pluralistic society.

Mauritian hospitality and diversity are celebrated and revered among Mauritians and those who visit the island. Yet, the people of this “self-consciously multiethnic” nation accept their fellow Mauritians’ differences only as long as each ethnic-religious community stays within its religious traditions.

This thesis demonstrated the implications and pressures of the Church trying to globalize its faith base while adapting its traditionally Anglocentric approaches to religious practices in multiracial, multicultural, cosmopolitan communities such as Mauritius. This case study explored the implications of Mormonism’s expansion into cosmopolitan societies for the Church and its global converts. I sought to demonstrate that a new religious tradition such as Mormonism—a tradition that invites Indians, Creoles, *gens de couleurs*, Franco-Mauritians, and Chinese people to convert—can cause underlying tensions among the various ethnic, racial, and religious groups to surface,

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Hylland Eriksen. *Common Denominators*, ix.

exacerbating power struggles among marginalized groups and reinforcing white privilege. This thesis has generated the following conclusions.

First, in the case of Indo Mauritians, being a Latter-day Saint pressures converts to surrender significant markers of their Indian cultural identity in order to conform to a Church culture that caters primarily to Creoles and westerners. Although Indo-Mauritians are the dominant ethnic group on the island and dominant in the government, their broad-based socioeconomic power does not help them gain acceptance in the Latter-day Saint Church in Mauritius. This is likely because Mauritians associate Indians with Hinduism in Mauritius, despite the fact that a significant number of Indians are Muslims, and a small number of Indians are Catholic. The Creole community harbors resentment toward the dominant Hindu demographic group that enjoys greater power and privileges than Creoles in Mauritius. For example, Latter-day Saint Creoles have resisted events in the Church that showcase Indian cultural traditions such as Diwali. Making matters worse, as Indian Mauritians of Hindu faith convert to Mormonism, they are also shunned by their ethnic community. Indo-Mauritian Latter-day Saints are thus marginalized on both sides: first by their Indian community and then by the Creole-dominated Latter-day Saint community.

Second, the Creoles, who form the most heterogeneous group on the island, enjoy a more privileged position in the Church relative to Indo-Mauritians even though they remain marginalized in wider society in Mauritius. Creoles likely feel more at home in the Latter-day Saint Church because Mauritians view Creolity as synonymous with Christianity despite the fact that historically Creoles were marginalized by the Catholic Church. With decolonization in the global south, Creoles gained some limited power in

Christian traditions such as Catholicism and Mormonism. Creoles consider Christian churches to be safe spaces for them to express themselves and access a limited form of Church leadership. The Creole community harbors resentment toward the dominant Hindu demographic group that enjoys greater power and privileges than Creoles in Mauritius. For example, Latter-day Saint Creoles have resisted events in the Church that showcase Indian cultural traditions such as Diwali.

Third, expat Latter-day Saints, however unintentionally, have contributed to reinforcing white, expat power structures in the Church in Mauritius that is reminiscent of colonial hierarchies. One example of the power expats hold in the Church in Mauritius can be seen in the fact that there are two sacrament meetings, one in English and one in Kreol. Many Anglophone expats prefer to have church services in English, their native tongue. However, while all members (Mauritians and expats) seem to agree that it makes sense to have a separate Sunday school classes in French (or Kreol) and in English, many local Mauritian Church members would prefer to have a single, unified sacrament meeting in Kreol and French with translating devices available for English speakers. Despite the fact that local Mauritians would prefer to hold a single worship service, the Church continues to maintain two separate services in deference to the English-speaking expats.

Many Mauritian members feel that the leaders in the Africa Southeast regional area are not aware of their predicament. This is partly due to the fact that the higher leadership positions in the Church have been given to the white expats living in Mauritius, based on the argument that the expats offer more leadership experience and

skills than locals. Because white expats hold the higher leadership positions, the power of whiteness remains a tangible and visible vestige of colonialism on the island.

Talking to some local members in the Church in Mauritius, I sensed their feelings of frustration and lack of understanding. They wholeheartedly sustained their prophet, the American President Russell M. Nelson, and his counselors as well as the Quorum of the Twelve as “seers and revelators,” but the white dominance of leadership positions and divided worship environments in Mauritius frustrate them. Religious scholar Jehu J. Hanciles argued that “The inescapable conclusion is that Mormon voices in North America control the flow of ideas and almost exclusively shape the LDS Church’s narrative.”¹⁹⁵ Feeling largely unrepresented in the Church leadership, many Mauritian members are hoping for greater direction and examples regarding inclusivity from the Church in Salt Lake City via the Africa Southeast area presidency.

Race influences the power structure within Mormonism not only locally in Mauritius but also centrally in Salt Lake City. On January 14, 2018, Russell M. Nelson, a retired heart surgeon, became the 17th president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, following the death of Thomas S. Monson, the former Church president. On January 16, 2020, the new Church president, along with his two new counselors—Dallin H. Oaks and Henry B. Eyring—held their first press conference as The First Presidency of the Church in Salt Lake City. During the Q&A, Peggy Stack Fletcher, a journalist from *The Salt Lake Tribune*, posed the following question to President Nelson: “The Church leadership is still white, male, American. What will you do in your presidency to bring

¹⁹⁵ Jehu J. Hanciles, ““Would That All God’s People Were Prophets””: Mormonism and the New Shape of Global Christianity,” in *From the Outside Looking In*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Matthew J. Grow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 372.

women, people of color, and international members into decision making for the Church?"¹⁹⁶

With candor, Russell M. Nelson stated:

We are white, and we are American, but look at our quorums of seventy and look at our leaders locally. Wherever we go, the leadership of the Church is from the local communities, and those are the real leaders. The twelve and the seventy are not a representative assembly of any kind; that means we don't have a representative [from each country in the world]. How would you govern the Church with the representatives from all the 188 countries? So, somebody is going to be left out. But it doesn't matter because the Lord is in charge, and we will live to see the day when there will be other flavors in the mix.¹⁹⁷

Fletcher's question and President Nelson's response reflect an ongoing challenge for the Church as it expands its membership globally. Although President Nelson argues that local leaders from each country are the true leaders on the ground ministering to Church members in many parts of the world, this thesis demonstrates that at least in cosmopolitan societies like Mauritius, this is not the case. Instead, each ethnic group (Indians, Creoles, white expats) have a tendency to marginalize the others.

For the past decade, members and scholars have argued that more diversity in leadership is needed among the leaders in the Church headquarters. However, the likelihood of incorporating greater diversity into the Church leadership positions, at least for the moment, remains slim. During that press conference, President Nelson explained

¹⁹⁶ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "First Presidency News Conference, January 16, 2018," *YouTube*, accessed on June 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8Cd3vcWYnc&t=1347s>.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

that it is nearly impossible to promote ethnic quotas among the Church higher hierarchy. However, a positive step in the right direction occurred on March 31, 2018, when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called Gerrit W. Gong, an Asian American, and Ulisses Soares, a Brazilian (and the first South American), as apostles—the second-highest-ranking leaders in the Church. An Asian Latter-day Saint, upon hearing Elder Gong’s name, recalled, “It was a complete shock. And here we are—an apostle of God who looks like me.”¹⁹⁸ Eduardo Galvao, a Brazilian member, expressed his thoughts on the new Brazilian apostle, stating, “We have a leader that will understand our needs and personally bless the lives of our people.”¹⁹⁹ These statements reflect the ongoing desire from Latter-day Saints globally to see leaders who look like them, accept their cultures, and understand their socio-economic realities.

In the case of Mauritius and many other cosmopolitan societies, does it make a difference to have greater diversity within the Church hierarchy? For example, if a Mauritian of African, Indian or Chinese descent were to be called as one of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve, based on the local context, would the Mauritian leader help breakdown the hegemony of ethnic group(s) in the Church in Mauritius or would he contribute to the exacerbation of the tensions between Mauritians of the Creole and Indian communities within the Church?

¹⁹⁸ Jason Swensen and Sarah Jane Weaver, “Church members rejoice at calling of first Asian American, Latin American apostles,” *Deseret News*, May 31, 2018, accessed June 30, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/2018/3/31/20642622/church-members-rejoice-at-calling-of-first-asian-american-latin-american-apostles>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Perhaps greater diversity among Church leaders in Salt Lake City is not enough. Church members also must take charge of their role in the Church and expand the vision of Mormonism. Latter-day historian Ignacio Garcia stated:

If we truly want, and I think most of us do, a multicultural Church, we must have a multicultural theology, a multicultural history, and a multicultural leadership structure, which is something we cannot easily claim to have now, nor do we seem to be preparing too rapidly for it. Multiculturalism within the Church can only happen if Saints of color have their history told, are empowered by their religious identity, and have an institutional role. If we don't, then Mormonism—a faith many of us love dearly—remains a white religion with shades of color in which Latinos and others remain governed and acted upon and not agents unto themselves in defining and constructing the future of the Church or interpreting its past.²⁰⁰

As Mormonism continues to unfold globally, the success of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will depend on how Church leaders in Salt Lake City respond to local adaptations and the extent to which they provide their congregations with tools that emphasize “a multicultural theology, a multicultural history, and a multicultural leadership structure.” In equal measure, the fate of Mormonism also rests upon how well Church members can courageously embrace change while still preserving the essence of Mormonism. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a relatively new faith. If

²⁰⁰ Ignacio M. García, “Thoughts on Latino Mormons, Their Afterlife, and the Need for a New Historical Paradigm for Saints of Color,” 11.

the Church is successful in making these changes, then Mormonism will finally be able to mature into a global religious institution.

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