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"Other" Priorities: Development, Heritage and Black Identity in Mauritius

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Abstract

This seminar discusses the place of heritage in Mauritian society given the island's imperative to diversify if it is to survive in the contemporary global economy. Mauritius has recently made a concerted effort to cast itself as one of the new knowledge economies and the government has initiated the construction of a cyber village and marketed itself as an offshore banking centre. Aware of the economic potential of eco-sensitive technologies, it has announced plans to cultivate sugar to produce biodiesel fuel. Questions around heritage and the environment have surfaced in the Mauritian media and the government has nominated sites for the World Heritage List (WHL). In February 2007, Le Morne, a symbol of slave liberation and maroon history in Mauritius, was submitted to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. Locally, Internet forums and discussions have focused on the importance of recognizing and documenting local heritages - particularly Creole heritage, which has been ignored and often denigrated. This seminar considers the challenge of sustaining discussions on and interrogations of heritage in Mauritius and it is argued that once nominated and inscribed on the WHL, heritage is in danger of becoming inconsequential in this new context because those in power have other priorities central to their own struggles in a politically asymmetrical world. Creoles need to assert their own priorities by presenting a more diverse, empathetic and cosmopolitan understanding of Mauritian history and identities.

In his book on hybrid cultures, Garcia-Canclini (1995) notes that heritage is the symbolic and constructed capital of the powerful, their means for achieving hegemony in an unequal world. In view of the more than 700 sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, one would be inclined to agree, as more than 80 per cent of these sites are located in the developed countries of the world and are constituted of tangible heritages – namely, monuments and archaeological sites. Increasingly however, the heritages of less powerful and least developed nations are being inscribed on the WHL. As my postdoctoral research (2005-2007) has shown, this is not an uncomplicated process. There are different opinions about in the conceptualisation of heritage, how to curate, transfer and manage heritage. And as I show in the following, in developing countries, heritage is also a source of economic power and can 'speak' to transnational solidarities. I also ask can and how does the commodification of heritage 'work' in a rapidly developing society? Reflecting specifically on the current situation in Mauritius, as a series of political and

legislative reforms bring about change in the perception and treatment of heritage. I focus on Le Morne, the subject of significant discussions around heritage in the last two years and continue a story I began in 2004, when I last reflected on the homogenisation of slave history and identity as a means to create a space for Creoles on the Mauritian cultural hierarchy.

I begin with a brief overview of Mauritian history, specifying the history of the Le Morne, which is situated on the south-west coast of the island. I continue with a focus on the concept of 'salvage' to heritage scholarship and practice. The historical convergence between heritage, ethnology and indigenous identities is challenged today, as heritage acquires new value in an increasingly commodified world. In Mauritius it seems heritage is capital which can be used to meet national economic aspirations.

Salvaging Heritage

Heritage is a hot topic for contemporary scholars of culture and identity (Aripe 2004, Edensor 2000, Radice 2003, Taylor 2004, Turnpenny 2004) and has become an issue relevant to nation building and reconciliation in Africa (see Fekri 2003, McEahern 2001, Ward & Worden 1998). The historical approach to heritage is vastly different to what exists today. Discussing the past, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004), argues that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a close fit between ethnology and heritage. Ethnologists saw themselves as agents of classification and preservation. The aim was to salvage heritage in the face of disappearing indigenous cultures and impending modernisation and Christianization. Ethnologists were 'heroes' for science and for the local people – safeguarding indigenous technologies and their associated practices for future generations to encounter in 'uncontaminated' (museological) spaces.

Today, anthropologists approach the topic of heritage and preservation more cautiously. While some still focus on subjects of anthropological research being 'threatened' by 'civilizing' developments, most now acknowledge that indigenous cultures and practices also interact with thinking, acting and performing, independent locals and that the latter, in concert with the 'powerful' in society, manage heritage. Anthropologists also now question the notion of indigenousness, recognising the construction of identity and the effect of mobility on identity in an increasingly global world. Repositories for ethnological collections are also now approached with greater reserve. These are often viewed as agents of deculturation, encouraging the dis-embedding of items from personal, socially-meaningful contexts for placement in alien spaces.

The crisis in anthropology also forced anthropologists to see their research subjects as reflexive and active subjects, able and willing to seize upon new technologies and practices, using these to achieve their own ends. In some cases, this meant the invention of tradition (Ranger and Hobsbawm 1983), Ethnogenesis (Roosen 1989 and Govers and Vermeulen 1997) or even genocide (Mamdani 2002 and Melvern 2004). Fortunately, the crisis did not signal the end of anthropology (Asad 1979, Mafeje 1996) and anthropologists from the margins as well as their reflective and reflexive counterparts from the centres reflected on and discussed the role, purpose and new objectives for anthropology. Their work produced more theoretically sensitive and ethnographically personal texts that allow (as much as is possible in an anthropological text), research subjects to speak for themselves. In this changed

context, heritage (now treated as cultural capital) is no longer perceived as gift to be preserved on the behalf of others (Garcia-Canclini 1995) or passed on to future generations. It is instead an entity that can be and is influenced by locals, subject as (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:1) argues, to metacultural production. The latter is evident in the emergent literature on heritage. These emphasise the multicultural production of and the socially-embedded nature of heritage. However, much of the literature seems to condemn the commercialisation of heritage, seeing this as a way of devaluing local culture.

In the following, I bring my own anthropological observations to this reflection, hypothesizing that in Mauritius, heritage has become a commodity and part of new national symbolic capital. It is an entity of commercial and political value in an increasingly commercialised context and necessary in a nation that seeks to redefine itself. It speaks to the past of a postcolonial nation (in a way that does not satisfy everyone), as well as to its present and future. Le Morne is also the symbolic capital of a new generation of Mauritians, who are deeply affected by the island's slave past and struggle to accept the island nation's need for continued economic diversification. In this context, it the management and preservation of heritage is influenced by a wide range of stakeholders and there is a strong emphasis on obtaining commercial benefits from the site. This interest is not necessarily based on need, it is part (as I state in my conclusion) of the new aspirations to identity of the Mauritian nation, which is to become an icon of the modern liberal economy. Because of this, heritages are not simply for local cultural reflection or valuation, they are also becoming globalized commodities that feed into new discussions on identity in the Postcolony.

In recent years, a significant pile of literature has been building up on the commodification of heritage (Fairweather 2000, Garrod and Fyall 2000, Greenwood 1989, Deacon 2004). This literature points to corrupting effects of capital on indigenous cultural practices and products and discusses the roles of bodies concerned with the preservation of heritage. UNESCO (the United Nations Education and Scientific Council), stringently restricts that which can be identified as world heritage. Development and commodification around the nominated sites can negatively affect its World Heritage status, either preventing inscription on the list or leading to a loss of World Heritage status. However, little of this literature, my own included (See Boswell 2005) offers a less critical view of commodity, preferring to treat most commoditisation as a bad thing. Appadurai's the *Social Life of Things* (1988) offers a more balanced view of this term and his definition is useful here, in that it offers a more empathetic discussion of commodities. With reference to 'marginal' locals in Mauritius, I make use of Lambek's discussions on subjectivity in the postcolony (in Werbner 2000). Specifically referring to Lambek's consideration of the processes through which those perceived as powerless engage the powerful. Finally, the paper also addresses issues of resistance and personal autonomy, also raised in the book *Intellectuals and African Development* (2006). By highlighting 'Other' priorities, the paper shows that not only do these exist but also that they are valid, complex and subjectively defined.

Marginal Histories

Most of the ancestors of Creoles living in Mauritius today came from Madagascar and the east coast of Africa. A minority came from west and central Africa and this is evident in some of the surnames retained by Creoles and in the locales named after

west and central African peoples. Historical accounts of Mauritius usually start with the arrival of various Europeans to the islands. Typically, scholars mention the Portuguese sailors who first named the islands in the 1500s, then the Dutch settlers who claimed the island for themselves and named it Mauritius after their prince. Following the writing of Auguste Toussaint (1977), mention is then made of the devastating effects that the Dutch had on Mauritius, depleting the islands of its natural forests and its indigenous fauna in the space of a century.

In Moses Nwulia's (1981) account of slavery and society in Mauritius, he notes that the slaves that the Dutch obtained from Madagascar were rebellious, some of them escaping to the remaining forested hills to build (maroon) communities of their own. Alpers (2001), Larson (2000) and Teelock's (1998) analyses of slavery in the Indian Ocean indicate that the slaves came from diverse ethnic groups in Madgascar and Larson (2000) in particular, notes that different forms of bondage existed in Madagascar and slaves arriving from there would have been familiar with different forms of escape and perhaps the means required to set up new communities.

Historical similarities in fauna and flora between Mauritius and Madagascar must have also assisted the ancestors of Creoles to adapt to the local environment – using some of these for healing and nutritional purposes.

My own research (2005-2007) in the Indian Ocean region and further reading on society and history in the Indian Ocean (Larson 2000), confirm the possibility of Malagasy and African adaptation to the local context. In my research, I found many commonalities in language, belief, ecology and politics despite European or Asian colonization. In my fieldwork in Mauritius (2004) and Zanzibar (2005/6) I found for example, use of similar herbal remedies, cuisine and beliefs in both islands, indicating the continuation of practices and ideas across time.

Le Morne is a mountain that stands at 556 metres high. It is situated on a peninsula on the south-west coast of Mauritius and the region includes islets off the peninsula such as Ilôt Fourneaux and Ile-aux-Bénitiers. It is situated on the southwest coast of the island, is inscribed in Mauritian history and legend as a refuge for maroon slaves. It has long occupied a space of importance in Mauritius mythology and history. The mountain was a refuge for slaves who managed to escape from brutal conditions on the plantations elsewhere on the island. Legend has it that on the day on which slavery was abolished, English soldiers climbed the mountain to look for the slaves and to alert them to the fact that slavery had been abolished. The slaves, fearing that they would be returned to a life of bondage, chose to commit suicide by throwing themselves off the mountain rather than return to the plantations with the soldiers.

My fieldwork in Mauritius revealed that an interethnic community existed in the village of Le Morne and that the community relied on fishing, hunting and foraging and agricultural work to survive. The community was also well known as a place of celebration, music and oral history. Travellers from the hills of Chamarel (also on the west coast) would come down the escarpment on a Saturday or Friday to contribute to and join local festivities in the village. Beach side sega dances would enliven the village and assist in social cohesion and Creoles saw themselves as musicians, artists and master storytellers.

In most of the formal accounts of Mauritian history, Creoles and their ancestors are described as victims and their histories as marginal histories. While these histories may prove useful in claims for reparation they are also problematic, in that these cast Creoles in modern Mauritius as descendants of victims. Moreover, the discrimination experienced by slave descendants even after abolition produced important social and economic inequalities (see Boswell 2006 and Teelock 1998) putting Creoles at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy. This fact is often glossed over by the more affluent in Mauritius society as well as those who traditionally held power, producing a view of Creoles as passive and marginal subjects.

Active Subjects

Mauritius is a diverse country where personal social and economic trajectories are varied. There are approximately 1.2 million people in Mauritius. Population density is high and on this small island, the descendants of Europeans, African and Malagasy slaves, Indians and Chinese coexist, sharing four major religions and about 22 languages. Creoles, currently (popularly) defined as the descendents of African and Malagasy slaves constitute 20 per cent of the Mauritian population. In the political arena, they are subsumed within the category of General Population, a residual category for all those who are not accommodated in the religious groupings identified as Muslim, Chinese and Hindu.

For the nearly three hundred years of slavery and colonial rule, Creoles were seen and treated as passive subjects, the victims of slavery and the downtrodden under colonial rule. Creoles were (and are still) subject to stigmatisation in Mauritian society and some continue to suffer the discrimination in the public and private sectors and in general, Creoles remain among the poor of Mauritian society. My own fieldwork in Mauritius from 1999 to 2004 showed that Creoles tended to live in the poorest places in Mauritius, occupy the least paying jobs and experienced racial and ethnic discrimination on a regular basis.

In 1999, the death of a prominent Creole reggae musician, Kaya, led to riots in the country and re-sensitised the Mauritian population to the Creole 'problem' or *malaise Creole*, in Mauritius. The 'malaise' had long been the subject of public debate and locals identified its various roots, one which was the continued victimisation of Creoles and their assuming victimhood in contemporary Mauritian society. As I noted elsewhere (see Boswell 2005), revisionist historians in Mauritius keen to revisit and reflect on the situation of Creoles and their slave ancestors, as a way of exposing the 'real' history of Mauritius created, inter-alia, a view of Creoles as passive subjects.

My past fieldwork shows that Creoles interacted with Mauritians of diverse ethnicities, negotiating access to power in very difficult circumstances. The contemporary investigations strongly suggest that these negotiations, in conditions conducive to change, are allowing Creoles to become active subjects able to seize upon new sources of power (such as heritage), to redefine their identities and to cast themselves as subjects in context of new and globally relevant values. This is complicated, because on the one hand, Creoles need to appeal to the notion of fixed and rooted identities in order to lay claim to slave heritage and a more African-oriented identity but on the other hand, have mixed cultural practices and beliefs which reflect their local social reality. Creoles also have to respond to the

commoditisation of their heritage for consumption by a global, mostly European audience.

In a previous paper (See Boswell, August 2007), I noted that Mauritius has achieved remarkable social development and economic growth since obtaining its independence from Britain in 1968. These advancements had to be nurtured and Mauritius was attempting to do so in the sea of global change. For Creoles the navigation was possible for a privileged few, those diaspora Creoles who had obtained education and a measure of social standing in their employment outside Mauritius. Towards the end of that paper, I argued that those Creoles were seeking new ways of asserting their identity and were using new means to do so. Specifically, I argued that using the Internet, diaspora Creoles (that is, Creoles who had emigrated to Canada, Australia, the UK and France), had created websites which allowed them to stay in contact, not only with other Mauritians but also Creoles. One site in particular, appealed to the global identity of Creoles, as it served as a communication site for a wide range of people from as far afield as the Caribbean and the Seychelles, who profess to be Creole. On this site, various forms of the *Kreol* dialect was apparent and each contributor was encouraged to write not only about the past experiences of Creoles living in slave and plantation societies, but also about current experiences in each country. Less political issues were also discussed, including recipes, riddles and music from the across the Creole world.

These websites, papers and online discussions show that some Creoles in Mauritius are actively forging an identity for Creoles, one that makes use of their slave ancestry but at the same time appeals to the heterogeneous nature of Creole identity. This is being done in a context that increasingly calls for the commoditisation of things, including identity.

Slave to identity

Le Morne Brabant forms an integral part of Creole identity and heritage. Seen as part of the island's natural and cultural landscape, it was defined thus in a government *Planning Policy Guide* "Le Morne is a statement of the achievement of marginalized, dominated and oppressed people, who by their human spirit and sheer determination achieved freedom, independence, dignity and respect for their values and cultures. It symbolizes the birth of a people, the Creoles of Mauritius."[1] The association of Creoles with Le Morne and particularly the slave history of Creoles with the mountain is very strong. Stating that it is the achievement of the marginalized is (one could argue) misleading, as Creoles (and slave descendants in general) have contributed (and continue to contribute) in a wide variety of ways to Mauritian society and economy. Creoles living in the shadow of the mountain are currently compelled to emphasise the cultural and political value of the mountain and it seems (and as argued in 2005), to compress their identity to fit the current narratives on slavery and marginalisation. In his speech to local school children in Le Morne, Francois Odendaal, the UNESCO expert tasked with reviewing and drafting the World Heritage nomination dossier for Le Morne, encouraged children to "learn the story of Le Morne", without which, future generations would not be able to maintain the symbolic power of the mountain. This history of le Morne is one rooted

[1] http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:PnMzX8BzUxAJ:www.gov.mu/portal/goc/housing/file/lemorne.pdf+IRS+on+le+morne&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1 pg. 4

in the peninsula's association with slavery. My interviews in Le Morne however, showed quite clearly that while Le Morne is associated with slave history, life and social practice in the village below it was culturally mixed, that histories (of slave descendants and indentured labourers) were interdependent and that other factors had a role to play in the forging of Creole identity. Adding to this, the region's administrator, James Burty David said, « Quite often, when we speak of Le Morne, it is with a certain moroseness. Le Morne shows how the slave resisted his master and tried to regain freedom under extremely difficult conditions. Maroon history is also fundamentally about the human condition. It is evidence of humanity's unwillingness to submit to bondage. The key lesson we learn from Le Morne is about liberty."[2]

On 24 January 2006, days before the 171st celebration of the abolition of slavery, the prime minister, Navin Ramgoolam declared Le Morne Brabant a national heritage site. The site is to be protected in part under the National Heritage Fund Act of 2003 and the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund Act of 2004. In the few years leading up to this declaration, Le Morne had been the site of struggle between developers, historians and local residents. As I noted earlier (2005), revisionist historians were keen to emphasise the slave history of Le Morne and in doing so, made a strong link between Creoles and slavery – eschewing the interethnic nature of social existence in Le Morne and Creoles' interethnic identities. Private developers were keen to build villas and other recreational facilities, including a cable-car on the slopes of the mountain so that tourists could 'enjoy' the mountain. Local residents were sceptical of the proposed developments and opposed the cable car project, seeking a more authentic representation of the site's history and a more socially responsible economic project. The latter is in line with the 2003 New Economic Agenda (NEA) which seeks not only to increase competition and to protect the environment but also to achieve social development and cohesion.

The day after the announcement was made in the national news, the official nomination dossier for Le Morne to be inscribed on the World Heritage List (WHL) was submitted to UNESCO. The prime minister met with his invited guests on the summit of the mountain. The invitees included, Sylvio Michel (from the Organisation Fraternel), the government elected director of the Morne Heritage Fund, Stephanie Anquetil; the director of the National Heritage Trust Fund (Diana Bablee); Dr Francois Odendaal (who heads an environment-oriented NGO in South Africa and is the UNESCO expert for Le Morne) and the historian, Vijaya Teelock who had worked on the nomination dossier for Aapravasi Ghat (the Landing Place of the Immigrants). Creoles interviewed during the previous prime-ministership of Ramgoolam the sentiment of 'being left out' because of ethnic particularism. By inviting people like Sylvio Michel, Diana Bablee and Vijaya Teelock to the summit of Le Morne to discuss this symbol of great importance to Creoles, Ramgoolam attempted to change this political history and to show to Mauritians that all relevant

[2] "Très souvent, quand on parle de l'esclavage, c'est avec un certain misérabilisme. Or, Le Morne montre comment l'esclave a résisté au maître et a tenté de regagner sa liberté, dans des conditions extrêmement difficiles. Le marronnage, c'est aussi l'histoire de la condition humaine. Il témoigne du refus fondamental de se laisser asservir. La plus grande leçon, ici, c'est la liberté".

parties had been canvassed and agreed with plans mooted for the development of Le Morne.

Interviewed by a local newspaper on the day of the meeting, the prime minister said that, "here we feel the weight of history…on Le Morne, the slaves found an oasis of peace in a sea of suffering." The site, he went on to say, is a "symbol of the struggle against oppression and the struggle for freedom", "*Li pa zis enn World Heritage ki nou pe rode, lik ousi enn patrimoinn nasional*" (it is not only World Heritage status that we seek but also national heritage status) and, "heritage has no price because it is the soul of the nation."

This view was echoed by others invited and those reflecting on Le Morne both online and in popular articles, despite previous disagreements. For example, Sylvio Michel leader of the Organisation Fraternel said that development on the mountain would be resisted "Nous demandons qu'il n'y ait aucune construction. Nous ne partageons pas le point de vue qu'il y ait un certain développement touristique."(We ask that there be no construction. We do not share the view of tourism development in the region.) (*l'Express* 17 January 2007). In June 2007, there was still little clarity on what the fate of Le Morne would be. Under Anquetil, a public forum was set up to gauge public sentiment and to include public contributions to the Le Morne management plan. This plan would be finalised before February 2008 when a final dossier will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee (WHC) as it sits to consider the inscription of Le Morne on the WHL. What the above suggests is that Creoles, as much as they want reparations for slavery are now 'enslaved' by their heritage of slavery. This heritage is also no longer 'their own' but is now presented as a heritage of all those who have been enslaved both within and beyond Mauritius. From this perspective, it cannot be inscribed simply as national heritage, it qualifies for world heritage status.

Soul sale?

Politicians and Creole activists are not the only ones interested in Le Morne. By August 2006, the Mauritius Board of Investment (BOI) had already approved Integrated Resorts Scheme (IRS) projects adding up to 46 Billion Mauritian Rupees; projects of up to 62 Billion Mauritian Rupees were waiting to be approved by the board (*l'Express* 1 August 2006). The IRS are exclusive, gated resorts specifically aimed at foreign purchasers. With a minimum of 500,000 Euros foreigners can buy a property and reside in Mauritius without obtaining any residential or commercial permit to live on the island. For an additional 100,000 Euros per dependent the foreigners can bring their children or partner to live in Mauritius in a unit that has all the latest facilities not accessible to the general Mauritian public.

In 2007, five of these IRS projects were on the go, two having been completed on the west (Tamarina) and south (Bel-Ombre) coasts with a third, Anahita (east coast) starting construction in December 2007. Anahita on the east coast, the latest of the developments, initiated and run by Ciel Properties. It will be situated on a 500 acre site and cost 300 million Euros. It has six kilometres of coastal lagoon. Roads have been deviated to make way for the sites and also for exclusive use by the residents. "When completed, it is expected to feature a Four Seasons Resort, a residential complex and a championship golf course" (*The Sunday Times Post* online, 5 February 2006). The Anahita project targets wealthy (or high net worth) individuals from Europe, India and South Africa and offers the most expensive entry level units yet, at

829,000 Euros, with the most exclusive units being sold at 4.1 million Euros each. Speaking about Anahita, the general manager, Nicolas Vaudin said that not only is Mauritius looking to attract wealthy foreigners to its shores, but to offer something that most Mauritians already enjoy, that is, 'verandah living', the enjoyment of the outdoor scenery and weather on one's patio. Anahita will only be unveiled in Europe and South Africa in June 2008. Fortunately for Ciel properties, Anahita will not be located on potential heritage property although Mauritians in general (and fishermen on the east coast in particular) are concerned about IRS developments on the island.

Late in 2004, there were announcements from Bertrand Giraud, director of the Societe Morne Brabant (SMB) in Le Morne that there was to be a similar project for Le Morne. The land to be used concerned property which the Cambier family (Giraud's grandparents), had bought in 1877. The SMB submitted its proposal for an IRS consisting of 110 villas, golf course and club house to the government of Mauritius. All of this would be situated on private territory owned by Giraud and land owned by some other 99 land holders, approximately 20 portions of the latter's lands had no buildings on them. The review of this proposal by Georges Abungu a UNESCO expert in July 2005, led to a reduction of the proposed number of villas from 110 to about 65 with provision of additional space in the form of a hotel of 35 rooms. Abungu also called for a reduction in the core zone, where no development may take place (a zone identified by his predecessor in the matter, M.H. Saliba) and an increase in the buffer zone, where some development may take place and would include the sea and Ilôt Fourneaux. In December 2005, SMB through its Le Morne Brabant IRS company (formed in January 2005) obtained in principle the approval of the project via a *letter of intent* which it received from the government. To obtain its *Development Certificate*, the new company would have to complete and submit its environmental impact assessment (EIA) which was due at the end of August 2006.

In Chapters 1 and 8 of the EIA, it is noted that the project in Le Morne will provide work for 2 to 3 people per villa, another 70 - 100 jobs in the hotel, 10 maintenance staff and work for the construction of the infrastructure. In the EIA it says that:

The development vision is to provide high quality, low density mountain and ocean edge resort which is integrated with the natural and man made heritage of the existing site…due to the perceived heritage value of the Le Morne Brabant, the proponent has, in discussion with a number of interested parties agreed to take responsibility for the following aspects of development on the peninsula and although they do not form part of the development itself are therefore discussed in this EIA: Restoration of the lime kiln, development of a heritage centre, development of a community market and village artisanal. (pg. 3)

In Chapter 8 the EIA notes that it holds the research and preservation of objectives of the LMTF at heart and that it will provide, "heritage facilities and public beach improvements, native reforestation [and] provision of additional community facilities" (pg. 150). Shortly after Odendaal left in August 2006, a new core zone had been delimited and this excluded the private lands owned by the Cambier family as well as lands owned by SMB.

But SMB is not the only company putting money into Le Morne. Before SMB, Le Cape Brabant Gulf Estate and Country Club, part of the IRS project of the Le Morne Development Corporation Limited of the Rogers Group received its *letter of intent*

from the government in September 2003. This company proposed 130 bungalows, an 18-hole golf course, three restaurants, spa and six tennis courses to be constructed on 320 acres of land on the southern slopes of Le Morne (*l'Express* 4 September 2006). This project was later rejected by the government despite receiving initial approval. Another project estimated to cost 286 million Euros has recently been submitted to the Board of Investors (BOI). This will consist of 250 room five-star hotel, 200 residential apartments, 120 villas and a golf course. The British funded project will send its delegation of consultants to Mauritius in October 2007 to discuss the development, which they hope to construct on 454 acres of land in Le Morne.

Reflecting on the Le Morne dossier of 2007, Vina Ballgobin of the *Mauritius Times* asks "What measures have been proposed by the Le Morne Trust Fund to protect our mountain against the innumerable and very dangerous IRS projects that keep cropping up like mushrooms around Le Morne Mountain. It seems that the IRS are a means for government to obtain a steady influx of foreign direct investment (FDI), without relying on the lucrative but relatively unpredictable tourism income. Such schemes are also cropping up elsewhere in the Indian Ocean islands – such as Seychelles, where the peninsula, Eden island (off Mahé) is designed to attract a similar set of wealthy global residents who can pay to enjoy either the natural or cultural heritages of the islands.

In Le Morne there was confusion (in early 2007) for example about where the boundaries of the core zone (where no development can take place) and the buffer zone (where some development may occur as long as proposed developments are subject to the rigorous appraisal of government and parties involved in the preservation of Le Morne) lie. If the core zone no longer included lands owned by SMB and other private residents in Le Morne, projects similar to Anahita and Tamarina could go ahead. Anquetil the director of LMTF said that the involved parties would do everything in their power to assure that benefits accrue to the communities of Le Morne, but how this would happen is not clear. It is also not clear to what extent companies like SMB are required to stick to promises made in their EIAs. What is clear is that SMB is prepared to 'go the extra mile', after having already paid their 45 million Mauritian Rupees in Land Transfer Tax to the Mauritian government. Older residents of Le Morne interviewed in 2004, remember being told stories of their family's eviction from Trou Chenille by the Cambiers after having paid these families 10 Mauritian rupees each (30 US cents). Wary of similar big business exploitation, various social groups have emerged of late to protest any development on the mountain, which does not take into account the site's natural and cultural heritage status.

Managing treasure

Completed at the end of July 2007, the LMTF Management Plan for Le Morne was submitted to UNESCO. The organisation had accepted the nomination of Le Morne to World Heritage status but sought a plan of action for the development of the area in line with its World Heritage principles. The Management Plan is seen as a 'living document' to be continuously added to and reflecting current opinion by Anquetil and the many people who participated in the "continuous and consultative…planning process." In this document, Le Morne is described as being rich in "social processes whose potential needs further exploration, including reconciliation and nation building…Le Morne is a treasure without equal" (*Radio Moris*, pg. 13). Part of the plan includes a Visitors Centre, specified trails such as

"Trail of reflection, Trou Chenille trail, Circular Mountain trail, Maroon Crossing Top trail, Mountain View trail and Specialist and Adventure Tourism trail." (pg14.) There will also be a proposed Education Centre and viewpoints off the mountain. The document also highlights the possibility of creating a connecting trail between Le Morne and the Black River Gorges National Park, which will open up opportunities for ecotourism and the possible employment of locals in the area. As noted in my previous research, some Creoles are keen for this approach but a great many more seek to use their artistic and musical heritage to for tourism purposes. The proposed Management Plan does not specifically object to IRS projects in Le Morne, except stating that there will be no tolerance of development in UNESCO's designated core zones. The islets off the coast of the Le Morne peninsula such as Ile aux Bénitiers are included in the buffer zone as is part of the sea. In 2002, Tania van Schalkwyk on behalf of the La Gaulette community in the southeast of the island contested the designation of Mauritian islets for tourism and recreational purposes, noting that many of these islets had been identified by the IUCN as places to be preserved because of their rich marine fauna and flora.[3] Reflecting on the number of IRS projects in Mauritius, the fact of Mauritius' increasing openness to foreign investment and alluding to the US continuous occupation of Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago, one respondent on the Radio Moris forum stated, "Soon even the Americans will come and build base on Mauritius" (*Ziska pli tard americain pu vin faire baz lor la tou*). Contributors to an online forum[4] discussing the subject of Le Morne felt that the plan to have the site inscribed on the WHL was symptomatic of Mauritius' multicultural politics, where each 'community' has to be identified and equally represented in order to achieve democracy. The contributors felt that this would not assist in poverty alleviation,

> What's all this nonsense about Le Morne? Just because the Appravasi Ghat has been inscribed on the world heritage list, does this mean that Le Morne also should follow suit? But that's Mauritius after all. Now that the Hindus have had their "*boute*" the Creole community also should get theirs. But tell me, what can it matter to a poor Creole family that Le Morne becomes a "*patrimoine mondial*". Will this automatically fill their empty larder with food - or equip their living room (if they have any!) with new furniture? What this country needs is a decent living standard for everyone. So, I'd welcome any decent project in Le Morne area if this means more jobs and money for all those poor around.

Another said:

> I agree with you but as u say, *saken p rode zotte boute*! And that's the Mauritian culture. If one religion gets something, automatically others will try to get something similar in some way. For the moment, we got ony hindus (a,ghat) and creole(le morne) on the list.. Who knows who will come next on the list…

From *l'Express*, Deepa Bookun said,

> I'm all for symbolism and preservation of our heritage but not at the cost of our bread and butter. We will only be in a position to insult potential

[3] http://www.intnet.mu/iels/Rapport_benitiers.htm
[4] http://jeanlindsay.wordpress.com/2007/02/20/le-morne/#comments

> investors when our coffers are full and we don't need their money. As far as I know, we are a long way short of this.

Visiting the villagers of Le Morne in August 2007, Jacques David the administrator of the LMTF together with Stephanie Anquetil the director of the fund, encouraged the villagers to see the proposed Management Plan and ideas for the development of the village as a good thing. The meeting took place at the local community centre and attendants were mostly women, "From where we stand, we need to see in what direction we want to go…we are here to give a helping hand to those who wish to stand own their own two feet"[5] said Jean Claude de l'Estrac, the president of the organisation Empowerment Programme (EP).

The International Business Centre

An investor's handbook for Mauritius does not describe the island as a nation or country but as an international business centre. This description changes one's perspective of the island and its people. Basically, it transforms the island into a space for economic transactions and its people possibly commodities or salespeople. It also changes one's view of heritage. In this context, heritage can no longer be a cultural treasure or source of political identity it becomes a product or service (See Edson 2004). Heritage then also forms part of the economic narrative of the nation and is part of what is 'sold' in order to maintain the identity of the nation. Such a description also challenges the idea of the bounded nation state and changes the view of local resources as part of one's birthright. It makes such resources (whether natural or cultural) part of the equation of supply and demand. Moreover, managers of heritage are no longer those who necessarily consider the cultural or social value of heritage, they can become salespeople who legitimately seek to commercialise heritage by proposing plans (see above) that speak mostly to the commercial value of heritage.

Returning to my first arguments about the commodification and commodities, I would argue that if this is the case and commodification is not perceived as a 'bad' or corrupting process but rather as one that confers upon heritage a different value as a commodity in a global context with broad political caché; Mauritians (Creoles included) could come to terms with the developments proposed for Le Morne. Unfortunately, things are not that simple and one has to consider as in the case of Barbados discussed by Scott Fitzpatrick (2000) the deep colonial history of Mauritius and the continued, unequal distribution of power and resources. These factors have an important impact on the input and outcomes of heritage. In the case of Barbados and elsewhere in the Caribbean (See Pattullo 1996), locals have become more aggressive towards tourists, mourn the loss of their local resources and refuse for their land and sea to be sold, holding on to a different, cultural and social valuation of natural and social resources. In other words, locals have other priorities for their historical spaces even though they lack the financial resources to achieve these priorities. In my view, there also needs to be further research to investigate how slave heritage in Mauritius interacts with and impacted on the heritage of powerful groups in Mauritius. There is little study for instance of the interactive and hybrid aspect of heritage on the island. This may well have to do with the view of (and political interest in) 'communities' as separate in Mauritius. Moreover, as I found in

[5] "A partir de se ki nou ete, nou bizin gete dan ki direksion no kapav ale…nou la pou donn enn koudme dimoun ki anvi dibout lor zot de lipie"

Zanzibar, an island not far from Mauritius, people have various conceptualisations of heritage and as such, continue to preserve and manage these, just not in ways that UNESCO would require or see as appropriate.

Conclusion

In Mauritius, not everyone agrees about how to manage the cultural treasure that is Le Morne. Comments from LALIT, an organisation dedicated to the defense of the working class' rights in Mauritius, a spokesperson (in 2007) said that the IRS projects will return Mauritius to a time of slavery, where the *grand maisons* (colonial houses) will be the IRS resorts and the people around the slaves to serve their needs. The villagers of Le Morne do not seem at this point to have a specific response, especially since a wide range of people have come to speak to them about the benefits of tourism development. Most wish to have more employment and to find ways of improving the community but it is not clear whether the plans proposed by LMTF or even the IRS proposers will achieve these cherished goals. It is clear from documentation research at least and from previous fieldwork in Mauritius, that the country is seeking to become an economic hub in the Indian Ocean and that based on its past economic performance it is seeking to further diversify the economy so as to achieve sustainable growth. How Mauritius will balance the particular needs of heritage management and economic growth needs to be followed and documented, as it will serve as a good example for other African nations seeking to achieve a balance between economic and social development. It will also give us a good sense of how postcolonial nations are transforming important concepts such as heritage, how social and class profiles are changing in emergent economies and the measures nations are taking to achieve sustainable growth in an increasingly precarious global economy.

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