

THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL FORMATION
ON THE
ISLAND OF RODRIGUES (INDIAN OCEAN)

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in the
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ABSTRACT

The Process of Social Formation on the Island of Rodrigues, Indian Ocean

Rodrigues is a small island, 5½ by 13 miles, lying 400 miles to the east of Mauritius in the western Indian Ocean. First settled in the early 19th century by French colonists and their East African, Malagasy and East Indian slaves, it was initially controlled by the French, then taken over by the British, finally becoming a dependency of Mauritius in the mid-twentieth century. Rodrigues' recent settlement, isolation and small-scale in conditions of relative autonomy from the metropolitan centers of control, allows a situation which requires a consideration of the very processes of social and cultural creation.

Rodriguans view their society as socially and culturally divided into two groups, *Montagnard* and *Creole*. This division purportedly reflects the society's initial social configuration, with Creoles the descendants of the early European settlers, white and free, and with the Montagnards the descendants of black slaves. While this social separation is neither as straightforward nor as unambiguous as Rodriguans would have it, it does reflect what is fundamentally a difference in sociopolitical stance vis-à-vis both the metropole and each other.

The thesis explores the social implications of these two sociopolitical stances through the description and analysis of the quotidian social organization of the two groups and an explication of their respective key ceremonial events. Both stances evidence a resistance to, and a differential reworking of, metropolitan modes of domination, equally economic, political, social and religious, and directed at the establishment of autonomous spheres of social action. This sociocultural *marronage* was in the past and is still intrinsic to the actual social structure of the society, beyond what is manifest in ceremonial occasions and in the rhetoric of political discourse.

The process of social formation on the island of Rodrigues illustrates a particular people's expression of survival and resistance and the manner in which power — its perception and the attempts to control it — is integral to not only the most mundane aspects of society, but also to its very creation.

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The writing and completion of this dissertation has been a very long process partly due to my uneasiness with what so often seemed the arrogance necessary to portray another entire society and culture. The frustrations and dissatisfactions in trying to get it "right" were interrupted in 1984 when I was drawn to Haiti where I have lived and worked since. In Haiti I have constantly encountered the same indomitable spirit and innate dignity of a people which I first experienced in Rodrigues. Finishing this dissertation, trying to convey the social implications of what that spirit and dignity mean in today's world, is my small tribute to Rodriguans, and those countless others in Haiti and elsewhere, who have wrought this spirit from a hostile and brutal world.

Many people have not only tolerated my long preoccupation with Rodrigues and the writing of the dissertation, but have also managed with infinite patience to steadfastly encourage me to finish: Frances Pine, Rubie Watson, Vivienne Vidal and especially Margaret Stott from my days at the LSE; Nicole and George Treadwell, who never let me forget my unfinished task. I am especially grateful to Maurice Bloch, my teacher and my mentor, who rekindled my engagement with anthropology in the 1970s at a time when I was ready to put it aside forever — a decision I have never regretted, and then for his forbearance, consistent support and understanding for a student who must have been one of his most frustrating.

My children, Owen Michael and Alena Lowenthal, have grown up with the specter of this dissertation over our family life. I cannot repay them the time they lost with me, but from that I have the simple hope that they always remember that the world is wide and that all people, each in their own way and according to their circumstances, embody an essential part of the human spirit. Neither can I thank enough my parents, LeRoy and Anna Gardella, who not only stood behind me and never questioned my undertaking, but who also provided me with an upbringing rich in cultural diversity and the opportunity to experience it directly. No thanks, no words, could ever be adequate to Ira Lowenthal, my husband, my companion of the heart and mind.

Although I have tried through this dissertation to express something of my appreciation and admiration for the people of Rodrigues, that is just part of the debt I owe them. No people could have been more hospitable and open to a complete stranger arriving unannounced on their shores, nor more tolerant of what must have seemed aberrant and willful behaviour. Although I came alone and was far from anything familiar, I never felt bereft nor alienated. More than any others, the LaMoque and Cyril Clair families and Venning Perrine especially, took me in hand and treated me as their own. To them and all the Rodriguans I was privileged to encounter, I can never repay my debt of gratitude for sharing their lives with me. They should know that they profoundly changed my life and opened new worlds to me. They will forever remain in my heart.

Orthographic Note

Written materials in the many French Creoles of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean use a variety of different phonemic orthographies. These phonemic orthographies closely reflect the actual, spoken sounds of the Creole. The variant selected here comes from that used by Valdman et al (1981) both because of its simplicity and ease of presentation.

The chart of orthographic equivalents to Creole phonemes is provided below. The sounds, as represented in the International phonetic alphabet, are in square brackets, while the letter or combination of letters used to represent them follow the arrows.

1. Consonants:

[b]	→ b	[l]	→ l	[z]	→ z
[ʃ]	→ ch	[m]	→ m	[j]	→ y
[d]	→ d	[n]	→ n	[ãŋ]	→ ang
[f]	→ f	[p]	→ p	[ɛŋ]	→ eng
[g]	→ g	[r]	→ r	[ɣŋ]	→ ing
[h]	→ h	[s]	→ s	[õŋ]	→ ong
[ʒ]	→ j	[t]	→ t	[j]	→ y
[k]	→ k	[v]	→ v		

2. Vowels:

[a]	→ a	[ø], [e]	→ e	[ɔ]	→ ò
[ã]	→ an	[œ], [ɛ]	→ è	[õ]	→ on
[y], [i], [ʏ]	→ i	[ɛ̃]	→ en		
[u], [ʊ]	→ ou	[o]	→ o		

3. Semi-Vowels:

[w]	→ w
[j]	→ y

4. Special Cases:

[ʏ]	→ u	as in <i>uit</i>
[y]	→ ou	when alternating with [u] in words like <i>touye</i> , <i>souse</i>

Acute accents are used on *e* and *o* and a grave accent on *a* only when necessary to indicate that these letters are not to be interpreted as nasal vowels, that is to say, when an *n* follows which is in turn followed by a consonant, the semi-vowels *y* or *w*, or a word boundary.

PREFACE

The initial impulse, more than ten years ago, for this ethnographic study sprang from two sentiments, one academic and one decidedly romantic. The study proposals, grant applications and preliminary groundwork in London for this thesis were all concerned with structural change. It was in the gap between the two major modes of anthropological analysis, an inductive-empirical, materialist approach vs. a deductive, rationalist, structural one, that I hoped I could find a way to understand how societies changed. I wanted to avoid the circular explanations typical of functionalists' treatment of change, but at the same time I wanted to anchor structural transformations to an empirical social reality.

Given this theoretical interest, my field site would have ideally combined a detailed and controllable historical record, simple social organization on a small scale, and an isolation that minimized social relations with outside groups. But, after finding several places that fit these criteria, it was Rodrigues that simultaneously met my theoretical needs and my romantic notions — a grand adventure off to the unknown, admittedly more appropriate to a 19th century armchair anthropologist than a 20th century female graduate student grappling with funding sources and visa requirements.

Even in this age of a shrinking world, it would be difficult to imagine a place, a society, more remote and isolated than Rodrigues. Lying in the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean, its closest neighbor a shred of an island 400 miles to the west, this sense of distance in time and space was constantly reinforced by the ubiquitous presence of the empty ocean, on all sides, from any view. A half day's walk took one the breadth of the island, a full day's walk the length. With the sea all around and an unceasing wind pushing great, billowing clouds across the sky, the sensation was one of being aboard a steady ship. And, like a ship, the island felt at once secure haven and precarious perch.

Here was a tiny island in the middle of the ocean, only inhabited in the early nineteenth century by a handful of French colonists and their East African and Malagasy slaves. Then, most intriguing, these 82 slaves more or less left to their own devices, growing to a population of 35,000 in the late 1970s. What would I find? How had these people constructed their world?

In the pages that follow, I have attempted to convey an idea, which stated baldly risks triviality. This idea is very simply that people continually create their own societies, actively and sometimes consciously, according to a sense of themselves. It is this 'sense of themselves' which is perhaps most problematic within the confines of a social scientific discipline. The idea of a people actively creating their own society in its most generalized sense is nothing but a banal truism: society is the result of people acting, living, thinking. At the same time we recognize the existence of something we call a

society, a culture, that is more than the sum of its members' various actions. It is within this relationship between the individual and his or her actions and the society in which they live that I have attempted to locate my analysis of Rodriguan society.

The point at which I felt I had begun to understand Rodriguan society was the same point at which I realized that Rodriguans conducted their social lives according to an evaluative scheme. The evaluative scheme which I began to discern is in no way a kind of charter with prescribed rules and expected behaviours; nor was it completely conscious and strategically enacted in every action of every individual. Rather, the evaluative scheme became visible here and there, in the shadows of the implications of certain social actions and certain social customs.

It is difficult to name this "evaluative scheme" within the strictures of scientific terms, even social ones — to call it something like "the spirit of a people" renders it too impressionistic, whilst calling it a "structural principle" is too mechanistic. Bourdieu calls it, for the Kabyles, a sense of honour — "a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group. . . [that is] the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interests" (1977:14-15). It is this "sense of" that lies precisely at the conjunction of what Giddens terms "the realm of human agency" and "the processes of structuration." — ". . . an interplay of meanings, norms and power . . . [which] are logically implicated both in the notion of intentional action and that of structure . . ." (1976:160-161).

For Rodriguans, this "sense of" has to do with autonomy and independence. At first sight, it may seem that a concept like autonomy is too generalized among all societies to have significant meaning within this one. And yet, a constant striving for independence, manifest in myriad social manifestations, is palpable throughout all the societies heir to the African Diaspora. The fact and memory of slavery is without doubt an active force still within the social consciousness of these societies. It is not enough, however, to highlight this sense — it is only too obvious for those who are familiar with these post-slavery societies. The interesting question has to do with how a particular people define their world and within that world choose the paths that will lead them to the kind of autonomy they have envisioned. These paths are many: from the maroon societies of Jamaica, Surinam and Brazil, to the Haitian Revolution, to the mid-twentieth century black separatist movements found in the United States, including even the self-conscious elitism of mulattoes and the Negritude movement, as well as the worldview implicit in the many syncretic religions, music, proverbs and story cycles that have emerged in these societies born of slavery.

At this point in the thesis, stripped of all theoretical definition and discussion, the image I wish to present is this: a group of *bricoleurs*, together fashioning a society and a culture out of the bits and pieces that come their way through history and nature. But unlike Levi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, these know exactly what they are about, what they wish to construct, even as they, like an artist lost in the medium, have no idea what the final result will look like.

The Rodriguans I lived among and came to know were neither unwitting actors in an inherited, structured universe, nor were they an amorphous collection of individuals each pursuing their own agenda. Their various social actions were all means to an end, an end that had to do with achievement of autonomy. This work is my attempt to portray this 'sense of autonomy' as Rodriguans have articulated it and acted upon it and its visible result in their social and cultural lives.

Even had I wished to subsume the presence of this "evaluative scheme" into some other kind of analytical concept, and so avoided altogether any discussion or consideration of the gray area between the individual and society, I nevertheless would have been brought to this latter consideration by the very conjunction of the socio-historical attributes of Rodrigues itself.

One aspect of Rodrigues makes it unique and at the same time causes many problems for an anthropological analysis. Rodrigues is a society formed *de novo*, what in other contexts has been called a "frontier society." It can be stated unequivocally that Rodriguan society began just before 1804 when a motley collection of individuals took up permanent residence on an uninhabited island. Virtually all the ancestors of the present day inhabitants were present on Rodrigues by the mid-nineteenth century. This means that the "depth" of this society is only between four and six generations. My oldest informants recounted memories of their grandparents who were among the first settlers of the island. Furthermore, the present population is directly descended from no more than the approximately 700 people in Rodrigues in 1860.

Not only is this a small group of people, it is a quite eclectic group. Among the earliest settlers, there are not only the Europeans, primarily French, but also East Africans, probably from Mozambique, Malagasy, Indians, Chinese, and even a Native American. More significant than the mere ethnic diversity present here, is the fact that not one ethnic group was numerically dominant.

There are several important implications that follow from these two bare facts. The youth of the society demands consideration of the processes by which it was formed, the generative social forces that have produced what we see today. The weight of

tradition, the legacy of countless past generations, have little if any explanatory value here. We are forced to consider the circumstances of the actual genesis of social customs and traditions.

The ethnic heterogeneity of the first Rodriguans, despite the political dominance of the numerically few Europeans, must logically imply a resulting syncretic culture and society, a particular combination and recombination of disparate and sometimes conflicting sociocultural notions that each individual carried with him or her.

Given these two unignorable facts, it is difficult, and I think impossible, to consider Rodrigues without attempting to come to grips with the crucial, yet forever debatable, relationship of the individual to society. What is a conclusion and a “new rule of sociological method” for Giddens (1976:160), *viz.* “sociology is not concerned with a ‘pre-given’ universe of objects, but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doings of subjects,” is the necessary and uncontested initial fact at which any description of Rodriguan society must begin.

I begin, in Chapter I, “Introduction: Rodriguais, Creole, Montagnard,” with a description of how I was received into this society and the repercussions of that for my understanding of Rodrigues. From there, I discuss the conceptions Rodriguans have of their own society, of their own place in the world, and the various perspectives Rodriguans utilize to explain their own self-consciously articulated unity and diversity.

In Chapter II, “The Island and its History,” I provide a brief physical description and a sociohistorical account of the island up to the mid-twentieth century. This chapter goes beyond a concern for providing a kind of historical and contextual prelude for what follows. It is in these early conditions and human interactions that we can already discern social themes that are still present today. In a very fundamental sense, the ‘terms’ of Rodriguan social discourse are here defined and first acted upon: slavery, race, political domination and social asymmetry, together with isolation and insularity, severely constrained environmental resources and narrowed economic possibilities.

Chapter III, “The Quotidian,” presents an understanding of the ordinary, day-to-day and on-the-ground, social and economic patterns that inform Rodriguan life. The social organization and structure of a Montagnard community are presented side-by-side with those of a Creole community. The focus here is not only on each community’s particularities, but also in their relation to each other, point and counter point, and thus how Creole or Montagnard is constructed on the ground. It is precisely in the quotidian working out of social relations, defining one and the other group, that a ‘sense of autonomy’ begins to emerge. Social principles, rather than rules or ideal

norms, and the conscious distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* social behaviour, emerge as the parameters by which the separation of, and the necessary relation between, Creole and Montagnard operate.

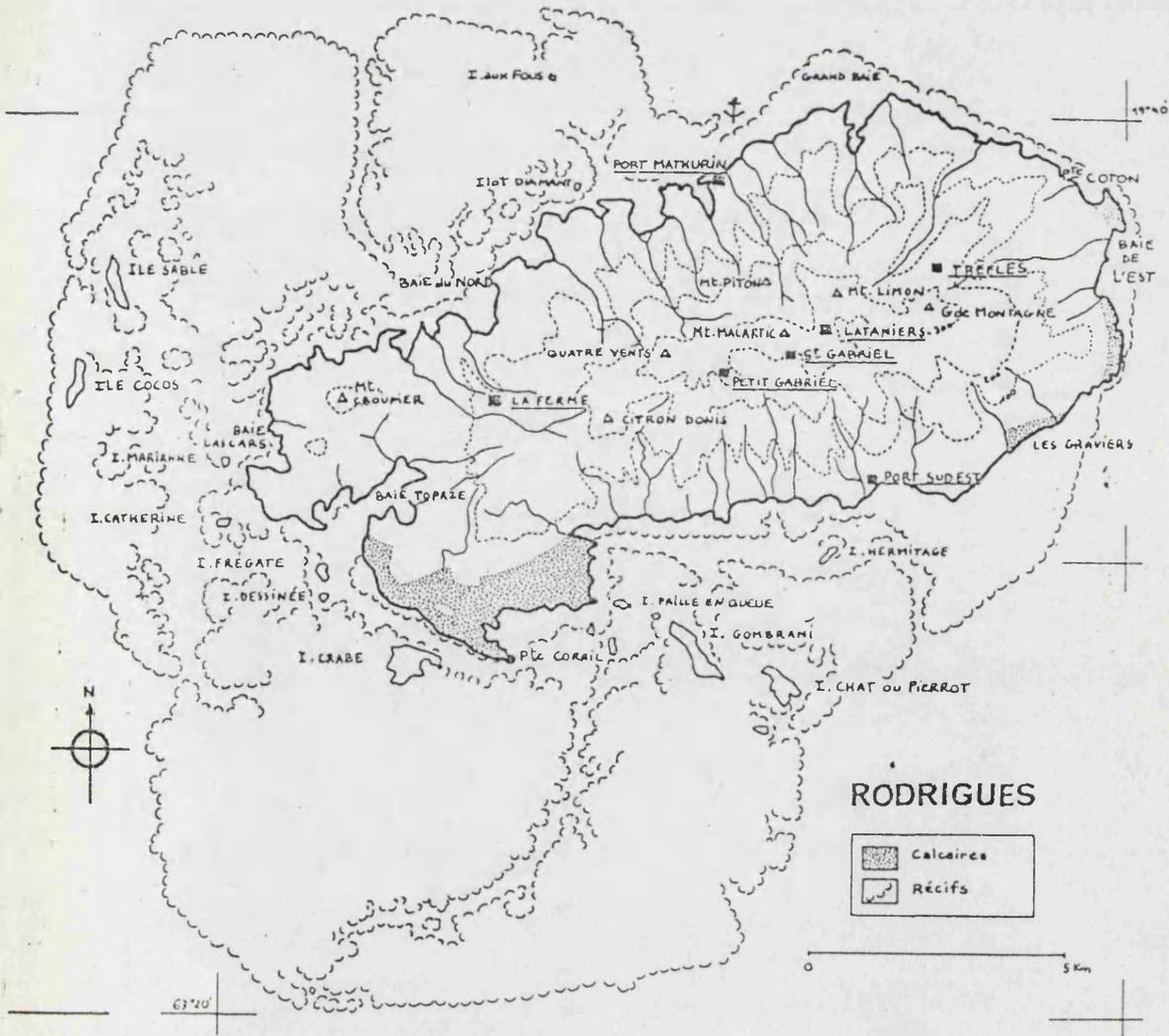
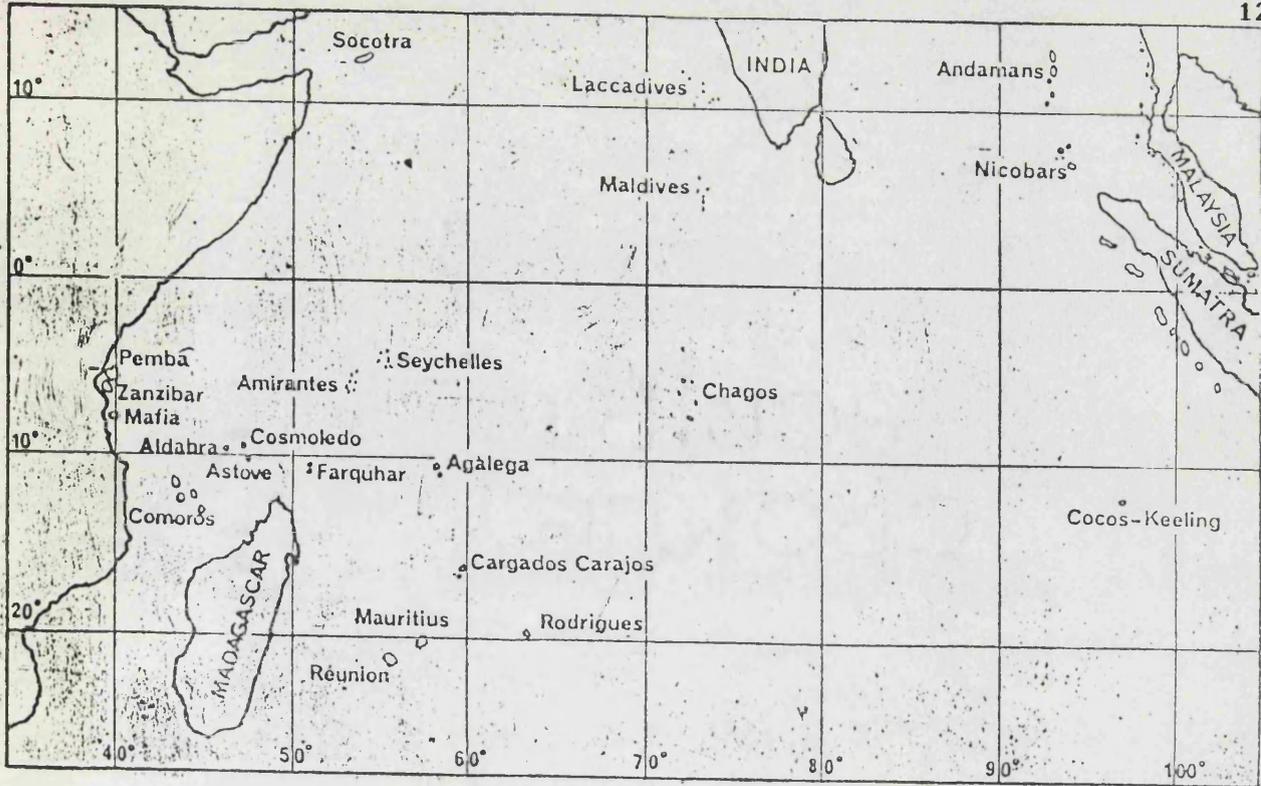
Chapter IV, “The Celebrated,” also divided into Montagnard and Creole, takes the most important ritual occasions in Rodriguan society and in their explication again reveals the specific social principles elicited in the last chapter. Here, the syncretic nature of Rodriguan culture is manifest, while the particular manner in which erstwhile European cultural items have been altered and reinterpreted further demonstrate the explicit operation of these social principles.

Chapter V, “Savages and Mudmen,” focuses on clarifying the relationship between Montagnard and Creole within the overarching unity of Rodriguan society. The two sets of social principles, both operating on essentially the same factors, result in two stances each linked to a perception of power and a particular strategy towards it.

The final chapter, “Context and Conclusions,” compares and contrasts Rodrigues to other creole societies in the Caribbean and the Indian Oceans. From this comparison, certain biases in anthropological studies of these societies become apparent for the case at hand. The identification of a kind of “driving” principle, the “sense of” notion, and its differential interpretations and consequences in Rodriguan society, a principle that at base has to do with power, assumes greater importance when its applicability to certain other creole societies emerges. Thus, far from being an anomaly, Rodrigues demonstrates one kind of societal response to institutionalized forms of social, political and economic domination.

As I complete the final version of this thesis, more than ten years and half a globe away from my sojourn on Rodrigues, the ideas and analysis engendered by Rodriguan society take on a particular resonance. The contemporary enactment of a stubborn and persistent pursuit of independence, autonomy and innate human dignity, played out through an insistence on a particular notion of sociocultural power — in the late twentieth century articulated as democracy and the unbiased rule of law — goes on around me. As in Rodrigues, these ideas do not need to be taught, they are integral to everyday life, even if stifled by the powers that be. Here, the clash of two very different notions of power and its acceptable enactment in one and the same society is deafening to those who care to listen.

19 September 1994
Port-au-Prince, Haiti



I

INTRODUCTION: *Rodriguais, Creole, Montagnard*

A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Even before my arrival in Rodrigues, I was made aware of the division in Rodriguan society between Creoles and Montagnards through my background readings and interviews with former residents in Mauritius. Even so, this division, though not its substance, was perfectly visible the moment I set foot on the island. The division was not manifest in the expectable separations of skin colour or physical type, but rather in terms of strictly delimited spheres of social intercourse. Categories of people were easily discerned by physical separation in public places, by the lack of casual greetings and conversations between them, by hesitant and guarded demeanor of one in the presence of the other.

Within this social duality, I was an anomalous figure from the beginning — European, female and alone — in a place where *any* stranger visiting was an anomaly. I arrived on the same flight as the Minister for Rodrigues on one of his periodic visits. Willingly or not, I was swept up into the Minister's entourage and, together with the Resident Commissioner, the Chief of Police and various other officials, was driven to the Commissioner's Residence in Port Mathurin. There, acting on a concern for my well-being and safety, various resident officials made arrangements for me to initially reside at the Residence, meet the "right" people, be invited to the proper occasions, and eventually rent a house located in an appropriate neighborhood.

My early weeks on Rodrigues were thus circumscribed by my hosts' perceptions of the appropriate social and physical "place" for a single white foreign woman. This place, among the expatriate Mauritians and their Rodriguan counterparts, the Creole elite of Rodriguan society, was predicated on the fact of my being a white stranger, a European. The channeling of my social activities through, primarily, daughters of "good" families and young married couples was born of my being a woman alone and thus in need of protection.

While my access to Creole society was completely open, welcomed and encouraged, my efforts at exploring certain social interactions, which appeared peripheral to ongoing Creole activities, were either ignored or dismissed. Who were the teenaged boys peeking around the kitchen door? Why was this group of men standing at X's door? Whose house was that that I was consistently steered around? Who were these people who approached but were not introduced to me? As I became more habituated to

my neighborhood and the town, and my facility with creole grew, I became increasingly aware of the subtle and not so subtle social barriers that were being erected around me. An innocent hello, how are you?, to a stranger was often admonished. I was warned away from certain noticeable individuals on the grounds they were disreputable. The “countryside,” the hills and little valleys that I had passed through quickly on the way from the airport, began to take on a mute and anonymous aspect. Forays into the countryside were either carefully circumscribed or mysteriously postponed, ignored or canceled. It was as if the whole interior of the island, and its inhabitants, had become some remote and alien backdrop, to be traversed quickly or ignored.

I realized that it would be necessary for me to go beyond simply working my way through the family and social networks of the individuals I knew well if I wanted to meet other than Creoles. I approached people who had occasion to go to the interior often, agricultural agents, cooperative workers, the priests, asking to accompany them. Most often I was left behind after promises made to take me. It became patently obvious that I would have to get around independently in order to meet Montagnards on my own terms, or theirs.

Despite its total unsuitability for a woman, through subterfuge and a few sympathetic accomplices, I was able to purchase a motorcycle. The motorcycle was the means to my autonomous movement and the removal of the social constraints integral to living in a Creole community and limited to walking and others’ invitations. My solo motorcycle trips around the island allowed unchaperoned contacts with an ever-widening network of people beyond that of my residential community. After six months, I was sufficiently familiar with the world beyond the Port Mathurin area to locate a house to rent and establish myself in a Montagnard community.

My residence in a Montagnard community was the last blow to the ideal comportment I was expected to display as a woman and as a foreigner. That ideal comportment already had been compromised seriously by my going out unaccompanied, even at night, by talking to men without a female chaperon, by driving, by living alone and so on. This eccentric behaviour was at first tolerated, rationalized as due to the untenable independence of European women. But in the end, my behaviour was condemned, my reputation as a respectable woman compromised in certain quarters of Creole society.

My descent “down” the social ladder in Rodrigues has significant implications for my analytical perspective. In terms of producing an ethnography, a concentration on either the Creoles or the Montagnards would have been not only acceptable but perfectly justified. Initially, in fact, it had been my intention to focus on the Montagnards.

However, in my efforts to get to the Montagnards, an entire constellation of social and cultural relations was revealed. Once revealed, it could not be ignored. Its importance was highlighted inadvertently by Creole consternation at my behaviour, while this same behaviour was applauded by Montagnards.

It should be a commonplace observation that the anthropologist's choice of setting, his or her gender and personality, in a certain basic sense, predetermine what aspects of a society are highlighted and ultimately how that society is restructured on the page. It seems clear that had I been a man, the efforts to limit my social interactions would have been much diminished, if present at all. Had I been accompanied, my social position would have been encapsulated into a separate, though alien, social unit, and the many efforts expended in "taking care" of me, from making sure I had appropriate lodging and food to ensuring that I not be left alone and "lonely," would have been absent. It also became abundantly clear that my relatively long residence on the island provoked certain social reactions. While Rodriguans were passingly familiar with visiting foreigners, with only one exception, these people came for only a couple of days to a couple of months, not enough time to breach the insularity of such an isolated society. The only other exception had been a U.S. Peace Corps couple, who, years earlier, had set up their own household and limited their activities to the fishing cooperative, in effect distancing themselves from the grist of Rodriguan social life. The result of all these factors was that because most Rodriguans had no pre-established conceptions about how to situate a foreigner in their midst, they each set about trying to incorporate me into their social lives in a variety of ways, despite the patent ambiguities. While these efforts gave me a relatively privileged view of their lives, as I passed from being an alien visitor to the familiar *tantine alexi*, the mascot *pti mèrikin*, I was also increasingly restricted in my social activities by the roles thrust upon me. These roles were various and dependent upon social context, including unmarried daughter and prospective high status wife, schoolteacher and elite functionary, godmother, sister, ignorant and naïve child, political adversary or ally, patron, spy, sexual prey and even disreputable "easy" woman.

Certainly, my experience on Rodrigues led me to serious consideration of the relations between Montagnards and Creoles which might otherwise have been lacking. Once entrenched in Creole society, it was difficult not to see the Montagnards through Creole eyes, and once taken in by Montagnards my view of Creoles was filtered through Montagnard eyes. By my change of residence, from Creole to Montagnard community, and by my maintenance of relations in both, I lost the possibility of a unilateral perspective of Rodriguan society. My anomalous social standing and movement through

both communities and their separate efforts to incorporate me placed me precisely in between.

An unavoidable consequence of having a foot in each “camp” was viewing each social fact from two different perspectives. It seems to me that the practicalities of my fieldwork situation, in themselves, determined a “method of double or multiple comparison” (Bateson 1980). But the result of this circumstantially-enforced “binocular vision” (*Ibid.*) was a more accurate rendering of Rodriguan society than any that could be produced from a more restricted approach, one centered in one or the other group or limited to one arena of social relations. The fertility and self-evident validity of this binocular perspective was such that it provided me with the primary venue in my analysis and its added dimension a major element in my theoretical approach.

In trying to understand Rodriguan society, it became increasingly clear that the relationship between these two groups has been and is the touchstone of the evolution of Rodriguan society. One group simply cannot be understood in isolation from the other, or either in isolation from external authorities. My perception of the divide between the two social groups was no epiphenomenon of my social position, rather it was the shifting ambiguities of my social position that gave me a privileged view of the two groups and, significantly, their interrelationships.

CREOLE AND MONTAGNARD

From its inception, Rodriguan society has been characterized by a division corresponding to Creole and Montagnard, and almost every astute visitor has so noted. Prior to 1839 this division was, of course, that between the slaves and the free, the *noirs* or *natives* and the *concessionnaires* or *settlers* (Recensement 1804). By 1863, a division between the *petits mulâtres* or *noirs de naissance libre* and the ex-slaves, or *indigènes* (Père François 1863, Père Guilmin 1868) was clearly noted. In 1882, Lady Barker, visiting for a few days, referred to the “mountaineers” and the “upperclass of Port Mathurin, the shopkeepers” (1882:9). Mr. A.J. Bertuchi (1923), marooned on the island during World War I, refers to the “*café au lait*” and white creoles, residing in Port Mathurin and La Ferme, and the “negroes who originally were imported as slaves” which made up the bulk of the population. Alfred North-Coombes’ observations, spanning the years 1937 to 1963, noted: “the lighter coloured natives call the blacks *habitants* or *mountaineers*, sometimes refer to them derisively as the *manafs*, and look upon them as an inferior race” (1971:272). “Though there is no sense of hatred or hostility, there still

exists, even after nearly two hundred years, a social gulf between the white Rodriguan and his black brother” (*loc.cit.*).

And yet, to the passing outsider, to *letranjè*, whether Mauritian or European, Rodrigues seems a homogeneous society. Arriving, as he or she must, from the glaring multi-ethnicity of Mauritius, the subtle variations of skin colour and the intermingling of different phenotypes evident at once among Rodriguans do indeed seem to indicate, in the words of one visiting social scientist, “*l'absence de problème sociale, l'heureuse harmonie raciale, fruit de la relative homogénéité du peuplement*” (Dupon 1967:234). Everyone gardens, fishes, raises livestock. The little houses that dot the landscape, with their cleared *lakour* and outside kitchens, only seem to vary in their construction materials — stone, wood, *tôle* [corrugated tin], cement — and in the states of their completion. Men and women alike are carefully dressed in clean pressed clothes, each with a straw hat. Any variability perceived by the outsider is easily attributable to the idiosyncracies of individuals and minor differences in wealth, rather than to the existence of more general class, or ethnic, differentials.

This too is the picture presented to the outsider by the Rodriguans themselves. They say they are all *Rodriguais*: *même race, même langue, même religion*. They contrast themselves explicitly to Mauritius, a society of *lascars, malabars, indiens, chinois, creoles, noirs, blancs, étrangers*. And, at this level, they are quite right. Rodrigues is an island of Catholic, creole-speaking horticulturalists and fishermen, neither black nor white but an amalgam of the two.

Nonetheless, one soon realizes, this Rodriguan sense of unity only arises when contrasted to the *grands pays*, the outside world, stretching from Mauritius to far off Africa, Europe and America. An outsider in Rodrigues, by virtue of being an outsider, evokes this Rodriguan sentiment, as does any discussion of things foreign, or the experiences of a Rodriguan formerly abroad. Similarly, a political consciousness, engendered by independence from Britain and attachment to Mauritius in 1968, articulates itself almost exclusively in terms of a solidary Rodrigues pitted against an amorphous, dominating, alien Mauritius.

Rodriguan unity vis-à-vis the outside world is clearly a function of the island’s physical and social isolation and continuous experience of the outside world as a colonized people, colonized by those different than themselves. In the face of a common, alien foreigner or foreign thing, Rodriguans think of themselves as one.

It is significant that this spirit of common identity only reveals itself in contrast to the outside world, for underlying it is a Janus-faced principle. Rodrigues facing the

outside world is solidary, but Rodrigues turned inward is divided in respect to association and identification with this self-same outside world. To be a Rodriguan inherently means to be unique and separate from anything beyond the island itself, and yet, isolation and separation from the world beyond implies inferiority and backwardness. Thus the more intimate one is with the outside, the higher is one's prestige and status. From this side of the principle, the less "Rodriguan" one is, the more elite one becomes.

There should be no surprise at the existence of the dual nature of this principle of self-definition and consciousness: it is one to be found, even if only intermittently, in most, if not all, societies. Furthermore, it seems inherent in the social processes of colonization and imperialism the world over. What seems unique, or at least interesting, in this case, is the Rodriguan identity *qua* Rodriguan, given the short history of the island and the overt awareness of its inhabitants of their own origins in the outside world. The island's history is spanned by only four to six generations, and every family can identify their forebears as French, Malagasy, African, Seychellois, Mauritian or, even, American Indian. In clear contrast to the situation in Mauritius, where one is never only Mauritian, but is rather Indo-Mauritian, Franco-Mauritian, Anglo-Mauritian or Sino-Mauritian, a Rodriguan is simply Rodriguan regardless of his or her ancestor's provenance. (The sole exceptions are the small minority of Chinese on the island who have not intermarried and a single Indo-Mauritian family.)

To understand why a Rodriguan identity should override a more parochial one, we need only note the historical circumstances of the island. While it is true that the initial population of Rodrigues was marked by a great diversity of origin, the population's subsequent growth was largely endogenous. Throughout the nineteenth century the immigration rate rarely exceeded a half dozen individuals in any given year. This lack of outside "input" coupled with the fact of the island's isolation allowed a relatively autonomous social and cultural development. It is probably these circumstances, together with the small proportion of women, which prohibited the formation of small social groups based on a shared culture or origin. This circumstantially-forced social intimacy and insularity perforce resulted in a weaving of many cultural threads into a pattern all its own.

At the same time, this syncretic culture, though uniquely Rodriguan, maintains within itself the transformed social oppositions of a former slave colony: the opposition between enslaved and free, and between the metropole and the periphery.

Rodriguans themselves divide their society into what they call *kreyol* and *montanyar*. The most salient feature of this division is the historical one, between slave and free. Creoles are ostensibly the descendants of free men and women, while Montagnards are the descendants of slaves. Enough time, and enough families' fortunes have waxed and waned to make this division neither immutable nor clearly drawn. But it is this division which lurks behind the one just previously noted, that tension between being Rodriguan and one's association with the outside world. This is the legacy of a slave society: what, in another time and place, would have been a simple division between rich and poor, between rural and urban, between educated and ignorant, is here transformed by the bitterness and revulsion inevitably attending the institution of slavery. It is a knowledge omnipresent, despite its infrequent articulation, which sweeps all other social markers up into it — rich, sophisticated, educated and white are the heritage of the free, the Creoles, while poor, ignorant and untutored, black are the heritage of the formerly enslaved, the Montagnards.

The social ramifications of insularity, those that strengthen Rodriguan solidarity and identity vis-à-vis the outside world, while simultaneously ranking Rodriguans internally according to their degree of intimacy or association with that same outside world, are married to the cultural implications of slavery, whereby a group is denied full humanity and only the basest culture. The manifestations of these two social forces are never so bald as stated here, subject as they are to the daily niceties of social interaction. Nonetheless, this tacit tension reveals itself continuously in how Rodriguans see themselves and how they place themselves in their society.

Although on the face of it, the two terms, *kreyol* and *montanyar*, would appear to be relatively neutral, they are in fact glosses on a whole host of associated social designations. Creoles also refer to Montagnards as *bann laho* (people up there or of the mountains), *nwar* (blacks), *ti nasyon* ("little" people), *mazanbik* (Mozambique), *afrikin* (African), *zabitan* (pejoratively, peasants), *latèt sec* (dry head/hair), *zoray percé* (pierced ears), *manaf* (a kind of cake fed to slaves), and often describe them as *sovaj*, (savage, wild, uncivilized) and *tribal* (tribal).

Montagnards, in their turn, call Creoles *blan* (whites), *bann dimounn lapo klèr* (light-skinned people), *milat* (mulatto), *aristo* (from aristocrats), *ventar* (show-offs), *hor labou* (out of the mud) and *zourit bouit* (boiled octopus).

The most obvious contrastive feature between the two groups is the one of skin colour, black to white. Black obviously carrying with it the further association with African. But it should also be noted that colour is a social designation. Thus a black

foreigner would be referred to as a *blan*, as would also any relatively wealthy person. A poor person with unarguably “white” skin would be referred to as *nwar*. It is clear that the original denotations of the terms “white” and “black” are historically based on the difference between Europeans, free, and Africans, slaves. The terms’ evolution from a strict skin colour designation to a social classification incorporating many other social markers is equally clear and probably universal in societies heir to European expansion and the African Diaspora.

In the Rodriguan context, the terms black and white carry automatically the associations African/European and slave/free. This association is further corroborated in other Creole terms for Montagnards, *mazanbik*, *afriken*, *latet sec*, *zoray percé*, *manaf*. That these are derogatory terms, implying deficiency, is evident in the terms *sovaj* and *tribal*. Thus, from a Creole perspective, Montagnards are of African origin, formerly enslaved, backward, ignorant and somehow primitive. By clear implication, the converse is also declared by the usage of these terms, viz. Creoles are of European origin, always have been free, are educated, sophisticated and superior to, at least, the Montagnards.

Not surprisingly, the Montagnard terms for Creoles do not parallel the Creole terms. At first sight, the terms *blan* and *bann dimounn lapo klèr* designate the same black/white distinction with its connotations of African/European, slave/free and rich/poor, as noted for the Creole use of *nwar*, *afrikin* and so on. However, another dimension to the contrast is added when these terms are taken in consideration with the others. This dimension can begin to be grasped when considering Creoles’ reactions to the term *milat* used in reference to themselves. One Creole man said yes, he was Creole, but vehemently denied that he was *melanje* (of mixed “blood”) or *milat*. Another elderly Creole man, referring to the terms *milat* and *zourit bouit*, said “*Zot dir sa pou sikane, me si zot dir sa zot mor!*” (Barat 1981:10) — in other words, “they say that to tease, but if they do say that [to us], they die!” Clearly, for a Creole to be referred to as having mixed blood, mixed African/European parentage, is tantamount to a serious insult. This might be considered rather curious if black/white referred only to skin colour strictly speaking. But as we have seen, even in the Creole vocabulary, black/white bring in their train imputations of African/European, slave/free, primitive/superior. The term *milat* or *melanje*, by breaking down the strict dichotomy, begins to impute the very essence of being Creole — not purely European, white, educated, sophisticated and superior.

The imputation of Creoles being something other than they portray themselves is unambiguously contained in the terms *hor labou* and *zourit bouit*. *Hor labou*, out of the mud, means not only that they have emerged from mud, or dirt, *i.e.*, what is common and base, but also they have emerged from mud as a colour, they have shed their blackness. *Zourit bouit* is even more forceful in its imputation. Octopus is a major food item, very common in the lagoon waters and a major export to Mauritius. A fresh octopus is dark in colour; only when it has been skinned, beaten and cooked does its flesh turn a milky white. The meaning is patently obvious: Creoles are really black, but have been “cooked” in some way to become white. This goes beyond merely suggesting “mixed blood,” the Montagnards are saying that Creoles are “white” only by actively working at it. Their “whiteness” is not something they have inherited from their supposed European ancestors and a historically based “superiority”; it is something they have worked to achieve. The two terms *aristo* and *ventar* play off this meaning. *Aristo*, a slang shortening for aristocrats, is used sarcastically and ironically, while a *ventar* is a show-off, a hollow, hypocritical, braggart.

The Montagnard terms for Creoles unabashedly convey the sense that Creoles are “putting on airs,” that they are pretending to be something they are not really. Creoleness must be acquired consciously and actively, because, otherwise, there is no difference between Creoles and Montagnards. To transplant a phrase used by Naipaul (1969), Creoles are, in effect, “mimic men.” Of course, the converse of this is that Montagnards see themselves as true to themselves: they, unlike Creoles, have integrity and are unashamed of who they are.

We have come full circle with the characterization of Creoles made by Montagnards. Having started with the proclamation by all Rodriguans that they are all the same, all one, and then noting that within the island itself a distinction is in fact made among Rodriguans, we have ended with the “observation” made by the Montagnards, that all Rodriguans are the same, it is just that some think and act like they are not. The irony here should not be lost to the reader, as it is not for the Montagnards, nor even the Creoles who would rather not be reminded of it. The more fundamental point here is that the internal divisions of Rodriguan society are created consciously and actively by Rodriguans themselves — a point not exclusively the insight of a social scientist but also acknowledged, even if reluctantly, by Creoles and Montagnards alike.

It should be further noted that a social classification that utilizes physical criteria or those of family origin, like “European” or “African,” is, at least ideologically, asserting social division by ascription. That is, people are born into their social

positions. But, contrary to this implied ascription, the two terms *blan* and *nwar* have come to have socioeconomic referents, as noted above. Furthermore, the lack of a consistent colour or phenotype in each of the two groups is what led Dupon to note the “happy racial harmony, fruit of a relatively homogeneous settlement” (*op.cit*). Even as early as the 1860s, the two visiting priests only noted a distinction between the ex-slaves and the *mulâtres* or *noirs* in terms of “*de naissance libre*.” North-Coombes states that of the original whites, numbering 22 in 1804, “about half were of mixed blood” (1971:271). Thus, even without Montagnard terms for Creoles, the actual observable facts of the case indicate that the division is not based on phenotypic or historically-derived features, but rather on features that are somehow achieved. The Creole man’s anger at being called *melanje* or *zourit bouit* should be understandable: while Creoleness is presented as given, as ascribed, it is in fact achieved practically through behaviour and actions.

So far I have spoken of this Creole/Montagnard division as if it were constituted by two distinct separable social groups. An outsider could easily assume this in listening to the use of the two terms and then gleaning the referents from the immediate context. “We have no sugar because all the Creoles are hoarding it.” “Her parents are upset because she wants to marry a Montagnard.” “Montagnards are so strong that they don’t need to use donkeys.” “Only Creoles are interested in voting for him.”

An attempt to chart out the specific characteristics of each category, as used in conversation, would yield something like this: Creoles live in certain communities, *or* have high-paying or skilled jobs, *or* have at least a high school diploma, *or* are light-skinned, *or* carry a particular surname; Montagnards live in certain communities, *or* have no paid employment *or* only manual jobs, *or* have minimal schooling or none at all, *or* are dark-skinned, *or* carry a particular surname.

The consistent ‘*or*’ is significant: each designation may depend on only one item among these diacritica, or it may be cumulative. One relatively well-off family was referred to as Montagnards by their kin living near town, while their neighbors referred to them as Creoles. Their kin were denying their Creoleness on the basis of their residence, while their neighbors were bestowing Creoleness on the basis of other features, in this case wealth and a particular surname. In another case, a light-skinned young man from the oldest Creole community, employed as a mason, was referred to as a Montagnard by the parents of a dark-skinned young woman who was employed as a schoolteacher; whereas his parents referred to her as a Montagnard. Here, from one perspective the man

was not Creole because of having a manual job, from the other perspective, the young woman was seen as Montagnard because of her dark skin.

Furthermore, the outsider would have to notice that except when usage is explicitly ironic or sarcastic, the terms are almost always used to refer to the other. That is, a person would never directly refer to him- or herself as a Creole or Montagnard. As can be seen in the above phrases, the designation of self as Creole or Montagnard is inevitably implied by naming the contrast.

Despite the presence of a sliding, shifting scale of identity markers yielding a remarkably elusive boundary between them, the two groups do still exist *qua* groups and carry considerable social weight, both objectively and in the minds of Rodriguans. While it would be an exercise in futility to demarcate, on the ground, where the Creoles begin and the Montagnards end, one could, with ease, demarcate a series of groups that correspond individually to each of the diacritica. Port Mathurin, Baie aux Huitres, Anse aux Anglais and La Ferme are definitely Creole communities; Petite Gabriel, Maréchal, Roche Bon Dieu, Brûlé, *etc.*, are definitely Montagnard areas. The professions of schoolteacher, clerical worker, shopkeeper and large cattle herd owner are definitely Creole, whereas agriculturalist, government manual labourer, and artisanal worker are definitely Montagnard. Finishing secondary school is definitely Creole, only going through elementary school is Montagnard. The problem is, again, that these groups only exist from an external perspective. Within these groups, the same contextual meaning of Creole and Montagnard obtains.

Some of these features of identity are by themselves reminiscent of, for example: ethnic groups in the assertion of common origins, ascription or phenotype; or class, in the recourse to economic standing and education; or simply regional identity based on specific communities or neighborhoods. But the Creole/Montagnard division partakes of all of these sets of social features, with one striking exception.

The primary characteristic of this Creole/Montagnard schema, which renders it qualitatively different from ethnicity, class or other status systems, is that it is always contrastive, it always implies a relation. One never asserts that one is Creole or Montagnard, one only implies it by articulating the other. There is then, apparently, no such thing as an essence of being Creole or Montagnard, rather one is only what the other is not at that particular point in time or space. The resultant concrete and constant feature is that being Creole or Montagnard has to do with how and when an individual, or a family, chooses and articulates certain social relations, and how those choices are identified and judged by those around them.

If it is understood that being Creole or Montagnard is always relational, that it has to do with claiming, acknowledging or acting upon certain social relationships and not others at certain points in time, then it is readily understandable why the various diacritica would appear to be shifting and sometimes even contradictory. If the meaning of a social action is tied to the relationships among people, than it cannot remain the same as the individuals or contexts vary. In this sort of situation one can no longer speak of statuses or roles as discrete social categories since they would not be significantly “occupied” by any actor through space and time. Rather, each status or role would become defined anew in each interaction, dependent on the parties, the situation and the substance, just as it has been seen the imputation of Creole or Montagnard varies according to the parties and situation. The very ambiguity and relational content of the Creole/Montagnard division precludes the social existence of a series of behavioural norms or even observable regularities at all but the most superficial level of analysis. To postulate “social rules” one must first discover the regularized product they presumably produce. It is precisely this “regularized product” that is notably missing in the Creole/Montagnard division.

This should not be taken to mean that Rodriguan society, or the social division into Creole and Montagnard, is unordered, chaotic or only opportunistic. What is in question here is the locus of an “ordering mechanism” which can itself produce the panoply of social interactions observed. As described above, that mechanism cannot be found in the actual content of the social features assigned to Montagnard or Creole. But the only constant characteristic of the division, *viz.* the fundamental import of the relation between the two sides in each enactment, does provide a point of departure for analysis. Each social enactment of the Creole/Montagnard division depends on an individual, or family, and a social situation. It is that individual who articulates the relationship being defined, not as a free agent, but in accordance with their own perceptions, knowledge, and motives of both the situation and the other parties to the action. This articulation cannot follow prescribed rules or the fulfillment of a particular role, as these do not exist independently of the situation. Rather, the individual must orient himself to the situation at hand, he must choose and then define the relationships at hand. His or her orientation, most often socially unconscious or only partly socially conscious, is directed toward, in general, the “satisfaction of material and symbolic interests and organized by reference to a determinate set of economic and social conditions” (Bourdieu 1977:36).

Any individual’s intent in an interaction is not to define themselves as Creole or Montagnard, it is only to demonstrate where they stand in relation to interests they

designate as pertinent at that moment. Given that each social interaction is not created *ex nihilo*, out of whole cloth, but must also be a continuation of what has come before, both the “*longue durée*” of cultural conversation and the particular circumstances of the immediate, then the individual’s action must be taken for what it properly is: the social statement of a particular orientation or stance.

A stance is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “a standing place, station, position,” and in Webster’s as “a manner of standing; posture; especially with reference to the position of the feet, as in certain sports.” I have chosen this term precisely because it neither denotes nor connotes a substance, rather it indicates a position, a particular perspective, toward something of substance that is outside of itself. In this case, this substance is of two possibilities, Creole and Montagnard, together with their mutual dialectic. The notion of what Creole or Montagnard is seems to fit best with a view of culture as “chunked networks of loose procedures and understandings which enable us to deal with standard and recurring situations . . . that are clearly culturally created” (Bloch 1991:185). But Rodriguan culture contains within itself several points of departure for separate, sometimes conflicting, “chunked networks”. Montagnard and Creole are not separate cultures, they are separate “pathways” within one culture, Rodriguan. They each imply a particular position or perspective or stance towards the central idea implicit in each ‘chunked network’. This central idea, which will be discussed after the presentation of the ethnographic data, has to do with power relations. At this point, it is enough to understand that stance implies agency on the part of Rodriguans — that this agency is viewed in terms of power relations — and that each view of power relations is embodied in basically two ‘chunked networks’ of social and cultural practices, referred to as Creole and Montagnard.

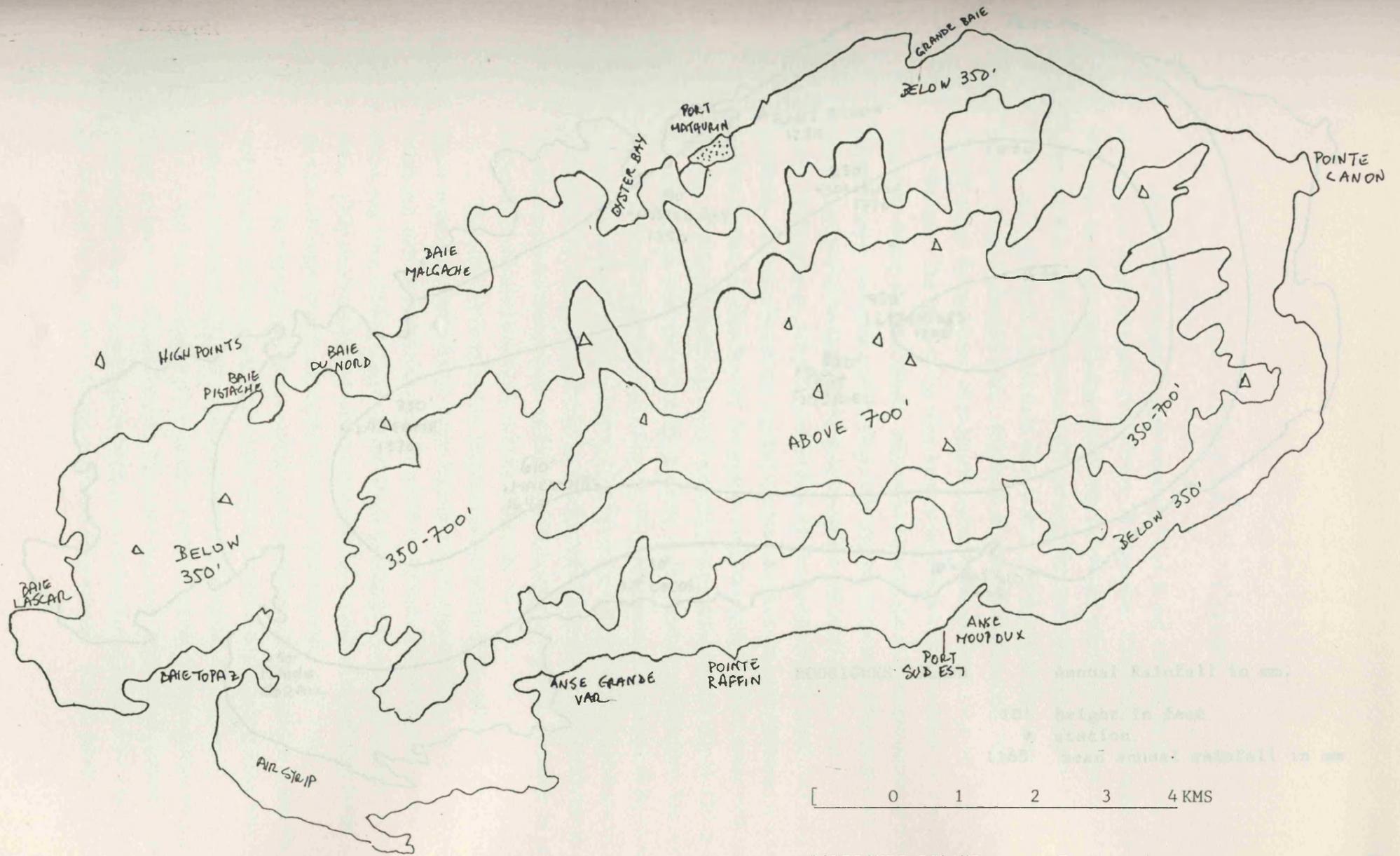
It is because being Creole or Montagnard implies having and maintaining a particular position toward society, towards one’s fellows, that the actual content of one or the other designation can be so varied and the existence of one or the other group on-the-ground so ephemeral. Taking one or the other stance is related in each instance to the particular issue, context and actors. A reification of Creole and Montagnard, or seeing these as contradictory, understandably emerges from an outsider’s perspective, but from within the culture itself these are self-evident and unproblematic.

In order to understand the social significance of taking a Creole or Montagnard stance, it is first necessary to grasp the “*longue durée*” and the immediate social conditions on Rodrigues — these are the immediate referents of the two positions, recognized by all Rodriguans. Bourdieu’s “determinate set of economic and social

conditions” is the socio-cultural environment of Rodrigues both in the past and currently as seen by Rodriguans.

There are, in the history of Rodrigues, certain key historical events or situations, which were, and are, pivotal in Rodriguan society and crucial to understanding Creole or Montagnard stances. Certain of these are immediately obvious, for example, slavery and external governance by either Britain or Mauritius. Other more local events, equally significant, acquire their meaning in relation to the first two, for example, fishing, cattle raising, shipping, tavern brawls, sporting events and local elections. Still other significant incidents occurred only within individual family histories or within particular *pawas* (parishes).

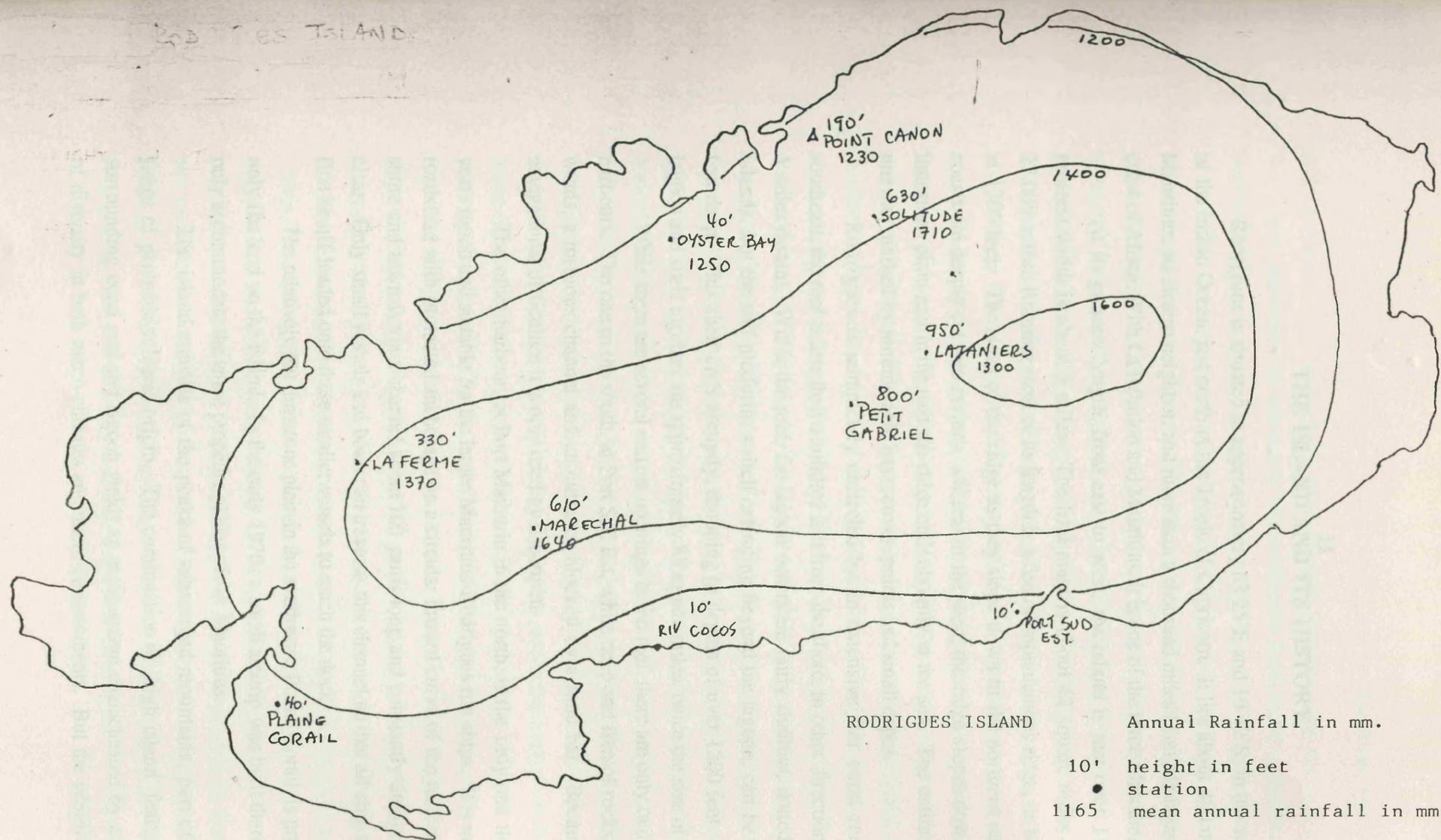
Rodriguan society begins with the facts of a pristine island, slavery and external political domination. From those starting points, a system of social relations unfolds that is constantly defined by individuals in relation to these initial circumstances and to subsequent interpretations of those circumstances by each family or generation. These are the preconditions for the Creole/Montagnard division, they yield the terms of discourse in Rodriguan society.



RODRIGUES ISLAND

Topography

RODRIGUES ISLAND



RODRIGUES ISLAND

Annual Rainfall in mm.

- 10' height in feet
- station
- 1165 mean annual rainfall in mm

II THE ISLAND AND ITS HISTORY

Rodrigues is situated at approximately 63°25'E and 19°42'S, in the western half of the Indian Ocean, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It lies about 400 miles east of Mauritius, its closest neighbor, and more than a thousand miles from Madagascar and the coast of Africa. With La Réunion and Mauritius, it is one of the three Mascarenes.

At its greatest length, from east to west, the island is just over 11 miles; its greatest width is about 5 miles. The land mass is about 42 square miles or roughly 27,000 acres. Running most of its length is a central mountainous ridge, its highest peak at 1300 feet. The sides of the ridge as they slope down to the northern and southern coasts are deeply cut into ravines, whereas in the west, the ridge slopes down to a wide limestone plain and in the east the ridge ends abruptly at the sea. The entire coastline is uneven, marked by innumerable bays, coves, points and small capes.

Rodrigues is completely encircled by an extensive flat coral reef. In the southeast, the reef is less than a hundred feet from the shore, in other directions it is up to 5 miles distant. Within the reef, the lagoon waters are fairly shallow, dotted with small islands, but the reef platform, a shelf extending beyond the lagoon, can be 120 to 240 feet deep. This shelf ends abruptly, dropping to depths of over 1200 feet. The whole lagoon and shelf together are approximately 85 square miles, twice the size of the island.

While there are several narrow openings in the reef, there are only two practicable harbours. The one in the south, at Port Sud Est, while deep and free of rocks, has strong winds, a tortuous channel and an entrance blocked by a sand bar. Because of these navigational difficulties it is only used by fishermen.

The other harbour, at Port Mathurin in the north, is the only one that is usable year-round and suitable for the larger Mauritius-Rodrigues run ships. It is in fact only a roadstead with protected anchorage on a circular inward curve of the reef; access to the shore and town is via a channel about 700 yards long and constantly dredged to keep it clear. Only small vessels and boats can traverse this channel so that all ship freight must first be off-loaded onto these smaller vessels to reach the dock.

The relatively flat limestone plain in the southwest, Plaine Corail, is practically the only flat land on the island. In the early 1970s a small airstrip was built there which can only accommodate the small propeller planes of Air Mauritius.

The island consists of the peaks of submerged mountains, part of an oceanic range of probable volcanic origin. The combination of 'high island' features with the surrounding coral reef and lagoon yields an environment characterized by a high degree of diversity in both micro-climates and micro-environments. But the island's small size

and extreme insularity seriously limit organic diversity and resources. Overall, Rodrigues' ecosystem is extremely vulnerable and particularly sensitive to human depredations.

The reef-lagoon ecosystem, on the other hand, is much more stable and evidences great organic diversity. The lagoon's primary producers are calcareous algae and zooxanthellae, which themselves are not, nor the space they occupy, directly usable by man. Thus overall, this marine ecosystem is much more resilient and more able to regenerate itself in the face of human intrusions, though it is not impervious to the long-term effects of pollution, soil siltation or consistent and continuous over exploitation.

These basic ecological facts have, and have had, certain implications for human economic pursuits on the island. First, Rodrigues has a dual productive base, one terrestrial and one marine, with the latter relatively more stable and providing a kind of safety net. Second, Rodriguans have had to import basic agricultural staples and livestock to supplement the limited indigenous forms. Third, the various agricultural crops cannot be grown equally well on all parts of the island due to the variation in micro-environments. And finally, the introduction of alien flora and fauna, as well as the human exploitation of indigenous forms, has precipitated rapid deterioration and consequent instability of the island ecosystem. Each of these implications has had both a generative and canalizing effect on the emergence and elaboration of Rodriguan socioeconomic systems.

Before its settlement and in the 17th and 18th centuries when it was visited only intermittently, Rodrigues was completely forested. But even before 1800, on the lower slopes of the northern coast, the original vegetation was being burned off regularly and being replaced by grass, pandanus, lataniers and palms (Cadet 1975:11). The forests covering the myriad little valleys and the middle and upper slopes of the central ridge were also the zones of most agricultural value. Thus, from the beginning, increasing cultivation was accompanied by deforestation. The human introduction of such plants as *jamrosat*, *goyavier*, *bois noir*, *bois d'oiseau* and *acacia* gradually eliminated many of the native species. Despite this, the island remained relatively forested until the late 1940s. Increasing population, with consequent expanding agriculture and pasturage areas, increasing need for fuel wood and growing numbers of goats, rendered the island practically deforested by the 1970s. Small stands of forest could only be found in a very few isolated enclaves in deep, inaccessible ravines. Otherwise the island was covered by small gardens, fallow fields and pasturage, belted by a poor savanna (*Ibid.*) and dotted with acacia, mango, *lataniers*, *pandanus (vacoa)* and palm trees.

Rodrigues lies in the path of the southeast trade winds, which in general keep the island relatively cool even during the hottest months. The temperature is even year-round, from highs in the upper 20s°C, to lows in the range of 20-21°C. There are essentially only two seasons. From June to October the weather is cool and dry with steady winds from the southeast. From November to May the weather is often unsteady, relatively hot, with the winds drawing round from the north and northeast, bringing rain in tandem with cyclonic disturbances. Because associated with cyclonic disturbances, the rain comes intermittently, pouring down in torrents, damaging crops and causing soil runoff. However, without these tropical cyclonic disturbances, there would be no rain at all.

The chance of a strong cyclone directly hitting Rodrigues in any one year is about 1 in 10. Statistically, it is almost certain that the island will at least come under the influence of one cyclone in any year. Between the years 1931 and 1970, 14 cyclones with wind gust speeds of between 90 to 172 mph hit the island. In just three months in 1967-68 three cyclones hit Rodrigues; similarly, the years 1863-64, 1872-73, 1875-76, 1962-63 were marked by a close succession of cyclones, with four hitting the island in 1875-76. The destruction brought by cyclones is catastrophic. The not particularly fierce cyclone in 1979 caused virtually the entire island's vegetation to turn brown from the salt spray blown up by the tremendous winds. Not only were smaller houses and coconut and palm trees destroyed, but entire mango trees were uprooted and steel lampposts and flagpoles were bent and broken as if matchsticks. The coastline directly facing the oncoming winds was permanently altered, losing at least 20 yards of beach and a paved road. The entire lagoon was coloured red from soil runoff for days afterwards. This particular cyclone's center was more than 40 miles northwest of Rodrigues.

DISCOVERY AND EARLY HISTORY

Although Rodrigues was long known to the seafarers of the Indian Ocean, both Arabic and European¹, its small size, relative paucity of resources and remoteness kept it a backwater. Except as a signpost on the voyage east and as an occasional anchor for resupplying fresh water and tortoises (for on-board fresh meat), the island held no importance for the Portuguese, nor for the Dutch, who were busy expanding their East Indies trade routes by the beginning of the 17th century. Even though the Dutch East India Company established a small colony on the island of Mauritius in 1638 to ensure their monopoly of the eastern trade routes, and the French claimed Bourbon (La Réunion)

also in 1638, and with various Dutch and French ships effecting landings on Rodrigues in the first half of the 17th century, the island failed to attract any of their interests.

However, Rodrigues' remoteness and the strangeness of its indigenous fauna did briefly pique the interest of European scientific and literary circles. The aborted colonization attempt by the Huguenot, François Leguat, resulted in a published travelogue describing the island and its principal inhabitants, large tortoises and the solitaire (*Pezophaps solitarius*), a long-necked version of the Mauritian Dodo bird,² and occasioned great incredulity among European intellectuals in the early 1700s.

With the publication of Leguat's book, more frequent stops for tortoises and rumors of the Dutch organizing to establish another settlement on Rodrigues, Desforges-Boucher, then governor of Bourbon, made plans to occupy Rodrigues, seeing a Rodrigues controlled by a foreign power as a threat in war and an obstacle in trade (Dupon 1969:6).³ While this particular attempt came to naught, the continuing wanton exploitation of the tortoises on Rodrigues caused the French East India Company to charge Labourdonnais, governor of Ile de France, to send for the Rodriguan tortoises and keep them for the revictualling of Company ships on their homeward journeys. To do this, in 1736, Labourdonnais established a few soldiers and slaves on the island to gather the tortoises and prepare them for shipment.⁴

This little settlement of Europeans and slaves, numbering about 25 in 1767-1769, was withdrawn in 1769 with the virtual eradication of the tortoises (Dupon *op.cit.*:64-65 and North-Coombes *op.cit.*:45). Only a *commandant* and a few slaves were left in Rodrigues to show the island's French control. And with the death of the last *commandant* in 1791, the island was abandoned.

The routine of hunting and loading tortoises during this period had been broken by several incursions by the British. Hostilities between Great Britain and France in America and India caused the British to make plans to take Ile de France in order to safeguard the route to India. In July, and from September through December, 1761, British forces sent 9 ships and 4 frigates to rendezvous at Rodrigues, there to await reinforcements from Europe for the capture of Ile de France. These never came and the British departed (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:50-54). While this particular attempt failed, it was an indication of what was to come.

Rodrigues' abandonment was short-lived. When news of the French Revolution reached the French colonies in Bourbon, Ile de France and Fort Dauphin (Madagascar) in early 1792, many of the settlers decided to leave. Some thought that Rodrigues would be a good choice; most of these, after visiting the island, decided against it. But others

stayed. The first permanent settler in Rodrigues was Germain Le Gros who arrived on the island in September 1792. He was followed by Michel Gorry in 1793 and then Philibert Marragon in 1794. Others came and went, but by 1804 there were five households, 22 Europeans and 82 slaves, established on the island.

Between 1794 and late 1810, there were open hostilities between the British and the French. A strict British blockade of Ile de France began in 1809. The British took over Rodrigues in August 1809 as base and rendezvous point for the blockade. On the 3rd of December, 1810, Ile de France capitulated to the British. British forces remained in occupation of Rodrigues until 1812 when they were withdrawn to India. In the Treaty of Paris, 1814, "Ile de France and its Dependencies, especially Rodrigues and Les Seychelles" came under British rule, and Bourbon was restored to France (Toussaint 1972:152 and North-Coombes *op.cit.*:55-71).

THE FIRST PERMANENT SETTLERS

When Germain LeGros arrived in 1792 he came with the intention of fishing and the commerce of fish and turtles to Mauritius. He was well equipped to do so: he was a master mariner, with his own ships, and with extensive business links in Port Louis, Mauritius.

In addition to his fishing and trading interests, LeGros obtained the first land concession in Rodrigues from the French authorities in Ile de France. To this original concession of 100 arpents*, which he called *Les Soupirs*, he later added two others, one in the hills at Solitude and one just east of Port Mathurin at Anse aux Anglais.

Despite these relatively extensive landholdings, his primary interest seemed to remain with the trade between Rodrigues and Mauritius. The 1804 census indicates himself and only 6 slaves, not enough for any serious cultivation. His holdings remained intact, however, *Les Soupirs* going to "*Louise, dite LeGros*," and the rest to Séraphine Pison, Marragon's daughter, upon his death in 1850 (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:55-56).

Michel Gorry arrived in 1793 in the company of G. Roger and François Boulerot. The three set up a fishing establishment at Baie aux Huitres, but when Roger and Boulerot shortly returned to Mauritius, Gorry moved into the interior to an area called *Les Choux*. There Gorry experimented with a variety of crops, having success with indigo and later even grapes. Although the first true farmer in Rodrigues, he was soon

* An *arpent* is an archaic French land measure equalling 1.04 acre or 0.4 hectare.

only producing food for himself and his approximately 19 slaves. Soon thereafter he abandoned his land and went to live with LeGros at *Les Soupirs* where he died in 1836.

Philibert Marragon, a career civil servant in Mauritius, had first visited Rodrigues in 1791, and, apparently liking it very much, applied for the post of civil agent there. In that capacity, he and his wife, his mother- and father-in-law, all arrived in 1794. While his in-laws settled at Baie aux Huitres, he and his wife took a concession of 400 arpents just south of Baie aux Huitres and near Mt. Charlot. They called it *L'Orangerie*, as it occupied the remains of a citrus plantation dating from 1761. The Marragons cultivated their land, growing maize, wheat, some rice and vegetables, but it was primarily for their own use. Despite Marragon's residence on Rodrigues, he did not thereby neglect his business relations and contacts on Mauritius.

During British hostilities, Marragon, as a French government official, recorded the kinds and numbers of British ships passing, but he apparently also raised cattle for sale to the British. His duties as civil agent were not strenuous: he was instructed to make land grants at the rate of 100 arpents per married couple, 50 per child; he was to prevent tree-cutting for purpose of cultivation, and he was to see to the planting of *bois noir*, a commercially valuable wood (*loc.cit.*). His own ambitions for the island never came to fruition due to the negligence of first French and then British authorities toward the island.

In these early years, various other settlers appeared, but none remained. In 1802, four arrived, but only one, Etienne Rochetaing, stayed and he only for three years. He had obtained a land grant of 350 arpents near St.Gabriel where he grew coffee, but his bitter complaints against Marragon led him to leave in 1805.

Three others came in 1802, Lecloud, Gautier and D. Raffin, all fishermen. Lecloud had 16 "blacks" for his fishing station, Raffin had 20, Gautier only 5. Raffin set himself up on the south coast, in a place where earlier some slaves had gardened sweet potatoes, arrack and sugarcane. It is still called Anse Raffin. Apparently due to enmity between Raffin and Marragon, Raffin left Rodrigues for good in 1804. The other two had already gone.

When General Decaen arrived as governor of Mauritius in 1803, one of his first plans was to evacuate Rodrigues on the plea that they provided the British with supplies for the ships on blockade. He had an ulterior motive as well, and that was to establish a leper colony in Rodrigues, in order to alleviate that problem in Mauritius and at the same time to threaten the British. Although these plans came to nothing, Marragon was instructed to make a census, the first for the settlement:

Census of 1804

HOUSE HOLDS:	Marragon	LeGros	Gorry	Rochetain	Brehinier	TOTAL
Free Individuals	6	1	1	13	1	22
LAND: (in arpents)						
granted	400	100	0	350	0	850
cultivated	100	25	70	70	0	265
SLAVES:						
Mozambique	8	0	9	12	3	32
Malagasy	7	1	5	3	2	18
Talinga	4	1	0	0	0	5
Guinea	1	0	0	0	1	1
Malay	0	1	0	0	0	1
Bengali	0	1	0	0	0	1
Born at Rod.	17	2	5	0	0	24
TOTAL	37	6	19	15	5	82

(Recensement 1804)

Marragon also listed the crops cultivated: wheat, maize, rice, manioc, coffee, some tobacco, citrus and mango trees. The farm animals included poultry, ducks, pigs, goats, and cattle, although Marragon omitted mention of cattle (*Op.cit.*:61).

From 1804 through about 1817, there remained on the island only three European householders: Marragon, LeGros and Gorry, Rochetaing and Bréhinier having departed. LeGros, and with him Gorry, were often in sore conflict with Marragon. Although at times there seems to have been some sort of truce, like their co-ownership of *L'Espoir* and LeGros leaving a good part of his estate to Marragon's daughter (albeit after Marragon's death), the enmity between the two men was quite marked. For example,

The social principle which binds man to man is but ill-exemplified at the island of Rodrigues. But two French families reside on it; and these (though lords of domains sufficiently ample to prevent, at least on the score of ambition, the cause of disputes) live as distinct, and entertain for each other full as much disgust and animosity as any belligerent potentates whatever.

(An Officer, "Account of the Conquest of Mauritius by — who served on the Expedition," London, 1811, cited by North-Coombes 1971:69.)

Given that LeGros not only lost a ship to the British but was also imprisoned by them on two occasions, and that Marragon had been given the rank of major by the British, the basis of their enmity can perhaps be understood. Marragon's omission noting the presence of cattle on the island to the French authorities gives credence to the

accusations of assisting the enemy by selling them cattle, made against him by Rochetaing (North-Coombes *Ibid.*:59,69 and Rochetaing 1804).

Another of Rochetaing's accusations (*loc.cit.*) highlights a curious fact about the 1804 census. There, Marragon's listing of 37 slaves is double that of Gorry and Rochetaing. While he lists 100 arpents being cultivated for himself, and 70 each for Gorry and Rochetaing, it is only the latter two who seem to be serious cultivators. Even if Marragon truly cultivated all 100 arpents he claimed, it is doubtful that the extra 30 arpents warranted twice the number of slaves. Among Rochetaing's complaints is "the lawlessness of his [Marragon's] runaway slaves," and that his slaves appeared to have been brought to Rodrigues only "to be fattened." These accusations appear quite credible given the conclusions in the "Report of the Commission of Enquiry upon the Slave Trade at Mauritius," 1828, wherein the Commission in fact concluded that many slaves on the island of Rodrigues, only registered in 1827, had just claim to freedom, having been introduced to that island after the 1814 order prohibiting the trading of slaves in British territories. Many of these had declared that they were carried from the coast of Africa to the Seychelles and from there to Rodrigues, as noted by Lt. Col. Keating, commander of the British forces in Rodrigues (Eastern Enquiry Commission 1826). Rodrigues, like the Seychelles, appears to have been a relay point for the continued importation of slaves into Mauritius after the British ban against slave-trading. This extra-legal slave trading was quite widespread throughout the western Indian Ocean until at least the 1830s (Gerbeau 1979).

References to slaves in the interior of the island, as early as 1761, seem to indicate, at least sporadically, the presence of runaway slaves. In 1761, Pingré speaks of forest fires set by "the blacks" (Dupon 1969:25), and both Anse Raffin and Marragon's *L'Orangerie* were located at the sites of what they referred to as former slave gardens. In 1806, Marragon reported a conspiracy among the slaves to seize LeGros' ship and escape with it, which he apparently quickly stopped by securing the leaders. Rochetaing's reference to runaway slaves was made in 1804. While the island was too small to conceal a community of runaway slaves, its various mountains, valleys and ravines, well away from the inhabited northern coast, could readily secret various individuals. The wild cattle, pigs and goats were easily exploited — not even the European settlers bothered to actually pen them, relying instead on hunting. That there was an incipient threat posed by the shadowy presence of individual maroon "blacks" on the island can be inferred from North-Coombes' remark: "there lingered for a while among the few white people a sense of acute apprehension" (*op.cit.*:62).

Between 1812 and 1817, there appears to be only two functioning “estates,” that of Marragon and that of LeGros. Starting in 1817, a few newcomers can be seen, some taking over abandoned concessions, others receiving new ones, all within the area of Port Mathurin on the north coast.

By 1830, significant plots of land along that coast, at Anse aux Anglais and west, and at Baie aux Huitres and east, and a series of agricultural parcels in the hills directly behind this area, were claimed. Parallel to these transactions is the quick succession of claims to usufruct rights on the little islands in the lagoon adjacent to this coast.

The next series of registered land titles do not begin again until 1865. These are dominated by plots in Port Mathurin and just east. It is at this time that the last large concessions were made, two of about 400 acres just south of Port Mathurin.

Certain patterns emerge from these land transactions. Between 1820 and 1830 only concessions of large holdings were granted. After 1865, Port Mathurin has become a town as evidenced by the small plots being accorded there; at about the same time, agricultural holdings appear to be shrinking. From 1820, a distinct and separate fishing sector emerges as shown by the granting of usufruct rights on the little islands dotted around the lagoon. These trends evident in the land transactions illustrate the socioeconomic patterns beginning to coalesce in the little settlement.

EMANCIPATION AND THE APPRENTICESHIP PERIOD

Between 1814 and 1840, the status of slaves, slave trading and then apprentices was much on the minds of British authorities in the colonies. Colonial officials in Mauritius sent Pye to Rodrigues in 1821-1823 to register slaves; McCarthy in 1822, Hoart in 1825, Werner in 1827, and Ormsby in 1830 — all sent to inspect the condition of the slaves. Hoart found 123 people in Rodrigues: 20 Europeans (7 men, 5 women, 8 boys); 2 freed men and 1 freed woman; and 100 slaves (49 men, 28 women, 12 boys and 11 girls). In 1830, Ormsby found the slaves to be well-fed and clothed, with great facility in catching fish and thriving manioc enabling them to keep pigs and poultry. During this period a Mauritian plan to encourage settlement of Rodrigues was abandoned as no one was willing to do so without bringing in labour, which they were prevented from doing because of the ban against slave-trading.

British Parliament declared slavery abolished in 1833, with a gradual emancipation period of first seven years, then five, and finally shortened to only four. Thus, on the first of February 1835, emancipation was declared on Mauritius, while the apprenticeship period ended with the final decree of freedom in March 1839.

In 1838, the British authorities in Mauritius sent C. Anderson to gather information on the state of the “apprentices” in Rodrigues. He found six households, three of which were quite considerable:

Apprentices in Rodrigues in 1838

1. Madame Pipon	66 slaves	17 free children
2. Messrs. Bessière and Husson (on Gorry’s old land)	36 slaves	17 free children
3. Mr. Eudes	19 slaves	8 free children
4. Gabriel Begué	4 slaves	
5. Jean Marie	1 slave	
6. Mr. Gonnet	1 slave	13 free men

(Anderson 1838)

Of the 127 slaves, or apprentices, 105 were listed as predials, growing foodstuffs for themselves and their ‘masters.’ Anderson reported that the apprentices were working longer hours than the law allowed and that their clothing and housing were inadequate. But at the same time they were allotted extensive garden land and were well-fed. Anderson remarked that while agricultural yields were relatively good, they were only sufficient for the inhabitants. Only poultry, some 200-300 pigs and not more than 40 tons of salted fish were sufficient to export annually, and were in fact the only source of income (*op.cit.*).

With the announcement of freedom for the slaves in Rodrigues on the 4th of June, 1839, their former masters offered the freedmen free transport to Mauritius if they wished; if they stayed they were offered a monthly wage of 3 *piastres* for men and 2 for women, free food, 1 lb. salt fish per week, 2 *coujarons* of spirits, and the liberty of continuing to cultivate their gardens. Although the freedmen unanimously accepted these conditions at the time, it should be noted that except for the wage, the situation was hardly different from what they had had before. Shortly thereafter, as if tacitly emphasizing this point, they started moving into the interior, eschewing the benefits provided by their erstwhile masters, squatting on Crown lands, availing themselves of the free-ranging cattle, goats and pigs (North-Coombes 1971:78-79).

Although the regimen of slavery in Rodrigues must have been relatively benign, especially compared to the large-scale plantation systems of the Caribbean or the American South, or even to the burgeoning ones of Mauritius of the epoch, it was hardly idyllic. While agricultural labour was not particularly arduous, given the very limited extent of cultivation on Rodrigues at the time, it was nonetheless compulsory. Disobedience, recalcitrance and desertion were punished with a whip — as Pivault (1913) heard in the early twentieth century from former slaves, and as still recounted

today from some of their descendants. That it was a time bitterly and angrily remembered by descendants of those who suffered under it is conveyed by their referring to it as “*dan lamargoz*,” a particularly bitter vegetable, an expression arising from that era and still used to refer to it.

Who were these people, formerly enslaved and now freed to do as they would in the interior heights of the island? In the first census of 1804, there are seven “*castes*” represented among the slaves: 18 *Malgaches*, 32 *Mozambiques*, 5 *Talingas*, one each of *Guinée*, *Malay*, and *Bengalie*, and 24 *Creoles*. *Creole* refers to locally born and as expected, of the 24 *Creoles*, 17 are under the age of 12. Of the total of 82 slaves, 33 are female, 21 of those over the age of 12. Unfortunately, later censuses do not list birthplaces again until 1878. In 1878, there were 103 individuals “natives of Africa and Madagascar,” among 21 from India, 12 from Europe, and 1,315 born in Rodrigues or Mauritius. After 1878, those “natives from Africa or Madagascar” steadily decrease, presumably through death. Thus, it would seem safe to assume that from the formative stages of Rodriguan society through the last quarter of the 19th century, there was a small core of adults, ex- slaves, who carried with them the remembrance of life in their native lands. This core group was apparently occasionally enlarged: in at least one case, a French ship slave, native of Madagascar, had jumped ship and installed himself in the interior in the 1870s, although his presence is nowhere noted in the official records.⁵

However, despite the existence of this small group, within it was an eclectic representation of other cultures. Dominant among them were the *Mozambiques*, brought from that coast in Africa. But this designation tells us nothing but East African provenance, Mozambique only being the name of a vast catchment area for the traffic in slaves. Even the designation *Malgache* could encompass people of strictly African descent given the active trading role of the Malagasy in the East African slave trade. The only generalization, albeit a significant one, that can be made is that this was a diverse group whose only common feature was their non-European origins.

What else can be inferred from the information available? The land records and contemporary reports indicate that these people removed themselves from their erstwhile masters’ areas of settlement along the northern coast almost immediately following emancipation. This must have been a blow to the expectations of the owners of the two remaining estates: at the time of the proclamation of freedom, Eudes was “confident” all his slaves would continue to work for him as before (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:79). As there was no official authority on the island, nor private means to enforce the “confidence” of the estate owners, the freedmen’s abandonment of the estates was

unconditional. Eudes and Lenferma, the bailiff for Mme. Pison (who was Marragon's daughter married to a Mauritian businessman) and Messrs. Bessi re and Husson (Mauritian businessmen), conceded failure by their return to Mauritius at the end of that year.

The "state of lawlessness prejudicial to the whole island" (*loc.cit.*), occasioned by the freedom of the apprentices and the departure of the estate owners, created a vacuum quickly filled by Mauritians establishing fisheries. And the rapaciousness and exploitation attendant to these new fisheries brought permanent official authority to the island for the first time in 1843.

But even prior to 1843, it is clear that the freedmen's withdrawal to the interior was neither passive nor wholly defensive. That they took control of their gardens and created new ones, that they availed themselves of the free-ranging pigs, cattle and game is clear. The plots of land they took over remain in the hands of their descendants to this day. The first indication that their movement to the interior was not a retreat, but was rather a re-establishment on new footing, is revealed in an incident judged sufficiently serious to warrant the Mauritian authorities sending a British magistrate to investigate. Lenferma, the former bailiff of two of the larger estates, had quit the island when the freedmen moved to the interior. He returned, however, in 1841, and with a partner in Furcy Labour, an estate owner still resident, began slaughtering and salting down the free-ranging wild cattle for sale to the Mauritian market. At the time this would have been extremely lucrative as the more important exportation of cattle from Madagascar to Mauritius had been interrupted by French hostilities. In his attempt to do this, Lenferma was challenged and attacked by the freedmen. His failure to stop them and his complaints to Mauritius brought H.M. Self to investigate and arbitrate.

Self considered Lenferma's complaint unsubstantiated, calculated to answer his own private ends and an imposition on the governor. Self "claimed the whole of the wild cattle in Her Majesty's name" (Self 1841). Given that there was no official authority on the island, and thus no means of enforcement, this resolution was tantamount to a *nolo contendere*, and presumably the parties proceeded as before. We can safely assume that the freedmen had their way, as Lenferma disappears from the Rodriguan scene and the freedmen continue to exploit the cattle. More telling, however, is that this ruling gave in effect the recognition of parity to the contenders' claims. While it asserts, albeit in name only, the superior authority of the Crown, it at the same time refuses to legitimize the subordination of the freedmen to Lenferma. The reasons for this we will never know: perhaps Self disliked Lenferma; perhaps Lenferma was a *gen de couleur*, which is

probable; perhaps Self was a righteous man; or, perhaps, he was just oblivious to the social ranking in this remote outpost of empire. Whatever the intentions or the legalities of the case, by clear implication this ruling bestows a *de facto* economic autonomy on the freedmen, and parity to Lenferma.

The willingness of the freedmen to claim what they saw as equally theirs, their willingness to challenge the local powers, is again evident in a series of court cases in 1843, when a Police Magistrate was finally posted to the island (Marshall 1843). These first cases *in situ* are largely dominated by “creoles from Mauritius” (*Ibid.*) lodging complaints against nonpayment of wages in the various fisheries. But conspicuous among them are several cases involving “natives of Madagascar or Africa” entering complaints against M. Chelin, the major trader and fishery owner of the time, for damages done by his animals in their gardens or for beatings. Unfortunately, there is no notation of the decisions made. This lack does not diminish the point here: the freedmen, having removed themselves from the former centers of the island’s social life, did not thereby relinquish any claims to equality or autonomy. They were in no way timid recluses, avoiding notice and trouble by maintaining a low profile. Their lodging of complaints in the court attest to their willingness to challenge what they perceived as usurpations of their rights. These rights can even be specified from the above instances: proprietary ones in regard to garden plots, rights of personal integrity re assaults on their persons, and finally their right of equal access to what was regarded as a common resource, the wild livestock.

It is important to recognize the implications of these events: these freedmen, even if making the best of a bad situation, consciously and actively set out to form their **own** society, despite its’ location within the at least geographical purview of their former masters. Although the evidence for this must sometimes be read “between the lines” or within what Scott calls the “hidden transcript of the weak” (1990), it is sufficiently visible in two distinct forms. In the first, distinct boundaries of interaction between erstwhile masters or the elite and the freedmen are being drawn by the freedmen themselves. Thus the altercations with Lenferma and the court cases are clearly attempts, whether successful or not, at delimiting spheres of autonomy — around the person, around property, and the right to access of a common resource. These demarcations are doubly significant in that they concern precisely those areas of individual, independent agency that were explicitly and legally negated under slavery.

The second kind of evidence, suggesting the conscious intent of the freedmen to create and maintain their own society, are numerous social and economic factors which

are conspicuous by their absence. Thus, from 1843 to the present day, the freedmen, or later Montagnards, are notably missing from the abundance of court records, petitions and official complaints which are a continuous thread throughout Creole life in Port Mathurin. The exception to this general observation underlines the same point. The exceptions are only those cases where a freedman or Montagnard is explicitly challenging the official authorities or an influential Creole. These cases involve livestock damage primarily, but also attempts at avoiding commercial exploitation by the traders, as well as taxes and tariffs imposed by the Mauritian authorities. In no instance are the two parties to such disputes both Montagnards (as can be discerned by name, residence, occupation, *etc.*). Obviously such disputes occur frequently between and among Montagnards, but their lack in the official records — in sharp contrast to the proliferation of Creole vs. Creole cases, even within families — should alert us to the existence of a whole array of social patterns carried on away from the official and public eye. It is only, in fact, when the activities of the elite or the governmental authorities begin to impinge directly on the economic activities of the Montagnards — the precise interface between the two groups — that the challenges are visible.

This conscious removal of whole arenas of social behaviour away from the overt and public life of the island is abundantly clear in the present day within the context of Montagnard social life. But this social distancing is already present in the early 1840s, immediately following emancipation. Indeed, one could easily argue that it is a mere continuation of patterns of social life established by slaves in their own defence, as has been remarked upon in various studies for other parts of the world. While the historical materials available on Rodrigues do not allow a privileged view of slave life on the island during that period, the existence of patterns of conscious social distancing just afterward are nevertheless clear in what is available.

The utility of studying Caribbean peasantries as cases of resistance to plantation regimes, following from Mintz (1974) and others, is particularly apropos here. The crux of this perspective resides in an assumption that slaves, or freedmen, struggled to define themselves in contradistinction to a plantation or slavery regime, and that the most available means to effect such a struggle were economic ones. The plantocracy's, or former plantocracy's, efforts to control access to land, or to circumscribe possible economic activities through enactment of different sorts of vagrancy laws, are thus not only efforts to consolidate and extend their own means of production, but are also efforts to contain, and maintain, the former *status quo* of slaves, under a new name. The

emergence of Caribbean peasantries, and the large scale importation of East Indian labour in many colonies, attest to that general failure.

The lack of a true plantocracy in Rodrigues, together with governance by authorities alien to both freedmen and former masters, generally precluded any such efforts to maintain the previous *status quo* there. However, where the Rodriguan Creoles, the local elites, chose to exercise their relative power does still indicate those issues crucial to the freedmen's emerging self-definition, at the same time as marking those issues perceived as threats by the elite. In Rodrigues, these struggles are conspicuously not about attempted control, or even interest in, access to land, nor do they concern the imposition of any sort of labour constraints.

Throughout the 19th century, Creoles' efforts at power consolidation take the form of controlling and exploiting the trading nexus with Mauritius. Unlike the elite in most of the other plantation colonies, they waged their struggle on two fronts, one against the freedmen, and the other against the colonial authorities. While their actions against the freedmen are characterized by rapaciousness and exploitation, those against the authorities consist of constant defiance, subterfuge and outright disobedience and rebellion. But in both cases, the issue was control of the trade, the maintenance of a mercantile oligopsony.

As the settlement grew, the base of Creole economic power also widened. But, notably, it did not intrude into the realm of freedmen's, Montagnard's, production. Rather it encompasses those economic sectors explicitly oriented toward the export market. The interest in the Montagnards' economic activities was limited to their surplus production only, that which the Montagnards were willing to sell, and the credit they were willing to accrue in order to obtain imported commodities.

The scope and subject of Creoles' activities imply at least a tacit acknowledgement of the separation and independence of freedmen. It further suggests a substantive superfluity of the freedmen in the economic calculations of the Creoles. The entire thrust of Creole material interests concerns the protection of their trading base, first fish and cattle, and second, the trading nexus itself. Control of agricultural land or labour was either not part of, or not necessary to, their economic strategies.

Now, it is clear that the slaves on Rodrigues grew their own foodstuffs and that the freedmen, at least, were producing a surplus and this they sold to the Creole middlemen and traders in Rodrigues, or those who came periodically on the trading ship, or to the occasional passing whaler. In these earlier years, this surplus consisted primarily of pigs, cattle and later goats, but in later years it encompassed agricultural produce, from acacia seeds, to indigo, tobacco, beans, and limes and onions. It is

equally evident that the imported goods being bought, or traded, in return were commodities otherwise unavailable in Rodrigues, *viz.*, cloth, shoes, flour, rice, certain kinds of spirits, sugar — all items either manufactured elsewhere or not viably cultivable on Rodrigues.

The existence of surplus production among the freedmen, however, should not be construed as suggesting that production was either constant or homogeneous in either kinds or yields of crops, or by regions. The mere existence of a diverse range of micro-environments on the island is sufficient to preclude such a supposition. In the contemporary situation, differences in yields and kinds of produce vary widely among *pawas*. In the relatively humid interior highlands, tomatoes and other green vegetables grow with relative ease, whereas in the drier, hotter coastal areas, limes, peppers and coconuts are abundant. Other areas are most conducive to pasturage, whereas proximity to particular coastal areas indicate richer fishing. Furthermore, the contemporary environment has become limited in its diversity due to deforestation and consequent reduction in rainfall. In other words, a century ago the environment would have been more diverse than it even now appears to be.

The point is that within the Montagnard community, or a century ago, among the freedmen, there was a wide range of both yields and kinds of agricultural or livestock production. Yet there is not one observation or remark made either by official or casual visitors, in some cases explicitly concerned with economic issues, about some system of internal exchange or marketing of local produce. This holds in the contemporary situation as well. Except for an occasional cow being butchered for local *pawas* purchase and consumption and an occasional solitary *vendèr* of surplus seafood, there are no markets and no public venues for the sale and purchase of locally produced items. The sole exception is a desultory weekly market in Port Mathurin whose primary patrons are expatriate government officials.

While one could assume that this merely indicates a capacity for self-sufficiency and hence the lack of any economic incentives for internal exchange, this is belied by two facts. For one, Montagnards were producing sufficient surplus to buy at the shops and, for the other, the wide range of ecozones and consequent crop variety and productivity negates any assumption that Montagnard production was uniform. The conclusion then, as it is readily apparent now, is not that the Montagnards had no internal exchange, but rather that it was not taking place in public. Undoubtedly then, as clear in this century, their internal exchange took place along routes established by kinship and *pawas* relationships, and by that token invisible to the *etranjèr* and Creole elite.

While it could be argued that this situation was due to the disinterest of the Creoles, the net effect remains clear: the internal economy of Rodrigues, particularly the larger portion of it involving freedmen/Montagnards, who have always been in the far greater majority, was in effect invisible to the elite, and therefore in practice relatively free of external constraints or coercive pressures, except where it linked to the external trade. When taken together with the other evidence of freedmen's distancing, this apparent invisibility must also be attributed in part to the freedmen's intentions, and, as such, can be seen as integral to their resistance to their erstwhile masters.

Even if the priority of Montagnard conscious distancing from the elite of the island during the 19th century cannot be established — which should be expected given the nature of the historical data at disposal, *i.e.*, noted and recorded by the elite or official authorities — at least its presence cannot be negated. With that in mind, the ubiquitous descriptions of the Montagnards as lazy and improvident take on a second meaning.

The laziness and improvidence of the Rodriguans was noted as early as 1843 (Marshall), “the blacks do not labour here for more than a third of the year.” In 1893, Jerningham wrote to the Colonial Office, “an intelligent young official, ambitious to get on, . . . might do much towards wakening the people of Rodrigues from their ruinous lethargy and turning the resources of the island to advantage” (Jerningham 1893). A committee sent to enquire into the causes and remedies for drought conditions on the island in 1929, attributed the destitution of the inhabitants “in great measure to their improvidence” (North- Coombes 1971:201). To these characterizations, North-Coombes himself adds a twist (*Ibid.*:273):

It is easy, therefore, for a casual or uninformed visitor to think of the Rodriguan male as lazy, apathetic and improvident. It would be right of course to say that they have been reported to be so by men who knew them well, by magistrates who have stayed many months, sometimes several years with them. Indeed, the Rodriguan is lazy in that he won't do unnecessary things, nor would he do things out of turn. He thus appears more apathetic than in reality, especially if he is judged by European standards. Finally, he is improvident simply because he has never had enough to spare for a rainy day. He will not hesitate, however, to spend all he has on a wedding feast or other festive occasion. The Rodriguan is no paragon of virtue. What he is most in need of is knowledgeable, dedicated and able leadership.

A suspicion that these sorts of statements contain more than meets the eye is confirmed if we again consider the issue from the perspective of both the “namer” and the “named.” Then, the possibility of another meaning to the unilateral observation of an outsider, attributing laziness and improvidence, can be raised. Stereotyping of subordinate groups of people as lazy are just as common, if not more so, as stereotyping

them as stupid and ignorant. There has been a dawning realization among students of subordinate or disenfranchised peoples that “subordinates make creative use of the stereotypes intended to stigmatize them” (Scott 1990:133). “The systematic use of ignorance by the peasantry to thwart elites and the state prompted Eric Hobsbawm to claim, ‘The refusal to understand is a form of class struggle.’ ” (in Scott 1990). In the case of 19th century Rodrigues (and as we shall see, 20th century Rodrigues as well), the refusal to work, or more specifically, to do a certain kind of work, was a form of class struggle. For what the observers quoted above are in effect saying is that the Rodriguan (and from the contexts of their various reports it is clear they are talking about the majority Montagnards) is not working enough to accumulate sufficient goods/money against a “rainy day.” But if we attribute a consciousness to this behaviour, then we must also concede that the “accumulation against a rainy day” may take a form unlike that envisioned by these outsiders, or one consciously kept hidden from them. Thus the Montagnards’ ostensible failure to produce a sufficient surplus for exchange and accumulation can also be read as their reluctance to participate in an economy controlled by the elites and the existence of alternative economic relationships — “spend[ing] all he has on a wedding feast or other festive occasion” (North-Coombes *loc.cit.*). Just like playing “Sambo,” “Quashee” or “Uncle Tom” erected an opaque barrier between American or Jamaican blacks and their erstwhile masters, so the perspective of the Montagnards as lazy and improvident can be seen as an indication of a created opaque screen for certain economic relationships Montagnards did not wish seen by their erstwhile masters and the later Creoles.

This invisibility, or opacity, of economic relationships among the freedmen or Montagnards, when taken together with their conspicuous absence in the civil (and criminal) affairs of the colony and their willingness to challenge perceived usurpations of their rights, clearly suggests a group of people self-consciously separate from the local and colonial authorities. Given that these same elements of self-conscious separation are evident in the present day, it is clear that they are the source, and the constitution, of the independence and autonomy proclaimed by the Montagnards today. Thus within the lived-in context of Rodriguan history, from a Montagnard point of view, former slave status carries with it an associated attribute of separation — secretiveness and purposeful mystery. Revealingly, and equally evident to the present day, Creoles display a peculiar, in view of the smallness and insularity of the island, ignorance and blindness in regard to anything Montagnard.

It is hardly surprising that freedmen anywhere would want to distance themselves as much as possible from their former masters, and such is apparent not only in nearby

Mauritius but in virtually every colonial slavery regime of this epoch. Maroon communities throughout the Caribbean region, not just in Brazil and the Guianas, not to mention the Haitian Revolution itself, attest to this passionate desire even in the face of terrible and forceful retribution. But this desire is manifest as well in the post-emancipation period in many less dramatic, mundane confrontations between freedmen and former masters. Unlike Jamaica or Martinique, with their marginal mountainous areas, the physical constraints of Rodrigues implacably limited the possible extent of geographical removal and distancing for the Montagnards. But, as the Montagnards demonstrate, there is no analogous limitation on the scope of socio-cultural means to effect separation and distancing.

While acknowledging the freedmen's desire and apparent success in distancing themselves from their former masters on such a small island, it must also be recognized that their ability and success to achieve this relative autonomy went essentially unchallenged. Other post-slavery regimes make abundantly clear the various means by which the plantocracy was able to achieve control of at least the economic potential of ex-slaves. But these are notably lacking in Rodrigues. The explanations for this lay in part with the disjunction of ex-master and colonial authorities, and in part with the evolving identity of elite Creoles, but the larger reasons are due to the overall nature of the Rodriguan economy as it unfolded in the 19th century.

LAND AND AGRICULTURE

As we saw, the first records of land concessions are those recorded in the census of 1804 under the authority of the French colonial administration at Ile de France (Mauritius). These 850 arpents were divided into three parcels, but only 195 of these were actually being cultivated.

At the time of the British takeover, all lands not already conceded under the French were claimed for the Crown. However, land concessions continued to be granted. On the 29th of September 1820, three further concessions were recorded: to *Mme. Marie Jeanne Elisabeth de Neuville, épouse du Sieur Marragon*, two parcels of 108 arpents each, situated at Baie aux Huitres; to *Sieur Marragon*, three parcels of 108 arpents each, situated between "the northeast port and Baie aux Huitres"; and to *Sieur Germain LeGros*, three parcels of 108 arpents each, situated at Anse aux Anglais. Together with their concessions under the French, the Marragon family controlled 940 arpents (exclusive of their usufruct rights to certain lagoon islands) and LeGros 424 arpents.

In addition to the Marragons and LeGros, other arriving settlers received land concessions: in 1817 *Sieur Delaitre* received 216 arpents; in 1821 *Sieur Pierre Quessy* also received 216 arpents; and in 1822 *Sieur William Stone*, a government employee, received 250 arpents. In 1829 and 1830, *Dame Avice (épouse de Sieur Chenard)* got 108 arpents and *Sieur Gabriel Bégué* 324 arpents.

Hoart's report of 1825 mentions the crops grown by the settlers: "wheat grows very well; coffee should succeed. . . cotton gives good length lint; the land is too broken up for sugar, nor would there be enough water to turn the mills, the so-called rivers being mere trickles of water most of the year and often completely dry." He further remarked that fish was "plentiful" and that there were also several herds of cattle roaming wild in the woods.

Despite these sizable land concessions and relative availability of slave, then apprentice, labour, Rodrigues was not a significant economic success. Anderson's report in 1838 notes:

. . . as the island is formed by a collection of steep hills separated by narrow valleys and abundantly covered with pasturage, whenever the grass is removed by turning up the earth for cultivation, the soil is liable to be carried away by the heavy rains to which it is exposed, — and nothing but the bare rock remains —. Notwithstanding this objection the cultivation of the Indian corn and manioc has been persisted in, and with the preparation of salt fish, has hitherto constituted the employment of the population. Oats and wheat have lately been tried on a small scale, and the crops of this which I saw looked tolerably healthy although they are far from being rich. The supplies of grain and roots have only been sufficient for the support of the apprentices, and of the pigs and poultry which are reared in considerable numbers. It is therefore impossible to obtain any correct estimate of these productions. An uncertain quantity of salt fish, but not exceeding 80,000 lbs with 2 or 300 pigs and some poultry form all the animal exports of Rodrigues. Of cattle there is about 130 heads on the island but they are never exported and appear to be left to run almost wild — There are also considerable herds of goats and some sheep, but the latter do not thrive, and the goats seem to be as useless as the cattle, although both are in fine condition. . . The whole produce of the place on the present system is little more than sufficient for the support of a population working without wages, and who consequently could not be employed when they will have to be paid for their labour. . . I am convinced that their only revenue is from the fishing, which must be very trifling after paying the expense of the boats and nets yet if this branch is conceived to be sufficiently advantageous to encourage its pursuit, it might be continued without any interference with the interior of the island
(in Dupon 1969:81-83)

Anderson's report depicts a backwater of the Colonial empire, of little interest to the metropolitan powers, and without material base for a plantation economy. Indeed,

excluding the trading interests of certain of its inhabitants, there is no doubt as to the stagnant state of production on the island.

Twenty-five years later, in 1863, the agricultural sector seems little changed:

With the exception of those of Messrs Delaitre and Gabriel Bégué, none of the titles of Concession give the boundaries of the lands conceded — The proprietors have never been put “en règle” and their lands have received but little cultivation.

All other occupation in Rodrigues is simply that of squatters, to whom permission appears to have been given in a most indiscriminate manner, by successive Magistrates, to take possession of the Crown Lands.

With but few wants, and those easily supplied by the labour of a few days occasionally spent upon the lazy cultivation of a prolific soil — a class of settlers has grown up whose highest ambition does not extend beyond the growth of the limited supply of vegetables which might support existence, or the rearing of pigs, goats and poultry, whose keep entails no cost, and for which their owners find a ready demand among the ships visiting the island, particularly the English and American whalers which frequently call in for water, fuel and live stock.

So full of charm is this style of life found — so devoid of all trouble for the present, and of care for the morrow — that many persons who have gone to Rodrigues with the view of seeking their living by fishing, have abandoned the idea, unable to resist the temptation of adopting the ordinary life of the squatter.

There is no doubt that the state of the Crown Lands is such as, while unproductive of the slightest benefit to the Government, to render improvement in their social position a matter of little importance to the inhabitants — The squatter will be indifferent to the proper cultivation of land of which he may be at any moment deprived; he will never rouse himself to any exertion beyond what the pressing necessity of the moment may require; nor will the energy of character, and independence, which result from an actual proprietorship in the soil, be ever characteristic of a population holding tenure of land as that which obtains at Rodrigues.

(Morrison 1864:13-18)

In these intervening 25 years, only one item has been added to the official land records, *viz.* in 1853, 400 arpents at Baie du Nord leased for ten years to Mr. Savy (in Dupon 1969). With the exception of the Delaitre and Bégué holdings, the “agricultural establishments” noted up to 1838 appear defunct, and the agricultural sector is dominated by Morrison’s “squatters.” The identity of the squatters is not in doubt:

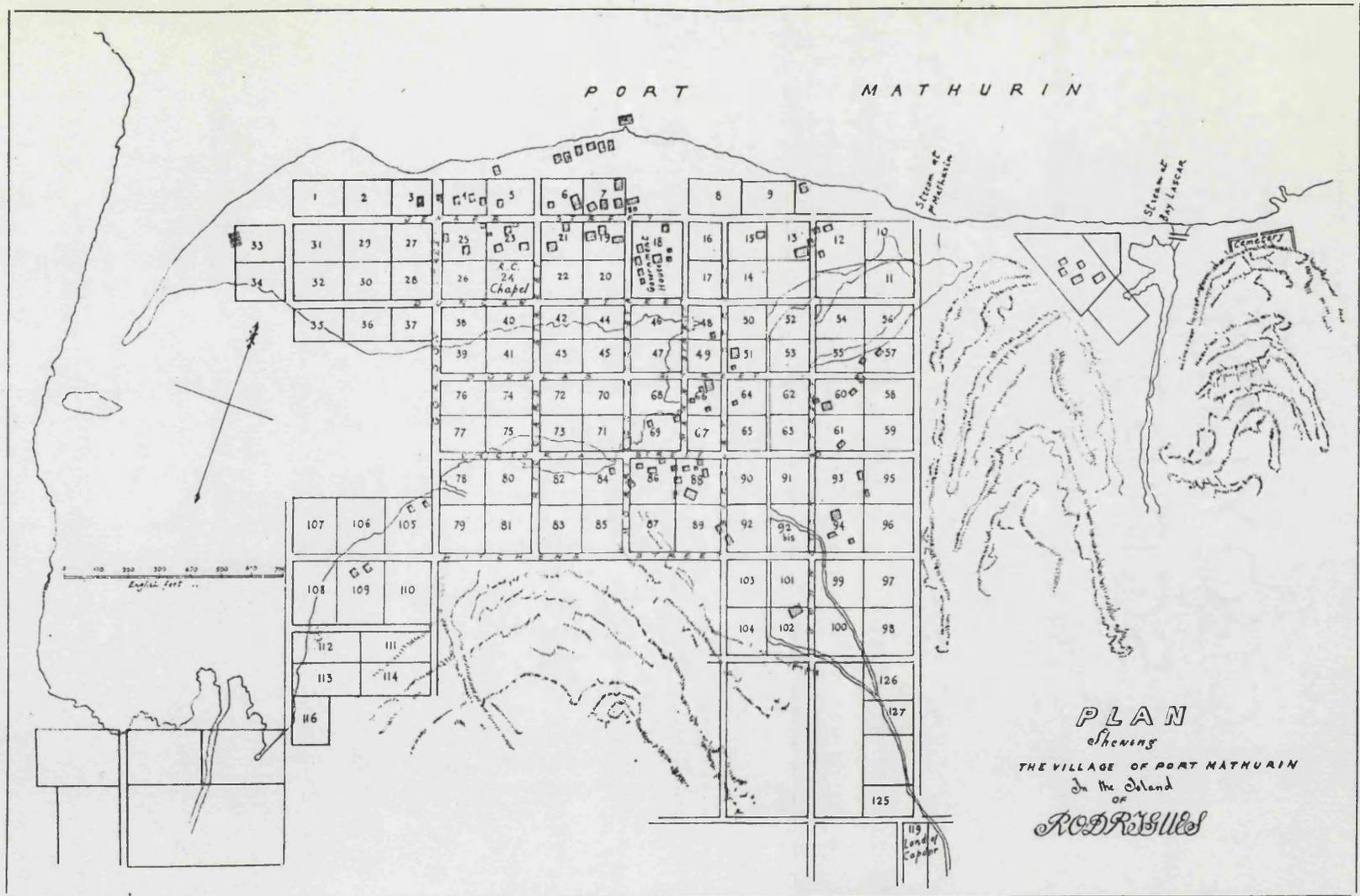
La population est divisée en deux classes parfaitement distinctes: les indigènes ou cultivateurs, répandus çà et là au nombre d'environ 400 sur l'étendue de la Montagne, et les pêcheurs, venus pour la plupart de Maurice, travaillant pour le compte d'une vingtaine de petits chefs, petits mulâtres ou noirs; ces derniers sont environ 300 et habitent sur la plage.⁶

(Père François 1863)

W. Morrison was a surveyor-general, despatched by the Mauritian colonial authorities and apparently his implicit criticisms were taken to heart. George Jenner, the Police Magistrate in Rodrigues from 1863-1879, was able to induce the government to allow him to take action. Jenner allowed the squatters to become owners of their land on easy terms of payment, although he was unable to collect rent on verbal leases (North-Coombes 1971:96). Under his stewardship, official land sales began in 1865. (See Map: Original Land Concessions, 1881, page 52.)

Between March 1865 and May 1871, 24 land transactions were recorded in Rodrigues (in Dupon 1969). Sixteen of those transactions concerned plots of ground in the town of Port Mathurin, and one in the adjacent village of Baie aux Huitres. The remaining seven were agricultural plots, all but one situated in the interior. The largest of these was 400 acres, titled to three proprietors in 1867, and another of 386 acres in the same year. Thereafter the size of the plots diminish: 25 acres, 60.7 acres, 100 acres, 24.6 acres and finally 15 acres — all titled in 1869. Two trends are obvious from these transactions. While there is an increase in absolute number of land sales, the size of the holdings steadily decrease. And the proliferation of small plots in Port Mathurin indicate an increasing density of settlement and status as a town proper. (See Map: Duncan's Plan of Port Mathurin, 1864, page 53.)

Such an ostensibly regularized state of affairs in regard to landholding during the years 1865-1871 would prove to be the exception to the rule. In 1875, just ten years later, the newly-arrived acting magistrate, Caldwell, found that none of those purchasers had received a title deed (Caldwell 1875). A situation of casually granted verbal land leases, apathetic or ineffective collection of rents, and muddled land records prevailed until 1930, when Raoul Brouard was posted to the island and explicitly instructed to try and recover the arrears in land rents and grazing fees (North-Coombes 1971:203). Faced with outright refusal to pay, at the next visit of the trading ship, Brouard "ordered the seizure of the animals and produce, sold everything by auction on the spot, and deducted the rents and fees due to the government" (*loc.cit.*). The reaction of the general populace was immediate. Their threats of hanging the magistrate were only thwarted by the ruse of a Royal Navy cruiser having been sent for and the armed back-up of the ETC Cable Company staff. Brouard's feat proved a short-lived victory. Although he more than tripled land rental revenue between 1929 and 1930, this almost immediately began to diminish thereafter. By the end of 1934, taxes were in arrears by 22,269 rupees, and thereafter increased by about 4000 rupees annually. In 1965 alone, the arrears on land rents only was 30,000 rs (Dupon 1967:218). In 1971, they were close to the half-million mark.



Duncan's plan of Port Mathurin, 1864

In 1978, efforts to examine in detail land records and leases were completely impossible due to the chaotic state of government records. However, certain general parameters were available. Despite the size of the first concessions in the early and middle 19th century, the largest landowner up to the late 1970s was the Catholic Church, holding approximately 90 acres. After the Church, ten landowners each possessed more than 12 acres but less than 20; and the remaining freeholders had, on average, just over 2 acres each (Dupon 1967:217 and *Economie et Productivité* 1977). Of a total land area of just over 25,600 acres, approximately 1,236 acres, or about 5%, were owned privately. This comprised 593 acres of arable land, 494 acres of wooded land and 148 acres of residential sites (*Ibid.*).

By a gradual process of fragmentation, together with abandonment and, in some cases, the Crown's repurchase of land, by the late 19th century the overwhelming bulk of the Rodriguan population was not only leasing the land they resided on and worked, even if not paying rents, but landholdings larger than 2 ha were the exception, not the rule. These bare facts lead to some obvious conclusions. The control of land was apparently not an issue of much import, "the state of the Crown Lands is such as . . . to render improvement in their social position a matter of little importance to the inhabitants" (Morrison *op.cit.*), at least vis-à-vis the government, and the payment of rents to the government was not regarded with great seriousness.

The 1881 surveyor's map indicates the areas where Jenner's attempts at initiating land sales resulted in a series of demarcated, and eventually titled, plots. This area in the central mountainous ridge lies just outside the boundaries of those first "agricultural establishments," and, in view of the contemporary descriptions of the freedmen, is the area where they first established themselves following emancipation. The area comprises the *pawas* of Mont Lubin, Vainqueur, Tréfles, Brûlé, and Lataniers. That these were the sites of the original homesteads of the newly freed slaves is confirmed by family histories. Virtually every Montagnard family genealogy collected begins with a household established in this area.

In the next generation, 1880-1900, the locations of households in family genealogies have moved centrifugally: starting in the east, to the areas of Roche Bon Dieu, Trois Soleils, Nouvelle Découverte, Pavillon, Citron Denis and Maréchal in the west. In the 1880s, Maréchal was a kind of frontier — one family's founder, the same escaped ship slave from Madagascar, purchased land there because it was uninhabited and remote from Port Mathurin.

Between 1900 and 1920, the areas of Grenade, in the east, Graviers, Port Sud-Est, Rivière Cocos and especially La Ferme and environs in the west, have become settled areas. From the 1920s on, the entire island has been settled, increasingly dense as one moves inward toward the original areas of settlement.

The exception to this general population movement is on the north coast. There the original settlement of Port Mathurin is already a village proper in the 1860s, with a satellite hamlet at Baie aux Huitres. For the next 100 years, these two nuclei expand in a strip east and west along the northern coast. By the middle of the 20th century, there is dense settlement from Anse aux Anglais in the east to Baie aux Huitres, with less dense fringe settlements extending past Caverne Provert to Grand Baie in the east, and through Baie Malgache to Baie du Nord in the west.

The two original population centers, one at Port Mathurin and Baie aux Huitres, and the other in the interior, correspond to the observations made in the 1860s by the two visiting priests, noting the division of the island's inhabitants into the fishermen along the coast and the indigenous cultivators in the mountains. Given a prevailing laissez-faire attitude regarding land on the part of the colonial authorities, the process of population expansion, land settlement and use was largely internal to the two population groups in question. That this remained a relatively autonomous process was further assisted by the elite's doing little to channel or control the acquisition of land, their economic interests being focussed on trade and the market in Mauritius. When their efforts were directed toward the production of commodities for this market, it centered on the fisheries or cattle.

A description of land use and land holding patterns in the interior of Rodrigues, reported in 1914 when the population was just over 5,000 (Koenig 1914), is substantially identical to that which was the case in the late 1970s when the population was close to 35,000. Plots of land that were owned, rather than leased, were kept wooded, while Crown lands were leased for cultivation. A leased plot was first cleared and burned in preparation for cultivation, then maize was grown for as long as good yields were obtained, usually two crops a year for two or three years; this was followed by beans, then manioc, and finally sweet potato, after which the plot was exhausted and then abandoned. Each family cultivated several plots, each at a different stage in the cycle. Whether land was owned, leased or only squatted upon, strict proprietary rights over it was recognized by everyone. Only when a piece of land was abandoned was it opened to another's claim.

Thus as each generation gained adulthood, they either cultivated their parents' plots or moved to the currently peripheral areas for their own gardens. What is

interesting is that after the initial purchase of plots of land in the 1860-1880s, this outward movement did not involve actual purchase of land, only the leasing and squatting on of new lands. This slash-and-burn horticulture, based on the cultivation of the Montagnard trilogy, corn, beans and sweet potatoes or manioc, and evident well into the 20th century indicates a subsistence orientation. But there is ample evidence that the Montagnards were producing a surplus for exchange shortly after establishing themselves in the interior highlands.

From the beginning of their independence, they availed themselves of the wild cattle and also raised pigs and poultry, the surplus of which was being sold at least by the 1840s. The reports of 1838 and 1864 note that the main, and only, sources of revenue were primarily the salted fish and secondarily pigs and poultry sold by the Montagnards. From Morrison's report, it is evident that at least some of this surplus was being sold to passing ships and the rest exported to Mauritius.

In 1878, the Police Magistrate, W.E. Desmarais, gives an indication that the generalizations in regard to fish and pigs and poultry as the sole exports hid a more diverse reality readily apparent in his listing.

Rodriguan Exports 1877

<u>GOODS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>VALUE(£)</u>
Salted fish	4676 bales	5,676
Beans	172 bags	250
Garlic	160 bags	100
Cattle	254 head	762
Goat	1365 head	550
Pigs	29 head	30
Fowls	100 dozen	60
Cotton	16 bales	16
Oats	3 bags	2.10
Hides	9	4.10
Palmiste	150	7
Fruit	38 cases	20
Maize	138 bags	80
Sundries	51	?
<u>TOTAL VALUE</u>		<u>£ 6,558</u>

(Annual Reports 1878:Appendix No.3)

Desmarais further noted that in 1876 the total value of exports was £8,358.60, a decrease of £1,800.60 in 1877.

This report does indeed indicate that fish is the most important source of revenue; but either contrary to the report in 1864, or due to a shift since that date, pigs and poultry are nowhere near as important as cattle and goats. While relatively less valuable, certain agricultural produce is certainly significant, viz. beans, garlic and maize, and, even individually, more lucrative than pigs and poultry. We can add to this list, the

observation that beans, maize, pigs and poultry are integral items in the native diet, whereas fish, cattle, goats and garlic are expressly produced for exchange. Variable rates of surplus production is clear, but so is production for a market.

And yet, in the very same report, Desmarais also makes the following observation:

. . . But sad to say, no inducement whatsoever will make the inhabitants of Rodrigues shake off their idleness and torpor. Beyond the planting of sufficient maize and manioc for their immediate consumption, they will neither work for themselves nor for others.

Despite the actual figures presented, the stereotyping of the Rodriguans as lazy and improvident persists. The opaque screen created during the apprenticeship period continues to appear to be an integral element of Rodriguan society.

Thirty-five years later, the basic repertory of agricultural production on the island has remained essentially the same. Thus Stockdale (1914) and Koenig (1914) note that the staple foods cultivated consist of maize, manioc, sweet potatoes and beans, and those also cultivated for export are beans, garlic, potatoes and tobacco. Fish continues to be “the money of Rodrigues” (Stockdale 1914) and goats the second largest source of cash income.

For a short period, tobacco became a significant export⁷; but despite this brief importance it was essentially an aberration in the long-term picture of Rodriguan exports. Based on an average of all produce exported during the years 1966-1970, the following items were exported, listed in descending order of monetary value:

Rodriguan Exports 1966-1970

<u>EXPORTS</u>	<u>QUANTITY</u>	<u>VALUE</u>
Salt fish and Octopus	3919 tons	548,660 rs
Pigs	4527 head	543,240 rs
Onions and Garlic	646 tons	(approx.) 540,000 rs
Poultry	1052 crates	210,400 rs
Sheep and Goats	3962 head	198,100 rs
Cattle	379 head	113,700 rs

(North-Coombes 1971:Appendix 17)

For comparative purposes, the analogous order of commodities exported one hundred years earlier (Desmarais 1878) is: fish, cattle, goats, beans, garlic, maize, poultry, pigs, fruit and cotton. In fact, the only historically continuous cash crops grown in Rodrigues are garlic and onions.⁸

The general picture of Rodriguan economic production is one that has remained remarkably uniform from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, with only variations in emphasis. The Montagnard trilogy of sweet potatoes/manioc, maize, and beans provides the basis of subsistence production, only being sold during periods of surplus. Poultry, pigs and goats also provide a minimal subsistence base, but the larger proportion is destined for sale. While fish, cattle and garlic and onions are explicitly produced for exchange.

The nature of the peasant economy that evolved in Rodrigues can be regarded as typical given the circumstances. What emerges, however, as most unusual, when taking into account an island's insularity and the clear limits of its resources, is the lack of importance on control of land throughout its history. Whereas universal access to land is probably common, and certainly expectable, in newly settled lands or frontier societies, it would seem seriously problematic in an island society with absolute constraints on the amount of land available. Although an understanding of this apparent conundrum begins with a realization of the lackadaisical, ineffective nature of colonial governmental authority throughout the island's history, its fuller social explanation can be found in the development of another economic sector.

FISHING, TRADING AND CATTLE

From the initial settlement of the island, fishing had regularly surpassed agricultural production in terms of importance and revenue. Since at least 1820, usufruct rights for fishing on several of the small lagoon islands had been formally recognized. But, even before, since at least 1803, fisheries were an important factor in Rodrigues. LeCloud, Raffin and Gautier, among the earliest settlers, came expressly to start fishing stations. Lt. Col. Keating, commander of the British forces charged with blockading Ile de France beginning in 1809, refers to "the settlers who have been in the habit of fishing all around the island" (in North-Coombes 1971:68). Between 1820 and 1830, at least four fishery stations are explicitly recognized in the land transactions, although only one is remarked upon in 1838 by Anderson (*loc.cit.*). By 1845, at least 56 men were employed in eight fisheries (Kelly 1857). Starting in 1878, and continuing beyond 1894, an annual average of 300 men are listed as fishermen.

The few facts available suggest that from the beginning the men employed on these fishing stations were contracted and not slaves. The reason for this can only be surmised, but it seems fairly safe to assume that the reasons were economic. Certainly up until the 1820s, a predial slave was of more value when sold to a Mauritian sugar planter, than when used as a fisherman. Thus it would appear more logical to employ

men by contract so as to provide incentives for larger catches without also providing their upkeep and nourishment. The unpredictability of fishing precludes a straightforward equation of labour to catch. In artisanal fishing it is probably universal that compensation is attached to catch, not man-hour or man-day. This logic, inherent to fishing as an economic activity, appears fundamental enough to transform any preexisting labour relations. Thus, Price (1966) found that slaves in Martinique, assigned to fishing for their masters, were more able to mitigate the conditions of their servitude than their brethren in the fields.

The earliest fisheries on the island, those of Raffin, Lecloud and Gautier in 1803, list “blacks,” not slaves, as employed in fishing. The lists of slaves and, later, apprentices, compiled by the visiting officials, include the individual occupation of each person. These listed occupations detail “*command[ant]*”, “*de pioche*”, “*domestique*”, “*charp[entier]*” and “*de caz*”. Nowhere is fishing, or anything that can be construed as fishing-related, noted in relation to slaves or apprentices. In 1838, the primary fishery, that of Gonnet, employed “13 free men” (Anderson *op.cit.*). Given the lack of other compelling evidence, it is most reasonable to infer from the data available that the labour utilized in these early Rodriguan fisheries was contracted, not owned.

Beginning in the 1830s, the master fishermen had been employing “vagrants” or convicts straight out of the prisons of Port Louis through the aid of Mauritian policemen.⁹ A certain Labonté, a policeman in Mauritius, was notable enough in the “recruitment” of labour for the Rodriguan master fishermen to have had a region in Rodrigues named after him (North-Coombes 1971:79). Self’s report of 1841 notes two groups of people: the Rodriguans and the labourers brought from Mauritius for the fishing. In addition to his other tasks, Self had been charged with investigating complaints against master fishermen. Certain individuals claimed that they “had been shipped to Rodrigues by the Police at Port Louis” unwillingly, to work in the fisheries. Most of the complaints had to do with those employed on a one-year contract at the end of which they could not afford passage back to Mauritius (*loc.cit.*). As North-Coombes remarks, “Each employer [master fisherman] had a store of his own from which he supplied the men on credit at extortionate prices. The workpeople were thus perpetually in debt and forced, against the law, to remain in their employers’ service until the debts had been canceled — which was hardly ever possible” (*Ibid.*:81).

Between Anderson’s report of 1838 and that of Thomas Corby, government surveyor, in 1845 (Corby 1845) there is a rise in the population not entirely attributable to natural increase: from 168 apprentices and 20 free men in 1838, to 240 apprentices and

83 free in 1845.¹⁰ In 1850, Father Thévaux, the first priest ever sent to Rodrigues, counted 350 “indigenous cultivators” and 100 fishermen from Mauritius. (Toussaint 1972:270)

Beginning between 1838 and 1843 there began a trickle of Mauritian immigrants, which ceases by 1877 when population growth can be tracked as almost entirely by natural increase. Judging from population figures in the 1870s, where the population was classified by place of birth, this influx of Mauritians was probably never more than about 200 or so.¹¹ Although it is impossible to fix their exact number, their presence and reasons for their coming are clear in the reports of the period. Marshall’s report refers to the “blacks . . . who are brought here from Mauritius” (1843), as does Self (*op.cit.*) in 1841, and Father Thévaux in 1850; in 1864, Morrison speaks of “the many persons who have gone to Rodrigues with the view of seeking their living by fishing” (*op.cit.*).

The identity of these Mauritians and their association with fishing is also quite evident. In 1874, a British scientific expedition, on Rodrigues to view the transit of Venus, notes that

. . . the population is estimated at 1500, all of whom are creoles or negroes, with the exception of Mr. Bell, the magistrate, and his family, a French priest, a police-sergeant, and two or three policemen.

(Transit of Venus Expedition 1874)

Earlier, the eyewitness accounts of two visiting priests, one in 1863 and the other in 1868, further confirm who these fishermen were. Père François wrote that “the population is perfectly divided into two distinct classes: the indigenes or cultivators. . . and the fishermen.” They go on to note that the fishermen were “*petits mulâtres ou noirs*,” who had all come from Mauritius and were “*noirs de naissance libre*”. (Père François 1863 and Père Guilmin 1868).

Yet earlier, that the master fishermen and some of those who took large land concessions, were not of “pure” European descent, can be gleaned in the list of official concessions (in Dupon *op.cit.*). In that list, all the concessioners are referred to as “*Sieur*,” with the sole exception of a certain Madame married to *Sieur* Marragon, and Dame Avice. In Mauritius, as Allen notes,

. . . the designation of individuals as *sieur* and *demoiselle* rather than as *monsieur* and *mademoiselle* frequently indicated persons of free coloured or ex-apprentice background or status. (1983:231).

Unfortunately, the official concessions list, by the 1860s, was written in English, where no distinctions were made in reference titles. However, the priests’ terms, the references to creoles, the terms of address in the concession lists, and the consistent

singling out of individuals who were clearly white, indicates that the population, including the newly arrived Mauritians, were neither Europeans nor socially “white.”

[In Mauritius] During the early and mid-eighteenth century the term [*creole*] referred to any person, white or colored, free or slave, born on the Ile de France. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the term referred increasingly only to free non-whites, of African, Indian or Asian ancestry born on the island. After the mid-1830s the term was used generally to distinguish the non-white, non-Indian immigrant population from the Indian immigrants introduced after 1834.

(Allen *op.cit.*:xi)

Given this evidence, the earliest population of Rodrigues consisted of two groups, the slaves and their masters who were of “mixed blood.” During the 1830s, a new group emerged, Mauritians, either “old free” or “*ex-apprenti*” people who came willingly or were contracted to come to Rodrigues. This new group was primarily identified as fishermen.

By mid-nineteenth century, then, the various accounts together indicate the existence of three social groups: (i) the freedmen and their descendants, referred to as “natives” or “*indigènes*,” “cultivators,” or “mountaineers;” (ii) a rather small and fluctuating group of *creoles*, consisting of the early concessioners, “master fishermen” or traders; and, finally, (iii) a group of Mauritian immigrants, mostly brought in under contract for the fishing, and evidently people who claimed to have shed their slave/apprentice status prior to general emancipation in 1838.

The social processes occurring in Mauritius during this same time period precipitate this movement to Rodrigues.¹² . Moreover, given their social identity and origins on Mauritius, they set great store in distinguishing themselves from the Rodriguan *indigènes*.

At the same time, however, a desire among these Mauritian emigrants to distance themselves from the Rodriguan freedmen must not have been universal. Thus Morrison’s words:

So full of charm is this style of life found — so devoid of all trouble for the present, and of care for the morrow — that many persons who have gone to Rodrigues with the view of seeking their living by fishing, have abandoned the idea, unable to resist the temptation of adopting the ordinary life of the squatter (*op.cit.*).

Those Mauritian emigrants passing into an identity with the Montagnards were not enough to blur the social distinction between Montagnard and the other, newly-augmented group, the fishermen, clearly perceived by the two priests in the 1860s. Nonetheless, the existence of an apparent choice as to social identity in Rodrigues shows

that identification with one group or the other was not automatic, even at this relatively early stage of social formation.

The true “old free” population in Rodrigues, the original slave-owners and land owners, has virtually disappeared as a class by the 1850s. Even by 1838, there are only three agricultural estates on the island, their economic importance consistently eclipsed by fishing and livestock activities. The land records themselves indicate a significant decrease in the importance and size of in landholdings. The primary economic focus of the island’s elite lay elsewhere.

This new focus emerges in a series of struggles surrounding access to the maritime shipping serving the island. In 1874, the historical documents demonstrate what must have been previously relatively quiet and strictly local arguments. These struggles are against a certain Jean Allas and his allies. Jean Allas was the only trader owning a vessel in the 1860s and still a major trader in the 1870s (North-Coombes 1971:97 *et seq.*). His adversaries are a group of at least sixty individuals, among whom are people whose families will become dominant by the turn of the century.¹³

The power of Jean Allas and his successors derived from an economic stranglehold on the island based on trading, though derived from fishing. From the outset, the mainstay of the earliest settlers had been trading. Both LeGros and Marragon, either together or as competitors, owned or had major shares in vessels that plied the seas not only between Rodrigues and Mauritius, but also to the more outlying islands of Brandon and Diego Garcia, as well as the Seychelles, and no doubt Madagascar and southern Africa. Rodriguan goods being transported and traded at this time varied from slaves, to occasional crops grown by Marragon and Gorry, to the salvaged cargo of shipwrecked ships and, the basic and most dependable, salted and dried fish. But their trade was not limited by what they exported from Rodrigues, as they only averaged 3 or 4 runs a year to and from the island. The basic outlines of the trade initiated by LeGros and Marragon remained the same until the early 1900s, taken up by various individuals, including Chelin, Allas and Raffaut.

The struggles emerging by 1874, however, were not about the circum western Indian Ocean trade, but rather solely concerned with the Rodriguan export trade, especially in regard to the export of fish, the “money” of Rodrigues — the single most lucrative enterprise throughout this period and into the twentieth century.

At the time of the first official complaints against the master fishermen, the 1838 report stated in passing that the only sources of revenue for the “Proprietors” was from the fisheries. The “truck” system was already well-established at that point. The master

fishermen, *i.e.*, those holding usufruct rights to certain islands or coastal sites (both legally and by squatting), from which the fishing took place, provided the requisite gear and most importantly the commercial outlet for the fish. The fishermen were contracted for periods of one year, and they were paid initially in wages and later by a proportion of the catch. The master fishermen transported and sold the salted and dried fish in Mauritius. Payment was made to the fishermen only after the catch had been sold. As noted in the reports of the period, each master fisherman had a “company store” where he sold to his employees, on credit, goods imported from Mauritius which were not otherwise available in Rodrigues — spirits, sugar, grains, clothing, oils, etc. Thus, a master fisherman gave credit against future wages for the purchase of items that he himself imported and sold. Given that the shipments of salted and dried fish, and hence the returns, only occurred a couple of times a year, there were long periods of time when credit at the “company store” was the only option available for the various necessities. Although there is enough evidence to show that these immigrant fishermen were also squatting on available land and making gardens for their own consumption, they apparently remained dependent on the essentials only available from the stores. The complaints investigated by the government officials were warranted:

. . . a man earning 7 dollars a month ran into as much as 150 to 200 dollars of debt . . . moreover, the cost of goods as compared with prices in Mauritius was anything between 150 and 300 percent higher in Rodrigues .
(North-Coombes 1971:97)

By 1850, the complaints were sufficiently serious for the Mauritian colonial authorities to charge C.W.P. Montgomery with looking into the situation and doing something about it. Montgomery recommended the issuance of shop licenses, ostensibly to negate and supplant the “company stores” of the master fishermen. Two shop licenses were issued that year; however, one was issued to the major trader (Jean Allas) and the other to the proxy of another trader. In fact, the truck system continued unabated under the guise of shop licenses. Messiter, the Police Magistrate from 1856-1862, who had the authority to approve contracts between employers and labour, allowed wages

. . . to be payable in merchandise so that when the servant is disposed to intemperance two bottles of rum issued to him in six-penny grogs pay his wages for one month and five days. . .
(Messiter 1864).

Even the apparently sincere efforts of Messiter’s successor, George Jenner, to regulate the truck system through tighter control of shop licenses failed. Thus, certain company stores were transformed into licensed shops, shops that both bought Rodriguan commodities and sold imported goods, and that had priority of place and arrangement on

the trading ships, either directly through vertical ownership or through partnership with ship owners.

The persistence and strength of the truck system, despite repeated attempts to control it, was due to two reasons. One was entirely situational, the other political. The only market outlet for Rodriguan produce, not only fish, but also livestock and certain crops, was Mauritius. And the only access to Mauritius was by ship. The proprietor of a trading vessel serving Rodrigues *ipso facto* controlled not only the export of all Rodriguan produce, but also the distribution of all imported goods. Failure to accept the ship owner's conditions meant lack of access to market.

The stranglehold the traders *cum* shipowners had on Rodrigues was further consolidated by the fact that there was not enough produce exported to make a second ship feasible. Thus in 1865, Jenner, the Police Magistrate, assisted in the government's chartering of another vessel to service the island, specifically to ease the relatively greater burden borne by the Montagnards. Unfortunately, a cyclone and a serious attack of caterpillars, together with a depressed market in Mauritius, resulted in insufficient Montagnard produce for this second ship. This vessel was quickly taken over, and then purchased by the other ship's owner, Jean Allas (North-Coombes 1971:97). In 1883, another Magistrate, O'Halloran, caused the Mauritian government to purchase a small ship to thwart these dominant traders. But the major traders, in this case, Raffaut and Lucchesi, also managed shortly to insinuate their control of this second ship by a combination of collusion with the captain and the ability to provide larger, more valuable cargoes (*Ibid.*:119).

A petition to the Mauritian authorities, written by the Catholic priest, on behalf of the inhabitants, in 1881 describes clearly these traders' stranglehold on the island:

. . . the mountaineers perforce must contract with the Backia Letchmy [owned by one of the traders] for a whole year. Moreover, they were forced to consign their produce exclusively to the vessel's agent, thus precluding free disposal if a better opportunity occurred. The small shippers were compelled to accept in payment merchandize, not cash. They could not get a settlement of their accounts for a whole year and must take any settlement offered at the shipowner's fancy. If they did not contract for a whole year, they were not allowed to send anything on the ship, nor would any goods be brought for them from Mauritius. Moreover, the freight then in force was a crippling one-fifth of the value of the produce shipped.

(North-Coombes paraphrasing 1881 petition, 1971:115)

In 1884, F.V. Descroizilles, a senior audit examiner sent by the Mauritian authorities, in his report (Descroizilles 1884), drew attention to the need to limit the captain of the *Harmonie* (the government's schooner, contracted initially with

O'Halloran's assistance) — he should be “only the master, not something like the agent and even the owner of the ship.” Descroizilles termed the truck system a “state of slavery” — both ships often refused inhabitants space for their goods, but the middlemen were never refused space for all of their goods. Descroizilles saw the crux of the problem as the enormous state of debt in which the inhabitants were trapped:

To carry out these reforms advances must be made for a few months by government in order to get the poor people out of the hands of the middlemen, to advance food and money to them, so that they may pay their debts. I believe that with Rs.3000 as an advance to Rodrigues, for one year, all the debts of the poor people would be wiped out. (*Ibid.*)

Thus the establishment of the external trade, first based on the control of the export of salted and dried fish, and then extending to other commodities, became an objective in and of itself for control of all exports. Chenin, Allas and Raffaut, starting out as master fishermen and shopkeepers, gradually narrowed their interest to just the trade itself. By the same token allowing a relative internal autonomy of economic production.¹⁴ While the whole population suffered from the kind of conditions set by these traders, the voluble and aggressive complaints of the fishermen indicate their greater vulnerability to these conditions.

The primary stage for the complaints and struggles against the traders was the terrain of the colonial authorities. It was the complaints against the master fishermen and the “truck” system which brought the first resident colonial government agents to Rodrigues in 1843. From 1843 until the 1930s, the colonial administrative record on the island has one theme: the external trade, as a point of contention between the producers and the traders and as a point of contention between the government and the traders.

Petitions for removal of the Magistrate were signed by residents of Rodrigues and sent to the authorities in Mauritius in 1849 against Henderson, in 1856 against Montgomery, in 1868 against Jenner, in 1875 against Henry Reid Bell, against O'Halloran in 1889, McMillan in 1901, Rouillard in 1902, and against Brouard in 1930. In the cases of Henderson, Jenner, and Rouillard, the wrath of the traders had been brought down on them by their attempts to regulate and control the truck system. In the cases of Montgomery, Bell, O'Halloran, and McMillan charges of embezzlement, larceny and corruption in trading deals had been levied. In the case of Brouard, his attempts to collect back taxes through the export of commodities caused an uproar by traders, Creoles and Montagnards alike.

Despite this long period of struggle, it cannot be said that the major traders lost the battle. The trading system changes its tenor around the turn of the century, and even if this change was inevitable, it was precipitated by the withdrawal of the big traders.

At the turn of the century, there is a decreasing mention of big name traders and a gradual diminishment of major *imbroglios* between the traders and the various magistrates. At the same time certain of the original concessions have been abandoned. By 1914, Koenig (*op.cit.*) is recommending that the Mauritian colonial authorities purchase abandoned private property, specifically four concessions: the Delaître property (216 arpents), the W. Stone property (250 arp), Goatley's 30 arpents, and the Allas and Medicis 15 arpent parcel. Besides Allas, Delaître and Stone were also big traders.

Given the big traders' intimate involvement with Mauritian business interests, specifically involving a wider trade encompassing virtually all of the Western Indian Ocean, they were no doubt party to a general Mascarene Creole emigration from the islands. That movement was first toward Madagascar and then South Africa, beginning in the early twentieth century and well established by the 1920s, continuing on up to World War II.¹⁵

Given this general withdrawal of the Mascarene commercial elite, the fact that a certain Roussety was actually censured and jailed in 1904 seems emblematic. This was the first time that such an action was successful, validated by the Mauritian authorities, despite countless previous attempts by the various Magistrates. Although Roussety was not a major trader with significant ties to Mauritius, he certainly had had ties with the big traders and belonged to the Rodriguan elite — an elite with ebbing political clout in Mauritius:

I am all the less prepared to urge that His Excellency should extend his prerogative of mercy to Roussety as I have been informed that since his original conviction, he has openly boasted that the influence he disposed of in Mauritius would secure his free pardon. Knowing the man for the braggart he is, this news was not unexpected.

(Rouillard 1903)

Add to this the fact that shortly thereafter, in 1913, the Rodriguan magistrate's jurisdiction was made commensurate with a district magistrate in Mauritius, surely an indication of a reduction in traders' influence in political matters in Mauritius. Roussety's downfall had been precipitated by the threat of riot by his supporters against the Magistrate, Rouillard. When not only the E.T.C. cablemen came to Rouillard's aid, but also a Mauritian steamer with the 20 extra armed policemen aboard sent by the authorities, an unprecedented step had been taken in regulating the affairs of Rodrigues. Another incident of popular uprising in 1930, when the Magistrate Brouard's appeal for armed reinforcement from Mauritius also was actually met, caps a trend whereby the Mauritian authorities were increasingly actively asserting their authority in Rodrigues after more than a hundred years of passive stewardship.

By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Rodriguan elite no longer consisted of major traders, but, instead, those who had first immigrated to the island from Mauritius in the 1840s and 1850s, and their descendants, who had built an economic livelihood based on not just fishing, but also cattle and certain cash crops.

Trade does not thereby diminish in importance. But it is the Chinese who appear to step into a niche abandoned by the big traders. And, perhaps, because the new traders are Chinese, only involved in petty trading limited to the Rodriguan-Mauritian run, they are neither a threat economically, politically nor socially.¹⁶ The Chinese by mid-twentieth century are owners of large herds of cattle, as well as owners of the majority of the large seine nets in Rodrigues and virtually totally controlling the island-internal retail shops. But by a combination of insularity, non-involvement in local politics and occasional marriage with Creoles, they continue to be marginal to the affairs of the island.¹⁷

Just as the Montagnards represent a continuous, albeit evolving, identification with the first Rodriguan slaves, through freedmen status to “*cultivateurs*,” “*indigènes*” and “mountaineers,” so also the Creoles’ continuous identity with the early settlers and traders, through the Mauritian immigrant fishermen and traders of the 19th century, right up to “those inhabitants who look upon themselves as the ‘white’ part of the Rodriguan population” (North-Coombes 1971:270).¹⁸

The previously noted descriptions of the population at mid-nineteenth century, together with the nature of population movement from Mauritius in the post-emancipation period, allows a conservative assumption that these early Creoles were of at least “mixed blood.” Based on his personal experiences with the island beginning in the 1930s, North-Coombes observes that to this population of “European or near-European stock,” other “white elements were added” (*Ibid.*). He lists a few seamen and policemen who never left the island. He further points out that sundry Europeans who had at various times visited the island “left one or two portraits behind,” as a common Rodriguan euphemism has it. However, despite these ‘white’ elements added to the population, the Creoles are “that part of the population which has resulted from “...miscegenation [which] has produced the semi-stabilised white, or *café-au-lait* Rodriguan” (*Ibid.*:272). Furthermore, “these have always been centred mostly at and around Port Mathurin, Oyster Bay, Grand Bay and La Ferme, whereas the ‘black’ Rodriguans are still by and large the inhabitants of the uplands, where they squatted originally after the abolition of slavery” (*Ibid.*).

Earlier, in the late 1910s, Bertuchi describes the inhabitants thus:

. . . A few white creoles from Mauritius and Bourbon came and settled on the island and intermarried with the blacks, which accounts for a section of the population being of a “café-au-lait” colour. Some of these settlers were the descendants of the French who had been expelled from the settlement at Fort Dauphin, in Madagascar.

Other white creoles married whites like themselves, which accounts for the number of inhabitants who are, in appearance, like Europeans, except in their habits and customs, which, through a prolonged stay, have merged into those of the blacks . . .

The bulk of the population consists of negroes who originally were imported as slaves from Madagascar and the coast of Africa. They are not so black as the Guinea negroes, the majority have a deep brown velvety skin . . .

The white and light coloured natives have in every respect the same features as Europeans; they generally inhabit the capital Port Mathurin, and Laferme. They are more addicted to fishing than planting. The blacks inhabit the hills and prefer planting to fishing, although nowadays both sections of the community combine the two pursuits. The lighter coloured natives call the blacks “habitants” or “planters,” and seem to look upon them as being of an inferior caste.

(Bertuchi 1923:69-71)

The continuity of the early settlers, the mid-nineteenth century Mauritian and occasional European immigrants through to the current Creole elite is evident not only in their past and current appeal to “white” parentage and distinction vis-à-vis the mountaineers, but also in the continuity of the focus of their predominant economic activities. From a mix of traders and master fishermen among the earliest settlers, through a mix of traders, shopkeepers and fishermen by the turn of the century, to a mix of fishermen and specialized farmers and cattle owners in La Ferme by the 1920s, the Creoles have continuously dominated the fishing, cattle and cash crop sectors of the Rodriguan economy.

That cattle was an important economic focus is evident from 1841 with Lenferma’s attempts at claiming the wild cattle, but it does not begin to emerge as a Creole economic force in its own right until about the 1880s.¹⁹ By 1921, 1,929 head of cattle were counted on the island, a number which had risen to about 6,000 by 1948 (Natural Resources Board 1948:5). A total of 6,000 head seems to be the extent of the “natural” carrying capacity of the island, as it has never exceeded this figure. The cattle population figures for 1969-1977 are instructive:

Cattle Population 1969-1977

<u>Year</u>	<u>Island Total</u>	<u>Exported</u>
1969	na	1,062
1970	5,223	1,552
1971	na	2,908
1972	na	2,704
1973	na	1,817
1974	5,911	1,674
1975	2,422	911
1976	2,337	514
1977	3,068	na

(Street *et al.* 1978:41)

Thus between one quarter and one third of the total population of cattle is exported in any year, even in those years where drought and cyclones have seriously decimated the population. The bulk of these cattle are grazed on the cattlewalk areas, roughly half of the area of the island, in herds combining the stock of several owners with a paid herdsman. A minority of animals are kept near their owners' (most typically, Montagnards) homesteads, fed crop by-products, tethered and paddocked at night. There is limited supplemental feeding of the cattle, and, despite efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture, breeding is indiscriminate.

From as early as Lenferma's battle with the freedmen and the earliest court cases in 1843, one of the constants of Rodriguan rural life has been the tension between cattle-raising and agriculture, between cattle owners and farmers. By a combination of the locations of early settlement and gardens, and the nature of the lands, the cattlewalk area was in practice devoted to the grazing of livestock, not only cattle but also goats and sheep. The cattlewalk area comprises a belt around the island, broader in the west, and intermittent in the north. (See Map, Cattlewalk Areas, page 70.)

Predictably, as population settlement spread from the original sites on the northern coast and the central mountainous ridge, contention arose in those areas where the cattlewalk abutted on garden sites. At the northeastern end of the island, the cattlewalk included the low hills behind Anse aux Anglais, and in the borderline area there, the cattle were traditionally grouped and prepared for shipment to Mauritius as it was within easy striking distance of the port. In 1894, the Magistrate, Colin, leased crown lands in this area to six or seven inhabitants. James Martin, the largest cattle owner of the time, complained bitterly to the governor of Mauritius, Sir Hubert Jerningham, who in turn, expressed his displeasure to Colin so:

. . . His Excellency cannot lose sight of the fact that for years past the Martin family had endeavored, at great loss, to supply the island [Mauritius] with cattle, and that they deserve protection, nor can His Excellency see any reason why you should give leases of patches of ground within the pasturage land, especially when His Excellency ordered a survey so as to keep that land free and in time to be fenced up. These patches let or sold are apparently taken up for the purpose of claiming compensation wholly out of proportion with the produce raised on them if the cattle trespass on them.

His Excellency considers this to be eminently unfair, and desires you to grant patches only in the direction of the island which is not occupied by land leased to Mr. Martin to whom His Excellency grants the lease he requires, but to whom he cannot remit the tax per head of cattle lately established.

(Jerningham 1894)

While Mr. Martin's influence is clear, he had other burdens to bear besides the head tax. North-Coombes notes the presence of cattle-stealing gangs, who drove cattle and goats off the free range into their own pens where they butchered the meat, and who also took advantage of cattle escaped from the embarkation pens at Anse aux Anglais (1971:141). These thefts were largely perpetuated by "inhabitants" or Montagnards, who were clearly consuming the meat, not reselling the animals for export.

Another sort of problem began to emerge in the western part of the island, where the situation was quite different. Martin had lost 13 animals there between late 1897 and late 1898 when they had strayed in search of water onto cultivated lands (North-Coombes 1971:152). In fact, beginning in the late 1880s, certain Creoles had begun to cultivate tobacco in this region. This region, centered around La Ferme, was best suited for tobacco cultivation, while it was at the same time ideal for large cattle herds because of good pasturage and accessible streams. Colin saw greater value in tobacco production than cattle and so gave higher priority to cultivation leases in the area. Though he had no specific authority to lease land for cultivation in the cattlewalk areas, he did manage in effect to grant such leases by using his authority to redefine the limits of the cattlewalk (*Ibid.*:152). The granting of these new leases coincides with the large increases in tobacco production in the early 1890s. Koenig's description of La Ferme as the "main agricultural centre" in 1914, indicates the retreat of the cattlewalk area further west and south. The area's growth in population was such that a Catholic chapel was built there in 1907, the only others at the time being in Port Mathurin and Ste. Gabriel. That this population was largely Creole, or *café-au-lait*, is observed by Bertuchi by the late

1910s; its character as a Creole community is established by then and is so noted throughout the twentieth century.

The spread of the Creole community from its traditional centers at Port Mathurin, Anse aux Anglais and Baie aux Huitres to La Ferme is not so much an indication of population pressure in those original centers as it is an indication of Creoles' investments in new economic enterprises. After the failure of the earliest concessioners' attempts at plantation agriculture, definitive by the apprenticeship period, relatively large scale cash crop cultivation is absent until the 1880s. By 1889, not only does serious tobacco cultivation emerge, but also other attempts at cash crop production. Thus sporadic efforts at cultivation of aloe for fiber, cotton, citrus fruits and coconuts were made. These, like the traditional garlic and onions, were cultivated for export, although, again like garlic and onions, were never significant enough to constitute a major single export commodity. The only exception was tobacco, which achieved dominance only within a certain era, before it was so circumscribed by Mauritian tariffs that it too dwindled to minor importance.

These successive and then concurrent foci of Creole economic activity, *viz.* fishing, cattle, and cash cropping, indicate their continuous orientation to the export market, and the strong role cash plays in their economy — and not incidentally their greater vulnerability to the predations of the big traders. While Creole economic activities up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century can be seen as only a difference in degree, rather than kind, with Montagnard economic pursuits, it is the Creole dependence on cash, and consequent greater reliance on the external market, that make their economic orientation and organization substantially different from that of the Montagnards. Together with this economic orientation, the Creole allegiance to metropolitan values accounts largely for an emerging interest in professional, managerial and technical professions in later generations. An emphasis on education, that available in Rodrigues, and when means are available, higher degrees in Mauritius, signals Creole aspirations. By the 1970s, given the limited opportunities for such pursuits on Rodrigues, it is not surprising that proportionately larger numbers of younger Creoles were living and working in Mauritius, and for those with light skin, emigration to Australia was a standard option.

Despite the initially common factors of production available to both Creoles and Montagnards, the substantial difference in the organization and objectives of their economic activities, as well as their differing cultural orientations, ensure the continuation of local elite status for Creoles into the twentieth century.

THE MODERN ERA

The establishment of the Rodriguan population, as well as its general configuration into Creoles and Montagnards and a small minority of Asians, is firmly institutionalized by 1920. The basic contours of the island's economy that developed throughout the 19th century, *viz.* fishing, external trading, livestock and both subsistence agriculture and limited cash cropping, attained a certain consistency by 1920 which is maintained up until the 1970s.

Nevertheless, certain new factors begin to affect the island's general social and economic features in the 20th century. These essentially exogenous factors, while not fundamentally altering the socioeconomic canons in place by 1920, will result in new alignments and meanings in the sociocultural arena. The major source of these alterations is in the changing relationship between Rodrigues and Mauritius and together their relationship to the outside world, especially Great Britain.

The gradual disappearance of the big Creole traders and their replacement by Asians mark a kind of watershed in Rodriguan history. These two mutual processes are accompanied by signal events in the political domain: in 1904, the actual censure and jailing of Roussety, who had previously been the subject of over 30 unsuccessful prosecutions and convictions; in 1913, when the Magistrate in Rodrigues was finally given equal powers and jurisdiction to a District Magistrate in Mauritius; beginning in 1902 the imposition of tariff duties on Rodriguan commodities, especially tobacco; and, in 1904 and, again, in 1930, when the Magistrates successfully confronted a rebellious population with the armed backing of the Mauritian administration. These events all mark a newly active, even aggressive, presence in Rodrigues by the Mauritian colonial authorities.

Integral to Mauritius' closer observation of and participation in affairs in Rodrigues was the establishment of a trans-oceanic cable station there in 1901. The Eastern Extension - Australasia and China Telegraph Company, Ltd. (or E.T.C.) ran an undersea cable from Australia and China through the Cocos-Keeling Islands and Rodrigues on to Mauritius. The cable station, at Mont Crevecœur, just between Port Mathurin and Anse aux Anglais, was manned by a half dozen Europeans with their wives and children. The wage labour used in the construction of the E.T.C. buildings, as well as the better-than-standard wages paid to the various cooks and servants of the European families and the amount of cash spent locally by the E.T.C. employees, represented a relatively large influx of money into the local economy. Most importantly, however, was that the cable provided immediate communication with Mauritius. This communication

link was crucial in Rouillard's and Brouard's confrontations, as was also the presence of the E.T.C. cablemen who backed them on site.

By the turn of the century, the Magistrate and policemen in Rodrigues were also complemented by an official clerk and a government doctor. Although there were already two government primary schools on the island, since 1866 in Port Mathurin and since 1882 in Ste. Gabriel, an inspector of schools was sent to Rodrigues for the first time in 1913 (North-Coombes 1971:237). It was only then that the Rodriguan curriculum was standardized to the Mauritian one, and that provision was made for teachers to have fixed salaries, with teachers coming from Mauritius receiving an additional 15% local allowance. In 1903, the first Anglican chapel, St. Barnabas Church, was designed by an E.T.C. cableman, and consecrated by the first resident Anglican priest. Since 1888 there had been two resident Catholic priests, and by 1920 the first group of teaching nuns had arrived. A small mosque was erected in Port Mathurin in 1912 for the benefit of the few Muslims among the Asian traders, the bulk of whom were Chinese and became Anglican. Thus by the 1920s, by Rodriguan standards, there was a relatively sizable resident foreign population.

No doubt prompted by the previously unruly islanders, embarrassingly drawing attention to a neglected dependency, together with the presence of the newly arrived foreigners, the Mauritian authorities embarked on various improvement schemes for the dependency. Thus Stockdale and Koenig's visits in 1914 and their reports suggesting measures for the improvement of livestock, alternative cash crops, reforestation, and experimental agricultural stations. An active interest in Rodrigues, on the part of various government ministries, was encouraged by Sir Henry Hesketh Bell, Governor of Mauritius from 1916 to 1923. Under his leadership, and facilitated by the wave of prosperity during and after World War I, the first governmental agricultural station, incorporating forestry work, was established in 1922. Bell's request for a financial statement concerning Rodrigues shows that in 1915-1916 the dependency was no drain on Mauritian resources, despite the yearly losses in uncollected land rents, fishing fines and livestock taxes. That year's revenue, including customs duty on items re-exported from Mauritius to Rodrigues, excise duty on rum, and stamps, amounted to Rs. 68,122; at the same time, expenditures, including a subsidy to the regular freighter and government employees' salaries, totalled Rs. 57,031, leaving Rodrigues in the black in the amount of Rs. 11,090 (in North-Coombes 1971:197).

The dozen or so civil servants who were posted to Rodrigues during this era mark the beginning of a permanent place in Rodriguan society for Mauritian civil servants. Although data for the intervening years is unavailable, by 1978 there were around 250

Mauritian civil servants residing in Rodrigues. These represented the full gamut of government interests on the island, from agricultural and livestock agents, to labour supervisors and port officials, to middle and upper level administrators and medical workers and police. By the 1960s, the majority of these government workers were Indo-Mauritian, following from the general predominance of Indo-Mauritians in Mauritian government bureaucracy, especially at the lower and middle levels. But the largest increases in government employment were to come for Rodriguans themselves.

In 1958, the Mauritian government employed 163 people on Rodrigues, a mixture of Mauritian and Rodriguan. By 1971, this figure was 820, with the largest increases for Rodriguans in Agriculture, Works & Surveys, Forestry and Health Services. In 1972, capital improvements expenditures were considerably augmented by a development project for Rodrigues. This project involved a series of public works, including land-terracing, construction of boundary walls, roads and drains, and development of water resources. World Food Programme assistance alone, in the form of food commodities, amounted to US\$1.955 million (Street *et al.* 1978:49-50). By 1977, a considerable number of Rodriguans were employed by the government:

Government Employment in Rodrigues, 1977

Emploi dans le secteur gouvernemental:

personnes payées par mois	= 1,831
casual	= 1,853
relief	= 886
Total	= 4,570

Emploi pour les principaux secteurs gouvernementaux:

Ministère de l'Agriculture	= 3,295
(Forêt)	= 231
Ministère des Travaux	= 799
(Le Port)	= 63
Education	= 174
Misc	= 9
Total	= 4,571

(Economie et Productivité 1977:Annexe V)

These figures should be compared to the total population in Rodrigues in 1976: 27,192, and, further, to the number of men between the ages of 18 and 60: 5,123. Thus 89% of adult Rodriguan men were employed by the Mauritian government in 1977.

The ostensible reasons for this extraordinary employment program, which continued beyond WFP assistance and was still in place up to the early 1980s, were increasing population pressure, land degradation, emergency measures in response to two hurricanes in 1968 and one in 1970, and a prolonged drought in the mid to late '70s.

The same sorts of reasons were cited in 1948 as justification for urgent and immediate steps to alleviate the situation then, when the population numbered about 13,000:

The report confirms and amplifies what has already been feared for some time that a serious disturbance is taking place in the general economic life of the island due primarily to:

- (i) The rapid increase of the population.
- (ii) The worsening agricultural conditions caused by:
 - (a) Primitive methods of cultivation and animal husbandry;
 - (b) Land degeneration and erosion;
 - (c) Unsatisfactory system of land tenure.

(Natural Resources Board 1948:1)

The report goes on to propose “important and radical” measures for correction of the situation, including emigration, land reclamation, reduction and gradual elimination of livestock, and the appointment of a staff, and workers, to direct and control these measures.

In fact, alarms in regard to land use and degradation, as well as the maladaptive practices of the population, had been raised as early as 1838 by C. Anderson, when the population was under 200. “From all these considerations I have arrived at the conclusion that Rodrigues has been occupied on a colony principle, that it is over peopled, and that the employment of its population is misapplied.” Serious deforestation and erosion had been noticed in 1862 by the magistrate, Jenner, and by Napier-Broome during his visit in 1881, when he encouraged O’Halloran’s attempts to check the indiscriminate cutting of trees attendant to preparing land for cultivation. In 1914, Koenig described many areas of the island bare of tree cover and considered reforestation a question of urgent necessity. The deforestation of land and consequent erosion was viewed as due to Rodriguan methods of slash-and-burn/shifting cultivation on leased lands.

From the point of view of governmental authorities, the intractability of the Rodriguans in regard to their cultivation methods, coupled with their “lazy and improvident” nature, caused them to face famine conditions periodically. While in the long term, for the authorities, these factors resulted in Rodriguans being unprepared for the periodic emergencies, all recognized that the most common immediate causes of famine situations were the occurrences of late-in-the-season cyclones, followed by droughts, resulting in total or serious losses of crops. The cyclone season follows the dry period of the year, beginning around November and lasting until May. This is also the rainy season and, hence, planting season. A cyclone occurring any time after January can seriously damage newly emerged seedlings, either by wind or salt spray. Although the island’s vegetation revives quickly after a cyclone, sometimes even reappearing more vigorous, this recovery is weakened, if not eliminated, if a drought quickly follows.

Because of the Rodriguans' ostensible refusal to provision themselves beforehand for such periodic crop failures by 1890 it had "become customary for the magistrates to order a supply of rice from Mauritius, to be held in reserve for such emergencies" (North-Coombes 1971:134).

From before 1873, small amounts of rice had been sent to Rodrigues, as reserves in the care of the Magistrates. In the event of emergencies, such reserves were distributed by purchase, or as payment in return for roadwork on the part of the poorer inhabitants unable to pay cash. Following one particularly severe cyclone in 1886, liberal credit terms had also been allowed. But the system of payment for emergency rice supplies by roadwork became a regular and customary means to execute public works projects in the 20th century. In 1903, Rouillard paid the road gang 30 cents in cash and 2 kilos of rice per day, and the "cathedral" at Ste. Gabriel was completed in 1939 through a food-for-work labour force during a drought. By the 1950s, relief and casual labour, by this time paid in cash, was regularly employed for various government projects in agriculture or road construction. In 1965, 1,200 hectares of agricultural land had been improved by terracing and reforestation, and 600 ha were being completed, through "relief work," available not only in conditions of drought or cyclone rehabilitation, but also for those "without resources" (Dupon 1967:219). At the end of 1965 and the beginning of 1966, 1200 rural families were still relying on this relief work (*Ibid.*:222).

Although the 4,571 individuals employed by the government in 1976 appears extraordinary and unprecedented in Rodriguan history, it was, however, only unusual in terms of degree, not kind.

The official reasons for government relief labour have always had primarily to do with assisting the poorer sections of the population during times of economic stress, at least prior to the sudden escalation in 1976, and secondarily, with rehabilitating agricultural and forested land for the long term productivity of the island. But, from the perspective of Rodriguans themselves, there is also reason to suspect that their appeal and recourse to relief work was not entirely due to dire necessity.

In late 1878, according to the Magistrate, Desmarais, the Montagnards were in a "terrible position," with no food left and forced to eat wild fruits, roots, cabbage palms and the leaves of the *colocasia* (taro family), and the government supply of rice had run out. In early 1879, Desmarais forced the shopkeepers to give up one-fifth of their rice stock to alleviate the situation (North-Coombes 1971:105). If only one-fifth of the rice was sufficient to meet the needs of the moment, it suggests that the situation was probably less than desperate. Moreover, the government terms for rice purchase must

have been much better than those offered by the shopkeepers, else why didn't the Montagnards simply buy, albeit on credit, directly from the shops? The same point is brought out clearly in a later similar situation. When crops had been lost to a drought following the cyclone in January 1896, "the most violent according to the oldest inhabitants," the acting Magistrate, Robert, refused to honor requests for emergency rice on the grounds the shops had a sufficient supply.

Most of the applicants then bought for cash, giving the magistrate the proof that he did well to refuse. Robert's firm attitude contrasts with a general tendency to yield too easily to demands of this kind in times of emergency, to the eventual detriment of developing in the population the will to face up to its difficulties without leaning too heavily on government assistance.

(North-Coombes 1971:144)

After the cyclone in 1903, Rouillard only offered rice for purchase, or for road work, at the equivalent in rice of a daily wage of 90 cents, considerably less than the going wage given by the E.T.C. "Only a few people came forward, which showed that for the time being food supplies were adequate. However, these measures displeased the inhabitants, who had expected to get aid a little more easily" (North-Coombes 1971:161).

The same Natural Resources Board report (1948) that addressed the "serious disturbance" in the general economic life of the island, and proposed "important and radical proposals for checking this deterioration," also remarked:

In view of what has been said about the scarcity of land and the condition to which much of it has been reduced, one would expect to find evidence of wide-spread malnutrition, if not actual starvation. We were in fact surprised at the robust and relatively well-fed appearance of the people and the condition of their livestock also considerably better than we had expected.

(*Ibid.*:6)

And, just prior to the wholesale increase in government employment in 1976, the value of exports from Rodrigues to Mauritius doubled in value in four years, from 1972 to 1975 (Economie et Productivité 1977:Annexe VII, p.9).

In addition, Rodrigues' exceptional fertility rates and low mortality rates, dating from the 1850s, indicate a high level of health up to the modern period. The only major diseases have been dysentery and an epidemic of influenza; the former due to poor water resources and the latter brought by visiting ships. There is no indication in any of the records that at any time, malnutrition had any effect on the population whatsoever.

Just a *prima facie* consideration of these attendant facts suggests interpretations that go beyond simple acceptance of a magistrate's perception of calamity. Which is not to deny that severe damage resulted from cyclones and droughts, and that at various times

certain nutritional resources were much strained. However, regarding the instances cited earlier, it is obvious that, for Rodriguans, government assistance, beyond providing an undeniable safety net, is also traditionally viewed as an economic resource, one of many, and particularly useful during adverse agricultural conditions. And, like any resource, it must be exploited by appropriate and efficient means in order to maintain its long-term viability.

Rodriguans' successful applications for emergency rice during these periods, apparently exaggerating the extent of their destitution, suggests again the invisibility of certain aspects of their economic system. From the point of view of a government official, the requests for emergency rice only proved a standing assumption that Rodriguans were lazy and improvident. But, taking the fuller context suggested by these additional facts, the appeals for emergency assistance were not in fact Rodriguans' last resort. Reading again "between the lines," the pretence of last resort was one which shielded the existence of other economic resources or relationships from official view.

The invisibility of the total economic system, an economic system which apparently treated government assistance as just another resource, flowing from something separate than the immediate circumstances of Rodriguan life, is perhaps inevitable when the government consists of alien individuals and its directives arise from a seat of power well-removed from their applications. Even the course of administrative history on the island, with its consistent element of Rodriguan resistance — whether by petitions and complaints, or by evasion of taxes and rents, deliberate flouting of regulations, and implicit subterfuge — must suppose that both Creoles and Montagnards regarded government as an entity apart. An entity that could be manipulated in certain cases, and in others simply ignored, or actively resisted, but one that was always an institution distinct and separate from Rodriguan life.

This essential estrangement of government from Rodriguans was fundamentally transformed following Mauritian independence from Great Britain in 1968. By the fact of universal suffrage and control of two seats in the Mauritian legislative assembly, Rodriguans, for the first time, had the potential to participate in their own governance. Where previously government was a separate and foreign institution, unifying Rodriguans by its imposed presence, it now assumed an integral role within the local social arena. Not surprisingly, the introduction of the possibility of local political power affected the play of social organization, in its tacit alliances and hostilities, in its shared and contested values and symbols, in its very self-conceptions. The early years of this modicum of political power on Rodrigues reveal the operation of the by now familiar key social features arising from the legacy of Rodriguan history.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL RELATIONS

From its first settlement, Rodrigues had been administered as a dependency of the colony of Mauritius, under the French until 1812, afterwards under the British. British colonial authorities in Mauritius had appointed the resident magistrates to the island from the 1850s, and through them had ruled Rodrigues by a series of externally imposed instructions, decrees, regulations and directives.

During this same time, by 1885, Mauritius itself was allowed a Council of Government with a minority of elected seats, within the purview of colonial authority. This 1885 franchise was based on narrow property and income qualifications, which effectively limited power to the elite, which included originally British and French residents, as well as certain monied “people of colour.” By 1948 the franchise was extended to those who met basic literacy requirements. It was only with the 1959 election that Mauritians were granted universal suffrage (Simmons 1982).

The constitutional reforms and extension of the voting franchise occurring in Mauritius throughout this time entirely omitted Rodrigues. It was only in 1966, during negotiations on constitutional reform as a prelude to independence from Britain that mention was made of “provision . . . for the representation of Rodrigues” (North-Coombes 1971:290). This is the first published mention of the dependency in the course of all the official constitutional proceedings to that date (*loc.cit.*). The constitutional reform commission sent one of its members, Professor Colin Leys, to visit Rodrigues, and with his suggestion recommended that Rodrigues be given two elected seats in the legislative assembly.

With the granting of these two seats to Rodrigues, the dependency was suddenly embroiled in the Mauritian political scene. During the first elections ever on Rodrigues in 1967, the majority Labour Party, dominated by Indo-Mauritians, correctly assumed the lack of an ethnic constituency in Rodrigues and so left the field open to Gaëtan Duval.

Gaëtan Duval, since his entry into Mauritian politics in 1956, had always been associated with the Franco-Mauritians and elite Mauritian Creoles. His right-of-center party, Parti Mauricien Social Democrat (PMSD), had, by the 1963 election, appealed for support on the basis of ethnicity, to counter the majority of Indo-Mauritians’ allegiance to the Labour Party (Simmons 1982). The PMSD was the banner party for the old elite, the white Franco-Mauritians and the wealthy Creoles, but also relied on the middle and lower class Mauritian Creoles traditionally allied with the elite within the Mauritian context.

One of the most important issues in the 1967 election was the question of the future relationship between Mauritius and Great Britain. Duval's, and the PMSD's, position reaffirmed a continuation of Mauritian dependency status with Britain, in opposition to the Labour Party's desire for independence. The PMSD argued its position by emphasizing the economic benefits that would accrue to continued dependency status. However, the Labour Party won that election, and with it, independence from Britain in 1968.

The Mauritian vote in the 1967 election was one of the first that emphatically aligned itself along ethnic lines (Simmons 1982). However, in Rodrigues, the rallying point was not ethnicity, but rather the dependency's relationship to Mauritius. Ninety-seven percent of the Rodriguan vote went to Duval's men (a Mauritian, Ollivrey, and a Rodriguan, Roussetty). Unlike the meaning of a PMSD vote in Mauritius — implying not only ethnic identification but also support of continued dependence on Great Britain, in Rodrigues, PMSD support was understood as a vote against dependency status to Mauritius. In other words, Rodriguans, accepting the fact of their dependency on larger nations, felt their interests would be best served under Britain, not under Mauritius.²⁰

From the election in 1967 until well after the next one, in 1976, Rodrigues could only be called the fiefdom of Gaëtan Duval. The "King of the Creoles" dazzled with his flamboyant appearances and his impassioned cries for Rodriguan independence from Mauritius. He impressed the Rodriguans enormously with his claim of having brought the plight of the little, forgotten island to the attention of British Parliament itself. Duval saw himself as the heroic defender of the island, and the Rodriguans agreed.

For the 1967 and 1976 elections, Duval's frequent visits and his elaborate efforts to woo the Rodriguans and their two legislative seats might have seemed out of proportion given Rodrigues' relative insignificance to Mauritians — most of whom are not even aware of Rodrigues' existence. However, during this period, the PMSD and the Labour Party had formed a coalition government which had only a two seat majority over the left coalition parties. Thus Rodrigues' two seats became pivotal and the subject of fierce competition.²¹

Implicit in Duval's 1967 calls for Rodriguans to remain with Great Britain, was an appeal to a sense of unity, a commonality, with the Creoles of Mauritius. This note of ethnic-cultural solidarity was expressed vis-à-vis the Indo-Mauritian majority who not only numerically dominated Mauritian society, but also dominated most of the government bureaucracy at the middle and lower levels. Recall, Rodriguans were quite familiar with Indo-Mauritians in this latter capacity. The Indo-Mauritian bureaucrats who administered Rodrigues received an extra 25% of their salary for service in Rodrigues,

and in addition were given modern housing with running water and electricity, paid passages to and from Mauritius — a standard of living that not only surpassed that of the great majority of Rodriguans, but also surpassed their own standards of living at home in Mauritius. Their aloofness, insularity and personal use of government facilities and workers, branded them arrogant and earned them the general dislike of Rodriguans, Creole and Montagnard alike. Buttressing this antagonism and hostility, was the fact that the Indo-Mauritians were not Catholic, nor even Christian; for Rodriguans, they were *payen*, pagans.

Thus Duval's rhetoric reached fertile ground in Rodrigues, even beyond the point when Mauritian dependency to Britain was a dead letter, where his calls for unity among Creoles were simply the reverse of the coin of anti-Indo-Mauritian feeling. But this sense of Rodriguan identity, merged with Mauritian Creole identity, was not merely negatively defined vis-à-vis the Indo-Mauritians. The sense of Creole identity expressed by Duval resonated with that claimed by Rodriguan Creoles. The westernized, sophisticated, educated standards by which Rodriguan Creoles defined themselves, were directly tied to the life-styles of the Franco-Mauritians and elite Mauritian Creoles, of which Duval was a particularly striking example. With his Caucasian features and dark complexion, Duval embodied all those emblematic qualities: in his eloquence and wit, in his stylish even if often flamboyant style of dress, in his British legal training, in his cars, motorcycles and horses. At one political rally, Duval's flamboyance took the form of arriving though the crowd riding a white stallion bareback, dressed all in white; at another rally, he drove up on a large motorcycle dressed in black leather from head to toe. Yet at the same time he was a respected member of the bar, arguing in court — in English, wearing the black robes and wig, and all that that implies in regard to traditional colonial authority on a small island dependency — in defense of certain Rodriguan Creoles. He was handsome and well-dressed, always accompanied by a beautiful woman, wealthy, a patron of the arts. Duval, through his personal style and the social group he epitomized, capitalized on the very social features, albeit much exaggerated, with which the Rodriguan Creoles distinguished themselves from Montagnards.

Duval's striking persona, however, proved fruitless in material terms for the Rodriguan Creoles. The lucrative upper echelon government jobs on the island remained in the hands of Indo-Mauritians and even Mauritian Creoles. The aspirations of the Rodriguan Creoles, particularly those with school certificates in hand, had to be satisfied abroad, as they failed to make significant inroads into the local white collar bureaucracy.

The Montagnards, once ardent supporters of Duval, also became disillusioned, although in a different way. Initial Montagnard support was predicated on Duval as a

patron, one that would repay their support through favors and rewards. Under Duval's men, the casual and relief government labour, periodically activated for the benefit of the poorer people during periods of cyclone rehabilitation and drought, became a *de facto* permanent institution, employing the 89% of adult men in Rodrigues by 1976. For the first time, great numbers of Rodriguan men had a steady supply of cash and were thus in a position to buy the clothes, spirits, tinned foods, house cement, radios, motorcycles that were the hallmarks of modern life, and, not incidentally, a Creole style of living. But therein were also the seeds of dissatisfaction: the increased communication with Mauritius, via the radio, newspapers, more frequent visits, and so on, also made the Montagnards aware of the material disparity between themselves and Mauritians. They did not have electricity, piped water, paved roads, not to mention cinemas and disco clubs, as it seemed every Mauritian did. These things became the stuff of development; in their own terms, to be modern, "developed," was to have access to these public amenities.

Here, ironically, Duval's strategy for gaining Rodriguan allegiance, by taking on the roles of heroic defender and patron, betrayed him in the end. Though Duval and his faction could not be held responsible for the lack of public amenities, nor the entrenched power of the Indo-Mauritian government bureaucracy, in the game of personality politics born from his strategy, he was accorded this blame. But, in the day to day, many of these dissatisfactions on the part of both Creoles and Montagnards were partly stifled by individual patronage and favoritism, as well as occasional incidents of threat and intimidation carried out by members of Duval's entourage. Duval was still more preferable than any Indo-Mauritian.

No doubt, this uneasy, though quiescent, situation would have gone on indefinitely if not for the entrance of Serge Clair. Serge Clair was a Rodriguan Creole who had left the island in his teens and had been trained at a French seminary for the priesthood. As a priest he had spent time in France, Australia, and Mauritius. When Clair's repeated requests for a parish in Rodrigues were consistently turned down, he left the priesthood and returned to Rodrigues with political aspirations.

Three months before the 1976 elections, he organized the first indigenous Rodriguan political group, *L'Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais* (OPR). Despite Duval's vicious attacks in that election's campaign, accusing Clair of being a Communist, anti-Church, of having been defrocked for womanizing, and so on, Clair and the OPR, in only three months, managed to get 35% of the Rodriguan vote. Even after his defeat in the 1976 election, Clair's support grew, again despite Duval's threats and intimidations,

the activities of his thugs, and political rewards and vindictiveness meted out through government work.

At the beginning, Clair's support was among young Creoles, educated but not quite of the very elite, those very men who saw themselves being passed over in favor of Mauritians in the competition for scarce managerial or professional jobs. But the continued and widening base of his support beyond this relatively elite group was a response to his characterization of the situation on Rodrigues. The sense of unfairness and injustice at the hands of the Mauritians found an outlet in the words and pictures painted by Clair.

Clair depicted Rodrigues' relationship to the outside world as a colonial one: "*Nous avons subi le pouvoir colonisateur,*"²² as he said after his election (Weber 1982:10). A rejection of colonized status required emphasis on the autonomy and independence of Rodriguans: "*Nous faisons partie de l'état Mauricien sans nous fondre totalement dans sa personnalité*"²³ (*Ibid.*). The rejection of colonial status, a reaffirmation of Rodriguan identity, were the constant themes in his little newspaper, also a first on the island.

The Rodriguan identity he articulated was based on the commonalities among Creoles and Montagnards — their common language, religion, and race. Rodriguan creole is distinct from other Indian Ocean French creoles, but not so different that Mauritians, Seychellois, and Rodriguans cannot understand each other. Rather, what was at issue here is the recognition of creole as a language in and of itself, and not merely a bastardization of French. In other words, creole is the true voice of the people, whereas French is the language of the "*domineurs,*" the dominating ones. This was not a neutral statement at the time. In Mauritius, in the late 1970s, the issue of speaking creole instead of French in public discourse was politically explosive. It was a major element in the ideology espoused by the left parties in Mauritius, as well as that of the OPR. To speak and write creole in public forums was tantamount to a challenge of the highest cultural standards and traditional authority.²⁴

Catholicism is integral to the identity of both Creoles and Montagnards, and as a whole they regard themselves as particularly sincere and pious believers. Public lack of religion or piety is a serious and immoral deficiency, as religion itself is a powerful symbol of unity. And Clair's use of *race*, not *race*s, implicitly recognized, publicly, a mixture of black and white.

Clair added to language, religion and race other common cultural markers, such as dance and music. Here, Clair pointedly grouped the originally French provincial

songs and dancing, *chanson romanz*, together with the African/Malagasy derived *sega*. Not only did he thus meld together two disparate social symbols, he also declared their combined uniqueness relative to similar musical traditions on the other islands. He further distinguished Rodriguan culture *qua* culture by drawing attention to Rodriguan celebrations of the New Year, the extensive and formal cycle of visiting and festivities called *Fèr lané* or *Bonané*, which seem to have disappeared on the other islands.

Clair's concern in delineating a Rodriguan identity, with which he could counteract the Duval strategy, turned on stressing these cultural items. He organized a song-and-dance troupe which visited La Réunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles and sponsored local music festivals. In his newspaper, he published short notes on the history of the island in creole, as well as notes on the activities of the Catholic Church in Mauritius and Africa. At the same time he used his newspaper to point out concrete examples of favoritism and corruption among government administrators. He publicized promises unfulfilled by the Mauritian politicians; and he continuously cited biases against Rodriguans in everything from sporting events to high prices to lack of "development." Though he had Creole status, he lived in the interior, in a Montagnard parish, and attended all Montagnard social occasions as well as Creole ones. He could often be seen walking through the countryside, conversing with whomever came his way.

Clair could not be derided as another backward Rodriguan; like Duval, he had been educated abroad and was considered wise in the ways of the world. Although Clair could never aspire to the stylishness of Duval, he made up for it in the demeanor of an *homme sérieux* — a grave, thinking man. Despite his own Creole cultural features, he emphasized those cultural aspects self-proclaimed by the Montagnards. He raised Montagnard values of self-help, autonomy and independence to those of all Rodriguans, while narrowing his own cultural distance from Montagnards in his day-to-day living. By minimizing the gap between Montagnard and Creole, by signalling Rodriguan language, song, dance and history, he underlined Rodriguan distinctiveness from the *grands pays* as something positive, not something backward. Where Duval's strategy was built on recognition of an elite in Rodrigues and its unity with that of Mauritius, Clair's meant dissolving the elite into a unitary Rodriguan identity distinct from anything Mauritian.

Clair's skill and the power of an exclusively Rodriguan ideology is probably nowhere more evident than in his continued and increasing support despite his calls for an end to government wage labour. The importance of government employment was relevant beyond mere economic security — it was the concrete manifestation of the

outside world's concern and care for Rodriguans. It provided a general sense of security, but it also reaffirmed Rodriguan identity by linking Rodrigues to what was considered most valuable and best, the metropole. Government labour was the concrete sign that the outside world, albeit Mauritius, valued Rodrigues enough to take care of it. In the words of a respected Rodriguan school teacher, Ben Gontran:

*Tout ce qui nous est précieux nous vient de loin. Ceci cause une certaine nevrose, une peur sourde que ce cordon ombilical ne soit coupé et que les Rodriguais ne soient laissés à eux-mêmes. Cette nevrose est un facteur clé d'un certain jeu politique dont la victime n'est autre que la dignité du Rodriguais.*²⁵

(in Desveaux 1978)

Serge Clair, by explicitly calling attention to this dependence, these relations “entre colinasateur et colonizé” (1978, #41), mocked, and prodded, the Rodriguan, especially Montagnard, sense of autonomy. “Elle [la population Rodriguaise] veut sortir de cette mentalité de peuple assisté et décourager les ‘bons papas’ dans leur politique”²⁶ (1979, #87). Clair declared that working for the government was “une véritable nationalisation” (Weber *op.cit.*), in other words, an acceptance of Mauritian cultural and economic hegemony in which Rodrigues would be swallowed. But he never went so far as to suggest Rodrigues should be legally independent from Mauritius, that would have been totally severing the “cordon ombilical” — a radical extreme which Duval misapprehended as he continued to call for Rodriguan independence from Mauritius.

At the same time as denouncing the acceptance of paternalism and dependency on the Mauritian government, Clair did not eschew “development” (Clair et al, 1981) In tandem with a policy of decentralization, he urged greater education for the younger generation and the development of the infrastructure — roads, wells, electricity, marketing boards, and so on — so as to allow Rodriguans to pursue their traditional productive activities but with the aid of modern improvements. Each man then would be his own master, retaining control over his own life. Inherent in this perspective was the view that Rodrigues is very poor, and “compte parmi les territoires les plus pauvres du monde”²⁷ (Weber *op.cit.*), and that this poverty is due to a child-like dependency on Mauritius — a vicious circle in which the poverty of Rodriguans made them accept government aid which in turn kept them poor, and in a state of welfare. Mauritian paternalism, especially of the sort practiced by Duval, had enslaved Rodriguans in a system of wage labour and deprived them of the self-sufficiency and autonomy which came with the control of their own productive activities. Thus by a neat twist, Clair had

changed the Rodriguan view of government as a tool or a resource they could use to their own advantage, to one where government, via Mauritians, was the instrument of their own marginalization and “underdevelopment.”

This is an integral part of the ideology constructed by Clair: a new sense of the injustice imposed by Mauritians, one that not only compromised the values of autonomy and independence, but also impoverished Rodriguans. The fact that “*dans cette île . . . le niveau de vie est deux fois plus élevé qu’à Maurice*,”²⁸ as one Mauritian journalist drily remarked (Weber *op.cit.*), was entirely antithetical to the perception of Rodrigues’ relation to Mauritius as characterized by Clair.

The resonance of this newly articulated global Rodriguan identity was such that it entered into the realm of religion, a particularly potent facet of Rodriguan life, without Clair’s help or intention. In the early months of 1979, a Montagnard man claimed to have long conversations with various saints; his wife and children attested to the fact of his night-long one-sided conversations, during which he was impervious to anything else. This man, over a couple of months, acquired strange scarified crosses on his body — seven in all. He declared that these were the visible signs of his communication with various Saints. Partly to quell the holy reputation the man was beginning to acquire among Rodriguans, the Mauritian doctor asked him to spend a few days in the clinic under observation in order to ascertain his condition and the origins of the crosses. The man acquiesced, but while there was mocked and humiliated by the Mauritian male nurses. During the last night in the clinic, apparently under constant supervision, the man acquired a particularly large and deep wound, in the shape of a cross, in the small of his back. Neither the nature of the wound, nor the manner of its acquisition could be explained by the doctor. The man was sent home — but by now he had acquired the standing of a saint himself, a true Rodriguan saint. People came from all over the island to visit him on Sundays, to talk with him, to touch him. He constantly relayed the message the saints had given him: he would receive a ninth cross²⁹ on his body, which would bring on a particularly powerful cyclone, destroying the island. This could only be averted if the Mauritians left Rodrigues. Apparently, the saints themselves recognized the injustice suffered by Rodriguans at the hands of the Mauritians, and were willing to employ the forces of nature to emphasize the point.

The fact that a newly articulated sense of Rodriguan identity, one emphasizing the commonality and pride and independent spirit of Rodriguans, had superseded the old one based on Creole aspirations to metropolitan civility and gentility, was never fully grasped by Duval. One week before the 1982 election, his confidence in his success in Mauritius

shaken, but intact in regard to Rodrigues, Duval could state with complete conviction: “So we will lose, so we will lose, and we will go to the island of Rodrigues and declare it an independent nation. You think I am joking?” (Powers 1982). However, for the Rodriguans, it was a foregone conclusion that Serge Clair would win.

A FULL CIRCLE

My account of this story as observed ends here, but subsequent political events show that Clair's victory was neither monolithic nor permanent. Although Duval fades from this scene, the continuing shifting and redefining of the terms of a Rodriguan political relationship with Mauritius remain tied to the significance of Creole vs. Montagnard, of each of those to Rodriguan, throughout the 1980s, and no doubt into the 1990s.

Although the elections of 1967, 1976 and 1982 provided for the first time a public stage on which the meanings of Creole/Montagnard/Rodriguais could be played out, their essential social significance was not thereby transformed. Serge Clair's political genius, whether the result of genuine acuity, or of being born Rodriguan, lay in the recognition that these ostensible social divisions had to do with taking a **stance** toward particular issues or fellow members of society, and therefore could be manipulated through the manner in which he characterized the relationship between Rodrigues and Mauritius, between Rodriguans and Mauritians. He was able thus to evoke an appropriate, for him, political position on the part of the large majority of Rodriguans, regardless of their internal divisions. Duval's mistaken perceptions, undoubtedly based on Mauritian social configurations, led him to understand Creoleness as an atavistic, ethnic identification with a particular group. Not only did he not grasp the relational content of these social divisions, but he also failed to understand the inherent contrastive features of Creole, Montagnard and Rodriguais. This latter failure led him to misunderstand why Montagnards and Creoles would initially support him, and why, to the end, he always supposed a continuing identification with the Mauritian Creoles and his ultimate victory.

The history of Rodrigues has demonstrated the origins and continued existence of certain social features. Beginning with the earliest settlers and their slaves, through the later Mauritian settlers, and the consequent division of the society into Creole and Montagnard, there has been a continuity in the two groups as well as in their respective economic orientations. This continuity appears to transcend the fundamental alterations of society arising from population increase, new immigrants, environmental deterioration, massive wage labour or even a basic change in political relations with the

outside world. At first sight, this continuity in social division would seem to belay any assertion of the relational content or shifting nature of this division. Conventionally, this division would be understood as arising from the different origins of the two groups and the continued reproduction of their way of life and beliefs.

However, this understanding of the nature of the two groups submerges the crucial element of choice or stance in the constitution of the two groups, and cannot make sense of the fact that a Creole or Montagnard stance is always relational. One does not exist without the other, just as the sense of being Rodriguan only arises when contrasted to something outside of Rodrigues. It is precisely this aspect of the Creole/Montagnard division which animated Serge Clair's strategy: by describing the relationship between Rodrigues and Mauritius as that of colonizer to colonized, dominator to dominated, paternalistic and dependent, while at the same time calling forth those cultural traits uniquely Rodriguan, he evoked those values of autonomy, independence and integrity which in a strictly local context adhere to a Montagnard stance. Within the political discourse defined by Clair, Creole values compromised Rodriguan identity.

Duval's strategy employed the conventional understanding of the two groups, as defined by their supposed origins and an associated way of life. By this understanding, the Creoles' depiction of themselves as descended from transplanted Europeans, and continuing a tradition of "civilized" behaviour derived from the *grand pays*, and the Montagnards as ever striving to achieve these standards, should have made an identification with the Creoles of Mauritius inviolate and Duval a permanent standard bearer.

While the success of the one, and the failure of the other of these two political strategies illuminate the relational aspect of the nature of the Creole - Montagnard social division, these pertain to a mid-twentieth century phenomenon, specifically responsive to a third party. But the constitutive elements of this division date back to the early years of the island's settlement, where slaves, then freedmen, then Montagnards demonstrated and practiced an independence not just of thought but of actual social life, and where *gens de couleur*, Creoles, eager to dissociate themselves from slavery, embraced the opposite — what came to be their perceptions of a European and civilized way of life. Although the division of Rodriguan society into Creole and Montagnard came early and was completely visible to outside observers throughout the island's history, neither was the largely self-constructed nature of the divide lost to the same outsiders. While some attributed the division to different economic pursuits (Pères François and Guilmin), others saw difference only in relative shades of skin colour (Bertuchi), or family origins

(North-Coombes), and still others saw no difference at all except for a curious hostility (Dupon).

The vague, differentially delineated, features distinguishing one group from the other noted by these various outsiders throughout Rodriguan history begin to suggest that the contrastive features of each are not so concrete as would be implied by a conventional view. The conventional view, *i.e.* one employing an ethnic, regional or class identification of social group, submerges precisely that feature which is crucial in the contemporary ethnographic context: the relational aspect. Although one could dismiss these observations of outsiders as the casual, untutored musings of non-social scientists (with the exception of Dupon), their collective reports coupled with the currently observable social facts, seriously impugn the utility of an ethnic, regional or class analysis in this instance.

The features of this social divide apparent in the historical accounts and used to such effect in the political processes of the 1970s are all public, presented, and 'consumed' as the *faits accomplis* of a resolved social ideology. But, they are the mere tips of an iceberg, which itself lies silent and hidden, its bulk and its ultimate strength residing in the whole tenor of social and cultural organization that each particular stance implies for its adherents, regardless of the presence of an outsider. It is in these quotidian affairs that the essential significance of being Creole or Montagnard will be found.

III THE QUOTIDIAN

SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY

The island of Rodrigues has one primary, relatively urban center, Port Mathurin. Port Mathurin itself only consists of a dozen or so streets in a grid pattern, but these are lined with all the major retailers, wholesalers and government offices on the island. It is also the site of the Commissioner's Residence, the single Barclays Bank office, the only secondary school, one of the three Catholic Churches, and the only Anglican Church. A small hotel, several shops, a couple of restaurants and half a dozen taverns and a small weekly vegetable and meat market represent the extent of urban amenities. An extended dock and a warehouse provide the only port on the island for the periodic Mauritian ship and barges. It is a primary residential area for the Chinese and the one Indian family, most of whom live above their commercial establishments. A fringe of makeshift shacks and houses are the homes of recent migrants from the interior. Historically and currently, Port Mathurin is the center of governmental, political and commercial affairs.

However, Port Mathurin is only part of a wider, densely populated area. To the east, Port Mathurin melds with Baie aux Huitres, only an inlet and a narrow peninsula marking their separation. To the west, separated by a small river, lie Anse aux Anglais and beyond it, Caverne Proverte. Anse aux Anglais is the site of the hospital, the radio and telegraph station, the "tourist" hotel and the central Public Works Office. It is also where several government-owned housing units for government employees are located. Both of these eastern and western extensions of Port Mathurin are primarily residential areas. For both practical and social purposes, Port Mathurin and environs are treated as one area, the capital of Rodrigues.

Port Mathurin is connected to the rest of the island by a single paved road, which runs, for 13 kilometers, along the central mountainous ridge of the island, to the airport, in the extreme southeast of the island, Plaine Coraile. Along this road are the other two "provincial centers": Petit Gabriel and La Ferme.

Petit Gabriel only consists of a dozen or so clustered buildings strung out along the road, a tavern, a couple of shops. Set back from the road is a rural clinic, and just south lies Saint Gabriel, the largest Catholic Church on the island and its associated residences for several priests and nuns. The relative centrality of Petit Gabriel is due to the largest church, Saint Gabriel, and as a crossroads for several dirt roads that branch off here and lead to the far south and far eastern regions of the island.

La Ferme is largely a residential cluster just off the western section of the road. The third Catholic church is situated here, as well as a couple of government agricultural offices. La Ferme's importance, however, is primarily due to the surrounding area which is the most fertile and productive agricultural land on the island.

In addition to these three "centers," there are several clusters, which could be termed villages, along the coast: notably, Baie du Nord, Rivière Cocos, Port Sud Est, and, slightly inland, Roche Bon Dieu. None of these consist of more than one or two *boutik* (shops), a primary school, and a cluster of houses.

Apart from these, loosely-termed, towns and villages, Rodrigues is most aptly characterized as having a marked dispersal of settlement. The landscape is evenly dotted with little houses, with gardens, fields and wooded areas spread among them. Within this pattern of non-nucleated settlement there are socio-geographic divisions called *pawas* (lit: parishes).

Pawas are not, strictly speaking, the equivalent of the English term parish. The parish of Sacre Coeur de Marie encompasses Port Mathurin and its environs; the parish of La Ferme the surrounding area into the western reaches, and St. Gabriel the rest of the island. However, by the 1972 census, there are something like 140 named *pawas*. They range from the two largest, Baie aux Huitres with a population of 1,215 and Petit Gabriel with 1,290, to many isolated and minuscule ones, numbering from 4 to 20 people. Some *pawas* are larger in surface area, others more densely populated, but in most cases are delimited by various conspicuous topographical features. The larger *pawas* usually have a couple of *boutik*, functioning as public areas for social interaction, whether drinking, playing cards or dominos, visiting and gossiping, and perhaps a primary school. Each *pawas* is recognized as such by its members and neighboring *pawas*. Precise boundaries and membership are of little consequence as these socially ascribed spatial units carry no political or legal importance. *Pawas* are the equivalent of named rural neighborhoods in the absence of clearly visible nucleated settlements.

However, *pawas* do have social connotations. These primarily arise from the history of population settlement. Thus, dating from the first half of the 19th century, Baie aux Huitres is the quintessential Creole community, whereas Mont Lubin, Lataniers and Vainqueur are the original Montagnard communities. Toward the end of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, Anse aux Anglais, Caverne Proverte, Grande Baie, and especially La Ferme, have become Creole communities. St. Gabriel, Port Sud Est, Maréchal, Rivière Cocos, Brûlé and Roche Bon Dieu have become populated, Montagnard areas. The Creole areas thus occupy the northern coastline and

the area around La Ferme, and the Montagnard areas the remainder of the island. Due to these socio-historical connections, then, residence in a particular *pawas* can be a diacritic of Creole or Montagnard identity.

A MONTAGNARD COMMUNITY: MONTVUE¹

Montvue is situated on the coast with an extensive lagoon directly in front of it. It straddles a river that diminishes to a trickle in the dry season. The nucleus of Montvue consists of two *boutik*, one owned by a Creole family, one owned by a Chinese family but operated by one of its bachelor relatives. There is also a government primary school, a Department of Agriculture model garden plot and a simple building used for the selling and salting of fish. The immediate area around these buildings is flat and grassy, with several large shade trees, and extends down to a sandy beach.

Montvue is encircled by several tiers of hills, each higher than the next, eventually merging with the central mountainous ridge which runs the length of the island. A rocky, serpentine road runs along the coast, and branches off at Montvue, connecting with the main road into Port Mathurin. It is, at most, suitable for a motorcycle or a jeep. Except for the beach area, the land is very rocky and steep, the main vegetation coarse grass and intermittent vacoa, acacia, mango and coconut trees. Alongside the river is one continuous area of cultivated land, criss-crossed with small irrigation trenches and divided into small plots. Other terraced garden plots are visible here and there up the hillsides.

There are two sources of water. One is the river during the rainy season, although there is year-round water at its source, a good hour trek through narrow rocky ravines. The other source is the government-built water system, consisting of a network of surface pipes with intermittent public spigots. This water system is fed by a series of artesianal wells. There is no electricity, although both of the *boutik* have small generators, very rarely used. The only vehicular link with Port Mathurin and the rest of the island is the Chinese *boutikèr's* jeep. Only two individuals owned motorcycles, one the Creole *boutikèr*. In contrast, there were many *piwog* (pirogue or boat) beached or moored along the coastline.

Montvue's large Chinese *boutik* and the primary school make it central to many other *pawas* in each direction along the coast and well up into the hills. It's coastal location and accessible, rich fishing grounds drew both part-time fishermen and individual purchasers of fresh fish from the neighboring inland *pawas*. Despite

Montvue's centrality for its immediately neighboring *pawas*, it remained a backwater, an isolated and peripheral place relative to Port Mathurin and the central road. (Although Port Mathurin was only about 5 miles distant, as the crow flies, it was a three hour march by foot, and an hour by motorcycle or jeep.) Non-local visitors, whether in private or public capacity, were very rare and when they did appear were the subject of much discussion for many days.

The *pawas* of Montvue is listed in the 1972 census as having a population of around 500. On the ground, within the area specifically designated Montvue by its residents, this works out to 45 houses and an adult population of 95 to 110 individuals.

Households

Except for six houses clustered near the two *boutik* and the school, the rest of the houses are scattered along the foothills encircling the central part of Montvue and the irrigated garden plots along the river bed.

In Montvue, the majority of houses are wood-framed and covered with *tôle* [corrugated tin sheets]. They have peaked roofs with intricate interior rafters (specifically constructed to withstand hurricane winds) and several exterior shuttered doors, rather than windows, giving outside access to separate rooms. The smallest houses have at least two rooms, while the largest ones consist of three to four rooms with an attached *verang*, [covered porch]. The "best" houses, numbering four (two of which belong to the two *boutikèr*), are made of *siman* [concrete blocks], rather than *tôle*, and have imported prefab glass windows and flat roofs designed to catch rain water. These also have three to four rooms, but only two have *verang*.

In every house, one room is the designated formal "receiving" room. Invariably, it is furnished with a large table on which stand decorative pitchers of water, glasses and vases of artificial flowers. Usually, chairs line the walls, which are covered with brightly coloured pictures, either of saints or pages from Mauritian or European glossy magazines. In the better-off houses, one inevitably finds a glass-doored cabinet in which are displayed various decorative objects (e.g. vases, figurines, shells, mementos, dolls, glass-ware and so on). Souvenirs from Mauritius or other foreign lands are especially prominently placed. The other rooms of the house, always physically separate from the front room, are sleeping areas and contain various beds and clothing. There is no effort to decorate or otherwise embellish these areas.

Regardless of size or construction materials, each house has a distinct kitchen hut, separated from the house by a cleared, compacted dirt *lakour* or courtyard. The kitchen

hut is no more than a haphazard affair of thatch and leaves on pole frames. Within it is the hearth composed of rocks, and a motley collection of cooking utensils — pots, knives, spoons, various tin cups, bottles and jars. Dishes and flatware are kept in the main room of the house. Maize cobs, seeds and other food stuffs are stored in either the rafters of the house, in cleaned oil drums or in the higher branches of surrounding trees. Some houses have an oil drum for water.

Except for sleeping and actual cooking, all other household activities take place in the *lakour*: food preparation and dining, laundry, children's play, informal visiting. The *lakour* is the heart of the household.

The entire complex of house, kitchen, courtyard, also referred to as a unit as *lakour*, is encircled by some sort of "living" fence, various kinds of cacti, lime bushes, oleanders, perhaps a mango tree. Chickens and tethered pigs are also kept in the *lakour* and better-off households have an adjacent stone paddock for the nightly enclosure of livestock (sheep, goats or cattle).

Every house shelters, at minimum, one adult and one child. (The only exception is the Chinese *boutikèr*, who lives alone.) Virtually every house, however, contains one cohabiting couple and children. (In Montvue, only one house contained only one adult and one child.) This basic membership can be augmented by unmarried brothers or sisters of the cohabiting pair, or a widowed parent. There is, in fact, an explicitly stated injunction against allowing more than one cohabiting couple to reside in one house. Other membership in the household is not otherwise regulated.

While every household contains children, these children may not be the natural children of either the cohabiting couple or adult; they may be either adopted or fostered, *zenfan ramasse* (lit: gathered children) and they need not be actual kin to any of the adults resident.

Thus the basic co-resident members of any household, both ideally and practically, comprise an adult male, an adult female and at least one child of either sex. This arrangement reflects the traditional division of labour and the constellation of economic activities associated with any functioning household.

Rodriguan society is characterized by a relatively strict division of labour between the sexes. This sexual separation in the realm of economic activities is continuous throughout all social activities, corresponding to a loose division of social life into the public, male domain and the private, female domain. The division of labour is organized by aim, or objective, rather than the actual nature of the task. In general, all activities associated with the family and its care and sustenance fall to women, while activities

which involve interaction beyond the family or kinship network or require leaving "home" territory are men's responsibility.

Due to the nature of a woman's activities, her physical domain is largely restricted to her own *lakour*, gardens and immediate neighborhood. Excursions beyond this area are limited to attending church, family celebrations, visiting her own parents, or, in recent years, taking her children to the clinic which has become the only other female public place apart from the church. This limited mobility clearly also restricts a woman's social contacts to her family and her immediate neighbors. Even at church or at the clinic, a woman's social intercourse follows patterns already established by family and neighborhood relations.

While this limited social range can be seen as consequent to the nature of women's tasks and responsibilities, it is also buttressed by sanctions as to appropriate womanly behaviour. Thus it is unseemly for a girl or woman to be seen outside of her own *lakour* unaccompanied, even if it is a short trip to the *boutik*. Likewise, the presence of men, other than family members, even in the *lakour*, precipitates the retirement of women from the immediate scene. In the *lakour*, this may simply mean withdrawal to another room, or the other side of the courtyard. Especially in regard to older women, this physical withdrawal does not necessarily mean total lack of participation in the social occasion. Many a social encounter among men has been dominated by a woman seated just over the threshold of a door to an adjacent room, or just barely around the corner of a house.

A woman's economic activities revolve around food and children. Her responsibility extends from the cultivation of staple crops to the setting of a plate of boiled ground maize and lentils before a man, and just about everything in between.

The garden where maize, manioc, lentils and yams are cultivated is cared for by women. The garden may consist of several scattered plots, or a single one, and may or may not be contiguous to the *lakour* itself. Sowing, weeding, watering, harvesting are undertaken by women on a daily basis. But men do participate in the heavier tasks such as soil preparation and large scale sowing or when the harvest is especially bountiful. When a woman is unable to fulfill these chores because of illness, pregnancy or a newborn child, men do take them over. While the care of the garden is primarily a woman's task, it is considered a practical matter with no assignment of social or ritual sanctions should men participate.

The preparation and storage of the harvest, the daily preparation of meals, the purchase of essential food items (e.g. oil, sugar, tea, salt and so on) are similarly shared with men when a woman cannot meet them and when other women are not available.

Women are also in charge of the courtyard animals, chickens, guinea hens, ducks and pigs. After household requirements are met, any surplus, whether garden produce, courtyard animals or eggs, is allocated by the woman, even when her partner has participated in its cultivation. Usually surplus is sold locally, to neighbors or the *boutik* as a source of cash for the purchase of other household necessities.

In effect, then, women control the economic assets which are their prime responsibility. Decisions regarding gardens and courtyard animals, their production, consumption and allocation, and the surpluses so gained, are a woman's responsibility, despite occasional male participation.

In addition to purely productive tasks, the many daily chores necessary to the functioning of a household fall to women: laundry, ironing, sewing, fetching water, house and courtyard cleaning and so on. And, of course, primary care for young children is theirs. Except for fetching water and child care, however, men do not ever share these chores. In the event that a woman cannot meet these needs, another woman or girl substitutes.

Beyond the requirements of running a household, women do have the option of engaging in other economic activities. These provide sources of cash which augment the household budget. Primary among these is sewing for women outside the family if the woman is fortunate enough to own a sewing machine. The preparation of *vetiver* and its weaving into baskets and hats, the gathering of octopodes in the shallower reaches of the lagoon, taking in others' laundry, candy and cake making and, in the past, the gathering of acacia nuts for sale to the *boutikèr*, are all common and accepted means for women to increase their cash income. This income, furthermore, remains the woman's own, to do with as she sees fit.

Although children's labour is both crucial and integral to overall household economic organization, as attested to by the stated necessity of a child in every functioning household, it is only different in degree, not kind, from female or male labour.

Children of both sexes, up to the age of ten or so, are responsible for many of the tasks that, strictly speaking, fall within the purview of women. Most common among these are fetching water, care of infants and toddlers, monitoring courtyard animals, garden weeding and "guarding" the house when no one is home. This last task follows

from the tacit rule that the *lakour* must never be left empty. The integrity of these children's responsibilities into household organization can be seen when children are kept from school in order to fulfill them, this despite the avowed importance of education. In fact, in some families, the children must regularly take turns attending school, much to the teachers' dismay, so that their chores are carried out.

As children approach the age of twelve, their tasks gradually separate into male and female spheres. Girls increasingly take on laundry, cleaning, food preparation and garden work. Boys begin to focus on activities beyond the *lakour* itself. Boys become messengers, carrying objects or messages to their fathers or others, or running to the *boutik* for small purchases. Most importantly they begin to take on primary responsibility for livestock — sheep, goats and cattle. Unlike the courtyard animals, these must be taken to forage or pasture each day and returned each evening to the *lakour* or its paddock. Depending on the *pawas* resources, or the season, these daily forays may just as well be close to home as quite distant. In the role of messenger or livestock *gardyen*, boys here begin their contacts with a social world beyond the *lakour* and family, which eventually, as adult men, will come to encompass the entire island. As a boy reaches his late teens, or as a younger brother begins to take on livestock duties, he may begin to work in tandem with his father or may apprentice himself to an artisan. In short, where he can, he will take on some sort of remunerative activity.

Needless to say, most children's schooling has gradually ceased by the time they are thirteen or fourteen, or even earlier. A family's economic circumstances and the number of children are crucial factors allowing a child to attend school beyond the first three or four years. Superior ability in one particular child may be recognized and he or she may be exempted from many household chores in order to continue to attend school; but this is invariably dependent on whether the family has enough children to take up the slack, or enough resources to not miss the contribution of one child. Even if a family is able to exempt a child from household duties, it still may not be able to support the child in school. School requires not only the purchase of books and school supplies, but also a uniform and shoes. Just these items, by themselves, may not be affordable.

Where women's activities are centered on the *lakour* and gardens, men's economic activities take place away from the *lakour*. These fall into five categories, none of which are mutually exclusive: cash-cropping, fishing, livestock, artisanal specialization and wage employment. The common denominator of all these categories is that they provide the primary source of cash for any household.

Land that is cash-cropped is controlled by individual men, whether it is held by title deed or simply leased. Within the context of the household, and wider kinship relations, this land is separate and distinct from the land cultivated by women for the household's daily needs. The fact that it is controlled by one man and that it is specifically geared to the cultivation of crops for sale further underscores its distinction from what can be called the subsistence garden in the care of women. Needless to say, the amount of land cultivated in this way and the choice of crops are variable throughout the island. In Montvue, these men's gardens are concentrated in the immediate area of the river, where water for irrigation can be easily channelled. Traditionally and currently, the primary cash crops in Montvue are garlic and onions. Other areas of the island concentrate on crops such as cotton and tobacco. Wherever cash cropping is possible, these crops are sold for export to Mauritius. Except for edible crops occasionally sold in the tiny market in Port Mathurin, whose clientele is primarily urban, the cash crops do not enter any island-internal circuits of exchange. Since the early 1970s, most cash crops are sold through the government-sponsored Marketing Board, which sets prices and export amounts, in bulk, for the island's key agricultural produce, garlic, onions and limes.

Although a man's garden is controlled by himself, he can and does rely on others during labour-intensive periods of cultivation — sowing, harvesting, bulking. In Montvue, because these garden plots are relatively small, between $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{16}$ ha, this extra labour most often is provided by a man's family. In other areas, like La Ferme, where holdings can be relatively extensive (up to, at most, 12 ha), labour is often hired on a day basis. In either case, the proceeds from the sale of the crops belong exclusively to the man who holds the land.

In Montvue, because the garlic and onion crop is dependent on the river and hence the rainy season, cash cropping is not a year-round activity. However, for those who have access to these lands, cash-cropping is their primary occupation during that season.

Because Montvue is on the coast, fishing here assumes greater economic importance than in communities further inland. Fishing can be either a part-time or a full-time activity, depending on a man's alternate economic pursuits. There are no large seine nets nor ocean-going cooperative fishing boats in Montvue; all fishing in the area is done by either *kasir* (fish traps), lines or spears from small boats, *piwog*. Because this area of the lagoon is particularly rich in octopodes, the primary focus is on octopus and squid, always for export. The whole shoreline is dotted with drying racks hung with hundreds

of octopodes. While the gathering of octopus and fishing for household consumption is a year-round activity, signing on with the big seine nets (whose owners live elsewhere) is limited to the fishing season. At least a dozen men from Montvue sign up each year. Here also, as with cash-cropping, cash proceeds stay with the man who has earned them. Among the full-time fishermen, virtually all own their own *piwog* as well as their gear. Some part-time fishermen own their own *piwog*, but most often they use *piwog* belonging to others, capitalizing on ties of kinship or friendship.

Sheep, goats and cattle are owned by a large majority of the men in Montvue. However, only three own more than a couple of head of cattle. Most Montvue men own only small herds of sheep or goats (5-12 head), with young boys primarily responsible for them. But when animals are sold, either for export to Mauritius or for the weekly meat market, cash proceeds belong to the adult men, not the boys. In other *pawas*, a man who owns more than a couple head of cattle usually entrusts them to the care of a paid *gardyen* in the cattlewalk area.

Artisanal work is varied in Montvue and is not a full-time occupation. These consist of boat-building, *kasir* weaving, carpentry, masonry, and butchering and sausage making. In nearby *pawas* are to be found tailors, [fishing] net weavers, herbalists and traditional healers, and motorcycle mechanics.² Except for tailors and mechanics, neither are any of these full-time occupations.

Wage employment in Montvue generally falls into two kinds, one for the government, usually in the capacity of manual labourers, and second, as *journalyèr*, day workers for private parties. *Journalyèr* work in Montvue is largely limited to occasional jobs for either of the two *boutikèr*, but in other *pawas*, *journalyèr* work ranges from agricultural day labour, to house building, to portage.

In Montvue, virtually all men between the ages of 25 and 50 are full-time government workers. Most of these men are employed as manual labourers on the year-round maintenance of the dirt roads in the area; others work on the government agricultural model plot and tree planting. Most of the men over 50 years old are full-time fishermen, while the men under 25 have a variety of jobs. One is an apprentice to a tailor in a neighboring *pawas*, one is an orderly at the clinic in Petite Gabriel, one is a janitor at the school, and several are full-time fishermen.

The pattern for male labour in Montvue, and for Montagnards in general, evidences a focus on one economic activity which provides the primary source of cash, and secondary, intermittent concentration on one or more additional activities. These secondary activities may provide other sources of cash or may only provide in-kind

products for household consumption. Thus, most men in Montvue have full-time wage employment with the government, but they also fish, cultivate cash crops, raise livestock or specialize in particular skills in varying degrees. Similarly, full-time fishermen, or the apprenticed tailor, also engage in other activities in addition to their primary occupation.

The fact that a properly functioning household includes an adult man and an adult woman together with at least one child emphasizes the understanding that a household is the site of the conjunction of the two spheres of economic activity, one male and one female, and the proper place for children to be gradually integrated into the one or the other. Whereas both male and female economic activities are characterized by diversity in terms of actual tasks, their respective aims are complementary. Female economic activity is geared to the ongoing daily operations of life, including any kind of production that is subsistence oriented. Thus a woman is concerned not just with the daily food preparation, child care, and other strictly domestic chores, but also is charged with the cultivation of crops that are meant for immediate consumption within the household, *viz.* maize, beans, yams, various greens, as well as small *lakour*-bound livestock. Men's activities, on the other hand, despite their diversity, are all geared to the production of items that are primarily destined for exchange. These activities are focussed on earning cash. Although women's surplus may be sold for cash at the local boutique, and a portion of men's production may in fact be consumed at home (like fish, small quantities of garlic or onions, and, on certain occasions, meat), this does not alter the fundamental conception of the two respective aims: female orientation to subsistence, male orientation to production for exchange.

Thus the household, one house with an associated *lakour*, can be seen as the most elemental physical and social unit, both by observation and by the declarations of its members. However, further dimensions to the household unit can begin to be seen in the actual configuration of houses in the landscape. Within the general pattern of non-nucleated settlement, one can, in fact, discern clusters of houses. In Montvue, of the 45 houses there situated, 39 fall into 12 loose clusters. These 12 clusters range from only two houses to the largest, five houses. Certain clusters are oriented to only one courtyard, whereas others have individual courtyards but with one predominant in terms of frequency of use.

The *lakour* as a whole is emphatically a private, familial domain. Not only is someone present at all times, "guarding" it, but any non-member must call out and request permission to enter, which will not necessarily be forthcoming. Where the *lakour* is attached to only one house, only those resident in the house are members.

However, when several houses form a cluster, all residents have equal standing in the collective *lakour*. In other words, the cluster is treated as a single unit by all the members of the associated households.

Placing these clusters into the context of the division of labour, one further feature can be noted. Although men's activities remain individually oriented, certain women's activities are collectivized within the cluster. Most notably, cooperative women's activities are those associated with the staple, subsistence, garden. Also child care and tending to the *lakour* animals is shared, although individual ownership of the animals is not thereby attenuated. In addition, and in contrast to a lone household, children are actively discouraged from interaction with non-members. They are expected to remain within the *lakour*, when not performing chores, and only play with the other members' children.

As one would expect, the fruits of the subsistence garden, cultivated collectively by the women, are shared among the constituent households for their respective consumption. However, all the activities concerned with the actual daily food preparation, as well as housekeeping, fetching water, laundry or individual purchases at the boutique, remain confined to the individual household. Thus, where spatial co-residence and subsistence gardening (and child care and livestock monitoring) are shared among the cluster's women and children, all other activities associated with the household remain within the individual purview of each household.

Men's daily economic activities are not directly affected by their individual household's membership in such a cluster. There are times, however, when men come together to perform a particular task, and these can be regarded as collective, cooperative ventures. Most of these collective tasks have to do with important ritual or celebratory occasions, *e.g.* marriages, funerals, and the *fèr lanne* festivities. But they also encompass house-building, most importantly, as well as occasional intensive land-clearing and preparation.

Implicit within the functioning of the household and the division of labour are three kinds of landed property: the residential site itself, the subsistence garden (whether a single site or several small plots), and, where it obtains, a man's cash-crop garden plot. In Montvue, virtually all the land is leased. In other *pawas* the distinction of a titled piece of property is frequently noted, but there and in Montvue, the distinction between leased and titled has no currency in the day-by-day economic activities of either a lone household or a cluster of households.

Following from the daily activities of members, there is no separation, by household, of either the residential site or the subsistence garden. Thus no individual, or individual household, would or could claim as their sole property the residential site or the subsistence garden site. In addition, any perennials grown on either of these pieces of land, usually trees or bushes such as limes, mango, coconut, palms, and so on, are not, and cannot, be individually claimed. All members of the *lakour* are free to take from these.

However, the cash-crop garden and the actual physical house are viewed and acted upon as the private property of the individual man, distinct from the residential and subsistence garden site. Likewise, all movable property, from livestock, house and personal furnishings, to a *kasir* or *piwog*, belong to individuals.

The Domestic Group

The people in Montvue, and Montagnards in general, say that it is best, and that they prefer, to live as far apart from each other as possible. In this way, they say, gossip, arguments and squabbles are minimized and privacy is most easily respected. But, acknowledging the limited spatial extent of the island and the necessity of neighbors, they point out that the best neighbors are those *en fanmi*, literally, in the same family.

In fact, daily life in Montvue, outside one's *lakour*, is regularly punctuated by public squabbles. The most common have to do with fetching water at the water spigot, where taking too much time, or leaving the water running, or the amount of mud, can all be the catalysts for loud arguments among women. Common also are arguments about someone's animals getting into the *lakour* of another, especially if some damage has been done. Periodic eruptions occur in response to gossip, and can involve yelling and cat-calling from *lakour* to *lakour*, as well as squabbles at the boutique or on the public paths. It should be noted, in Montvue especially, that although the *lakour* are strictly private in terms of access, most activities that occur within them are quite visible because of the lack of significant tree cover or other visual barriers. While most of these daily squabbles are among women, men also argue and fight, albeit only rarely anywhere other than drinking places, *i.e.* the local boutique, a public dance, or a tavern in Port Mathurin.

When the identity of household members is considered, it is in fact families that reside there, whether in the single households or the clusters. Except for the house of the Chinese *boutikèr* and a house where a widow lived, all the houses in Montvue were occupied by a cohabiting couple. Among these, only three had other adults living with them, in these cases the man's widower father.

The extent and nature of relationships within a Montvue household and a collective *lakour* is evident when membership in each is considered, as can be seen from the listing of houses and members [cf. Map xx].

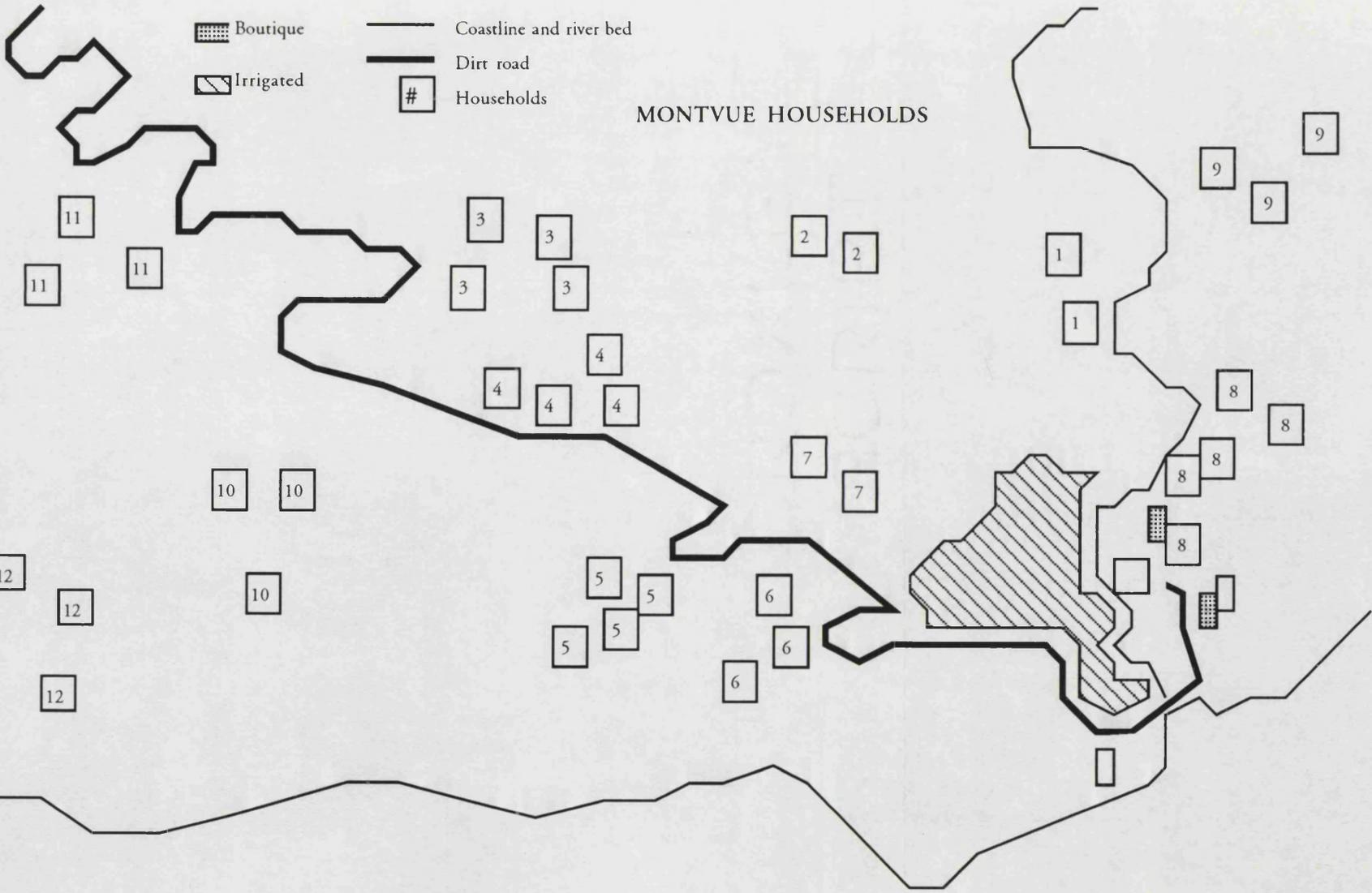
Although these clusters of households, together, are only referred to as *lakour*, the domestic groups that reside within them are referred to as *pti fanmi* in one house, and specifically *fanmi prè* for the ensemble of people in a particular cluster. The *pti fanmi* first and foremost refers to the cohabiting couple and their children, albeit sometimes these are *zenfans ramasse*, and the *fanmi prè* refers to all those co-resident in the [cluster] *lakour*. Judging from those kin relationships predominant in the Montvue *lakour*, the *fanmi prè* consists of patrilineally related men and their in-marrying spouses, although not necessarily, as with the Alcindor and Maxius *lakour*.

In contrast to the *pti fanmi* and the *fanmi prè* is the *fanmi lwen* which is used to refer to “family” that is not resident nearby, *i.e.* does not live in the same *pawas*. How, then, is *fanmi* defined? When asked this question directly, the answer is invariably all those that have the *mem sinyatur* (lit: same signature). A *fanmi* is thus all those that have the same surname. Implicit in this conception is that the *sinyatur* is passed from father to son, where the father is married, civilly and/or in the Church, to the son’s mother, and that women take on the *sinyatur* of their spouses. The *fanmi* is all agnatically related men, their unmarried sisters and daughters, and their wives. The *sinyatur* as denoting a genealogically defined group, whether actual kinship links can be specified or not, is further underscored by explicit *sinyatur* exogamy: one may not marry another carrying the same *sinyatur*, no matter the actual genealogical distance. The converse of this relatively strict exogamy indicates that all of one’s matrilateral kin are marriageable, which they are, in fact, even one’s matrilateral cross and parallel cousins. The limits of exogamy are also reflected specifically in kinship terms beyond those of brothers (see below): *kouzen prop* [lit: own or proper cousin] refers to children of one’s father’s brothers, or all patrilateral cousins; a *kouzen-par-alianz* [lit: cousin by alliance, marriage] is the child of one’s mother’s siblings, matrilateral cousins.

MONTVUE HOUSEHOLDS

FAMILY LAKOUR	RELATIONSHIPS among, and Number of, HOUSEHOLDS	OTHER HOUSE RESIDENTS
Cazeau (1)	1. Father 2. Son	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Faustin	1. Brother 2. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Alcindor	1. Sister 2. Sister 3. Sister 4. Sister	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Kersaint	1. Brother 2. Brother 3. Brother 4. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children & father
Calixte (1)	1. Father 2. Son 3. Son 4. Son	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children alone
Maxius	1. Mother 2. Daughter 3. Daughter's son	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Medoc	1. Brother 2. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Narcisse	1. Brother 2. Brother 3. Brother 4. Brother 5. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children & father
Dupiton	1. Father 2. Son 3. Son 4. Son	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Calixte (2)	1. Father 2. Son 3. Son	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children
Jadotte	1. Brother 2. Brother 3. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children & father
Cazeau (2)	1. Brother 2. Brother 3. Brother	w/spouse & children w/spouse & children w/spouse & children

Note: All family names have been changed, but it is worth noting that four of the original names were listed in the 1874 petition.



This relatively straightforward, stated definition of a *fanmi* is modified somewhat when certain anomalies are pointed out. These anomalies generally have to do with situations where a man carries his mother's *sinyatur* because his mother is, or was, not married, either civilly or by the church, to his father. A large portion of these situations are due to a readily observable pattern of polygamous unions among better-off men – even by the opaque figures of the official census, 8% of all unions are polygamous (cf. Ministry 1972). In a polygamous household, the secondary wife's children are not only acknowledged by their father/mother's spouse but are also economically supported by him in a like manner to his children by his married wife. Although these children do not carry his *sinyatur*, they are in all other respects fully his children. The term *nom divize* refers, in this case, to the fact that they do not share his *sinyatur*: the “name has become divided,” but the genealogical link and associated responsibility remains intact. Where the *nom divize* is a currently recognized branch of a particular *sinyatur*, the exogamy rule obtains as well with that *sinyatur*. Thus Prophète Calixte, *nom divize* of the *sinyatur* Maxius, was able to marry a young woman also named Calixte, but not any Maxius woman.

There are other situations where the *nom divize* appellation is also used. Like with a polygamous family, a son may carry his mother's *sinyatur*, but unlike the polygamous case, the genitor may not acknowledge paternity. In this case, the children relate to their mother's agnatic kin as if they were their own paternal relatives, albeit the exogamy rule still holds vis-à-vis the genitor's *sinyatur*. Circumstances permitting, the mother's agnatic kin provide the economic support and guidance normally stemming from paternity. In one case, this sort of situation was further complicated by the mother's subsequent spouse taking on the responsibilities normally incumbent to a father or maternal agnatic kin. Here, the name had become divided and associated responsibility had been attenuated, transposed to only the matrilateral kin, or, in the one case, to an affine.

In yet another situation, albeit relatively uncommon and certainly never discussed publicly, the *nom divize* refers to a particular married woman's child, whose genitor is not his mother's husband. This child receives a wholly new, invented *sinyatur*. While these invented *sinyatur* among adult men are readily obvious as they often mimic commercial brand names, e.g., Ricoffé [Café], Maxwell [House Coffee], Camay [Soap], attempts to discuss particular instances were virtually prohibited. At the same time, other

instances where the child was said, by third parties, to have a different genitor than his mother's husband, the child carried the same *sinyatur* as his mother's husband.

In respect to a *nom divize*, it should be noted that with the passage of generations, and ever-widening circles of family dispersal throughout the island, its genealogical link to a particular *sinyatur* may be socially forgotten. This is especially the case in the more outward lying *pawas*, where specific genealogical links may not be preserved by social enactment.

What the *mem sinyatur* and the *nom divize* clearly designate throughout these various permutations are the two tenets implicit in Montagnard consanguinity. First and foremost is the concept of shared kinship through the paternal line and in the large majority of cases publicly acclaimed by the *mem sinyatur*. When the ideal constitution of *mem sinyatur* — shared surname denoting a patrilineal genetic link together with associated socioeconomic responsibility — is attenuated in some way, that break is marked by reference to the *nom divize*. In effect, the *nom divize* signals a break in the patriline, whether or not that break is compensated for by continued socioeconomic support.

The advantage, of course, of having *fanmi* as neighbors, rather than strangers, is that there are certain modalities of behaviour expected within a *fanmi* which together minimize or eliminate any potential conflicts. These expectations as to appropriate behaviour within the *fanmi* fall into three kinds of relationships: those among male kin, those among women within the *lakour*, and those between men and women, specifically when in union.

Relations among Men

As we have seen in Montvue, the adult men in most *lakour* are patrilineally related, and in most cases this is obvious by their shared *sinyatur*. Montvue is typical in that in most *lakour* the co-resident men are brothers, or a father and his sons. There are two explicitly stated moral injunctions in this regard: a father has absolute moral authority over his sons and they in turn owe him respect and deference, and secondly, brothers should never fight.

Men, even elderly men, always behave in a reserved, respectful, circumscribed manner when in the presence of their fathers. For certain individuals, this manner is a decidedly sharp contrast to their normal behaviour to others. Despite these outward appearances, it seems an extremely rare event that a father would actually wield his

authority over an adult son. Thus an actual instance of such was never witnessed nor even recounted by others. But one aged patriarch explained what would appear to be the fundamental right that underlines a father's moral authority: the power to send the son away, that is, expel the son from the *lakour*.

The situation is quite different in regard to fathers and their younger sons, those who are not yet considered adult. Incidents such as a father prohibiting his teenage son to move, or ridiculing his political leanings, or instructing him to perjure himself during certain legal proceedings, were considered normal and expectable. One father was infamous for his cruel treatment of his young sons, on one occasion tying his twelve year old son to a tree for three days, on another putting his three young sons in a burlap bag and dunking it in the ocean. While these actions were condemned, there was no question that they were within the father's prerogative.

In contrast, many fathers were unhappy with their adult sons' behaviour, often referring to them as *vagabon* [lit: vagabond], a serious insult, but never taking any kind of concrete action or punishment against them. Thus, while on the one hand the moral authority of a father is consistently marked in both the secular, day-to-day comportment of their sons, and in periodic ritual celebrations, on the other hand adult men act as independent agents in the actual conduct of their own practical affairs, without interference from their fathers. This latter aspect of the father/son relationship in fact coincides neatly with the nature of men's economic activity, where men, individually, focus on particular activities whose gain remains their own. Even in the selection of a spouse, a father does not intervene in his son's choice, whereas a father's approval is necessary for a daughter.

Likewise, brothers, because they share one father, and typically one *lakour*, are expected to act in a mutually supportive manner and present a united front to the outside world. In fact, they are often in conflict with one another. One young man was sorely tried because his elder brother's goats were constantly raiding his garden, and yet he could only raise a timid complaint and the problem remained. This sort of friction could easily provoke an argument between two brothers. My presence at such not infrequent times caused others present to gently and firmly lead me away, explaining it was a shameful thing for brothers to fight and I should not be a witness. In this case, the social injunction, "brothers should not fight," tacitly acknowledged the fact that they tend to, in fact.

Family disputes besides those between brothers are certainly not uncommon. The "mechanism" for handling disputes is revealing:

Ou bizwen gron zot. Ou pa don zot sa pouvwar la. Ou pa les zot ganyè labitud domadir pou fèr sa. Demèn apre demèn ou les zot ale, apre sa ou pa pou kapa ed zot. Kan zot in komanse, ou bizwen aret zot deswit. Ou gron zot. Ou kapa pran en baton osi, ou tap zot. Pa don zot labitud. Pa bizwen al lakour. Parski laranzman dan la kaz. Apel tou. Ban zenfan la. Sa ban zanfan ki dispite la. Apel zot tou pou fèr en lide, en kalkil: ki ena tor, ki ena rezon la dan. Alor, ou gron zot.
 [You have to scold [lecture] them. You cannot give them that right. You cannot let them get the habit of doing this [complaining, fighting]. Tomorrow after tomorrow, you send them away, after that you are not made to help them. When they start [fighting], you have to stop them right away. You scold them. You can take a stick also, you hit them. Don't let them get the habit. Don't need to go to court. Because the arrangement [resolution] is made in the house. Call them all. All the children. All the children disputing. Call them all to get an idea, to make a calculation, who is right, who has the reason in the affair. Then you lecture them.]

It may legitimately be asked, then, in what does the relationship of father/son, brother/brother, consist of, that would so pervasively result in the predominance of patrilocal *lakour* among Montagnards. On what are these relationships of moral authority and solidarity based? The answer is contained in the “*laranzman dan la kaz*”, it lies within the *lakour* itself and its associated subsistence garden.

The *lakour* is first and foremost a residential site, it is where a man's house must sit. A house and a spouse together are in fact the two features that make a young man into an adult. But he cannot acquire a spouse without first having a house, and he cannot obtain a house without a place to put it. The process by which a boy becomes a man, whereby patrilocal *lakour* are created, and how property devolves from one generation to the next, are all contained in the manner in which a house is provided for each young man.

Just as with a keystone in an arch, there are some events that have far-reaching consequences beyond what they would appear. The house provision rule is such a social event. It is not only striking by its context in a society that has very few articulated social “rules,” but it is also deceptive in its simplicity, carrying, as it does, wide-ranging social implications. In fact, it is the existence of the house provision rule which creates co-residence, without which descent would have no politico-jural significance, even if that *de facto*.

The house provision rule is simply that a father must provide a house for each of his sons. A house is not only the single most important piece of property of any adult, it also represents the single largest expenditure in a man's lifetime. A man usually starts building a house for his son when the latter is about 12 or 13 years old, and continues

intermittently until it is finished when the boy is around 19 or 20. The materials for the construction of the house nowadays must all be imported from Mauritius, the wood, *tôle*, cement and cement blocks. Up until about thirty years ago, the wood could be obtained locally, and presently coral blocks are quarried in Plaine Corail, but are considered a poor substitute for cement blocks as they are water absorbent. More commonly in the past than now, a house could also be built with the abundant local rocks and stones and fitted with a thatched roof, but this type is now considered a rude and poor alternative. By and large, then, the majority of houses are built with materials imported from Mauritius.

The cost of materials and shipping for a simple *tôle* house was about Rs.15,000 (1979=US\$3,000), and a cement block house with metal frame glass-paned windows between Rs.25,000 and Rs.30,000. The money for this considerable undertaking is garnered by the father through various means: from his own cash earnings and savings, from his other sons and, since 1968, from small periodic bank loans. Normal construction proceeds in fits and starts: the house is built in stages, each stage demarcated by the availability of materials and/or cash. The bank loans, keyed to a particular stage of construction, are each paid off before a new one is acquired (an irksome method for the bank, and an oft heard complaint from the manager). The most typical sights dotting the Rodriguan landscape are unfinished houses, in various stages of construction, and greatly outnumbering finished ones. The current preponderance of cement block construction is the direct result of increased cash from the large scale government wage labour begun in the early 1970s.

The labour involved in erecting the house, once materials are in hand, comes primarily from the male members of the *fanmi prè*: the father, his other sons and his brothers and their sons, most typically, but any adult men co-resident in the *lakour*. This group, occasionally augmented by other male kin, works cooperatively on the house construction, compensated only by a large collective meal at the end of the day. This same group, in fact, can also be marshalled for any large-scale task requiring extraordinary labour, e.g. the clearing and preparation of a newly-acquired garden site, but, apart from house-building, is most commonly activated for ritual occasions.

The occasion of house-building, as well as the periodic rituals which will be discussed later, is an event which makes explicit a generalized reciprocity thought to be a natural, even if obligatory, aspect of relations among male kin. That a father must build a house for each of his sons sets in train a series of generalized obligations of mutual help and solidarity, which encompass not only the father and each son, but also each man to

his brothers, and thus all immediate patrilineal male kin. The “diffuse enduring solidarity” expected among men of the *fanmi prè* has a recognized material basis in the fact of house-building. While the *lakour* title- or lease-holder is the senior man in any particular *fanmi prè*, and the prime responsibility for house-provision lies with the father, it is tacitly understood that his other sons and his brothers also make a sizable contribution, even if only in-kind, to the house. Thus the son whose house it will be “repays” those who contributed to its provision by permanent obligations of mutual support and solidarity. In his turn, he will not only help his brothers and nephews in the building of their respective houses, but he will stand ready to provide support, material or moral, to any of their endeavors should he be asked.

Be, li pa ed so papa, so papa pa pou ed li. Komsa, sa arive. Be, kan ou ed ou papa, papa pou byen kontan ed pti ki ape travay . . . ek nou tou dan lakaz. Alor, memki se k li amen dan lakaz, ou bizen panse ou pa kapav manze tou so byen. Bizen les sa byen la pouse. Kan byen la fin pouse, sa gren la, in ariv letam, la, ou retabli so mezon.

Well, he [the son, the child] does not aid his father, his father will not aid him. Like that, it happens. So, when you aid your father, father will be well content to aid his children who work . . . and all of us in the house. Even then, with him who has brought you to the house, you need to think, you cannot eat all his goods [assets]. [You] must allow his goods to grow. When those goods have finished growing, that piece, with time, there, you rebuild his house.

The prime obligation of a father to provide each of his sons with a house, and their reciprocal deference, and the recognition of the genealogical link which engenders this relationship, are the foundation upon which the vertical, hierarchical relations among male kin in the *fanmi prè* are constructed. These relations embody both a patrilineal and a seniority principle. Obviously, one’s father is always senior to one self, but by the same token, so are one’s older brothers, as well as one’s patrilineal uncles. This hierarchy of brothers is clearly articulated in the kinship terms: *frèr ene*, oldest brother, *frèr kade*, next oldest brother, *frèr bèjamin*, youngest brother, and *frèr-mem-papi*, though most commonly simply *frèr*, half brother by the same father. Thus the headship of a *fanmi prè*, although merely titular and nominal in the quotidian affairs of the *lakour*, passes from oldest to youngest in each generation of the patriline of those co-resident. The respect and deference due a father, is thus also due his brothers, as well as one’s own older brothers. For a *frèr-mem-papi*, this vertical ordering is identical, but most often only visible if he lives in proximity. In decided contrast, brothers by the same

mother, different fathers, are called *demifrèr* [lit: half-brothers] and have no place in this particular hierarchy.

In the larger social context, then, the actual provision of the house, though a recognized material basis for the ensuing kinship relations, is also emblematic of the substantive relations expected among male kin. While each man pursues his economic livelihood in a decidedly individualistic manner, he can count on a “safety net” of agnatic male kin to lend him support should extraordinary labour become necessary, or one of his enterprises fail, or calamity strike. In these kinds of situations, his immediate recourse is to call on patrilateral kin in the *fanmi prè*, and secondarily to *fanmi* in the immediate *pawas*. Appeals for specific material assistance to the *fanmi lwen*, *i.e.* those of *mem sinyatur*, beyond the *pawas*, though ideologically possible, are virtually never enacted. Rather, as will be discussed later, a man is more likely to call upon his male affines or his *korom*.

Nevertheless, the *fanmi lwen*, all those of the *mem sinyatur*, do still have mutual obligations of support and solidarity. These enacted instances of mutual support beyond the *fanmi prè* rarely take on an actual material aspect, but are most often concerned with what could be called social solidarity. The most common example of this kind of support is evidenced in the frequent tavern brawls in Port Mathurin, where a man can rely on men of *mem sinyatur* to back him up in a fight. Also common are instances where a man can count on a place to sleep away from home, or expect a better price or a better deal in a particular commercial transaction, *e.g.*, the selling of livestock, or fish, or gaining credit. Cases of finding a job, or preferential treatment on the job, can also turn on this more generalized solidarity among men of *mem sinyatur*.

This generalized social solidarity expected among men of *mem sinyatur* is called *defanu*, meaning mutual defense, assistance, protection, standing up for. *Defanu* includes, of course, the patrilateral relations within the *fanmi prè*, but equally covers relations among all those of *mem sinyatur*, as well as certain other relations among men that are not kin-based.

The importance of the house provision rule is not restricted to a recognition that it is the symbolic core of the entire panoply of *defanu* relations among male kin. Its significance also lies in the role it plays in the transmission of property from one generation to the next. From this perspective, the house provision rule is in effect a method of *inter vivos* inheritance. Each man receives his patrimony at the beginning of his adult life, rather than at the death of his father. Because the house sits in the *lakour*

and includes access to the subsistence gardens associated with it, the provision of the house is simultaneously not only the bestowal of adulthood by the father, but also the foundation of the son's domestic economic life — the assurance of residence, subsistence and the material and moral support of his *fanmi prè* and *defanu* ties. Thus a man's patrimony is not only the physical house, but also the subsistence garden and a whole network of male kin support and solidarity. It is from this base that a man then develops his own particular economic enterprise or enterprises and, not incidentally, his own specific affinal ties.

Although a particular parcel of land, whether the *lakour* itself or the subsistence gardening site, does entail a specific individual holder, it is, in effect, a *de facto* collectively held piece of property. Save for one feature, there is no practical difference between land that is held by private title or by government lease. In both cases, the title, or lease, remains in the name of the first person who initiated the purchase or lease, with the current senior male paying the rent, when collected, in the latter instance. Indeed, the formal relationship to the land, as articulated in the papers, has currency only vis-à-vis the government, relations with which are exceedingly rare on this matter. Otherwise, the *lakour* and subsistence garden devolve to each generation as described: by the fact of a father, already resident in the *lakour*, building a house there for each son. In effect, the *lakour* is thus "owned" by the men co-resident there.

The only permutation in this standard pattern is that the youngest son does not have a house built for him, he inherits his father's house. Due to the prohibition against more than one cohabiting couple in one house, the youngest son's marriage is delayed until his father's or mother's death. In fact, of the three houses in Montvue which contain a man and his father, as well as his wife and children, all three are youngest sons whose fathers are widowers. (Invariably, widows live with their daughters, especially unmarried daughters.)

In actual practice, the one feature which distinguishes a privately-held *lakour* from a leased one, is that in the former the entire *fanmi*, whether *lwen* or *prè*, has the nominal right to the fruits of the perennials planted in that *lakour* and residence there. This right is explained by the family ancestors', the *grandimun*'s, initial acquisition of the parcel and their planting of those perennials, and thus the right of all their descendants to partake of their estate. Not only does this include all those of *mem sinyatur*, but also those who have a *nom divize*, inasmuch as it is recognized in the current generation. In Ton Numa's words:

Nou fèr sa pou napa kit zanfan. Li, li ena dwa. So frèr ena dwa. Mè selman, nou ena linyon pou nou. Dan milye terèn, nou pa met okèn lakaz dan milye terèn. Fèr toutotour, dan milye terèn nou le terèn la lib. Nou plant zarb la dan.

[We do this for any child. He (or she), he has the right. His (or her) brother has the right. Only it is a union for all of us. In the middle of the land, we put no houses in the middle of the land. Make them all around, [but] the middle of the land is free. We plant trees there.]

Why?

Alor, mem ki azordi sa terèn la pou nou, demèn apre demèn ou fin ena zenfan, ou, zanfan li fin grandi, li kapa arive marye. Li pou al sèr en lot fanmi pou li amen la. Li pa pou fèr en sel fanmi, li pou fèr en lot fanmi lèr la, ou trouve? La mem ki ariv dezord, ariv diskisyon . . . natirel, se fanmi. Li toutotour. Li ena tou dwa. Li plant so zarb, se youn plant ou zarb, youn plant ou fritier. Se pou ou. Parski ou fin plant, mo pa kapa pran sa. Sa rest pou li.

[So, even if today this land is for us, tomorrow after tomorrow you will have a child, you, and the child will grow up, he (she) can marry. It [the land] is there to serve another family, to bring the family there. It is not there for a single family, it is there for another family at that time, do you see? From that comes disorder, comes arguments . . . [this is] natural, it's family. They are all around. They all have the right. They plant a tree, a plant or a tree, a plant or a fruit tree. It is for you. Because you planted it, I cannot take it [away]. It stays for them.]

The distinction between freehold and leased is little evidenced in the day-to-day activities of a particular *lakour*. But its presence can occasionally be discerned on-the-ground in the actual membership of a *lakour*. Freehold *lakour* tend to show their greater genealogical depth by the wider inclusion of patrilateral kin. In one example, outside of Montvue, a freehold *lakour* consisted of 13 households. The head of this *lakour*, the most senior man, was the grandson of the original founder; his one son and seven daughters with in-marrying husbands occupied eight of the thirteen houses. His three patrilateral cousins, (one of his father's brother's three sons) and one of their sons occupied another four houses, and the 13th house was occupied by the *nom divize* son of one of the patrilateral *kouzen*. In contrast, the *lakour* in Montvue, all on leased land, consisted of either a father and his adult sons, or brothers by one father. While a freehold *lakour* has greater symbolic significance than a leased *lakour*, because of its association with the *grandimun*, in actuality the relative genealogical depth of a particular *lakour* is in large part a function of the recency of settlement, as well as the continuing viability of the land. Thus a larger parcel of land, or a particularly fertile associated garden plot, will support a greater number of households, and consequently have greater genealogical depth. Larger or more fertile plots of land tend to be those purchased during the last half of the 19th century. The fact that certain freehold properties show greater

genealogical depth is actually an epiphenomenon of normal family dispersal and settlement patterns and respective carrying capacity of the land, rather than any inherent social principle. Thus the Salomon *lakour*, just cited, consists of 8 arpents of land in a fertile area in one of the western *pawas*, purchased in the 1870s, while none of the *lakour* in Montvue are larger than a couple of arpents, and all are leased, only dating from the 1920s. Similarly, a small freehold *lakour* in Vainqueur, originally purchased in the 1860s, has only four brothers resident, while a leased *lakour* in Roche Bon Dieu, in the far east, contains two brothers, their father's youngest brother, and their respective sons and adult grandsons.

Although the specific factors of production that a man utilizes in his individualized economic activities, *e.g.* a cash-crop garden plot, a couple head of livestock, a *piwog* and gear, are separate and distinct from the house, *lakour* and subsistence garden that come to him through the house provision rule, they also devolve in a similar manner. A young man's economic life begins through his father, it is he who chooses, or encourages, or guides a young man to his primary economic livelihood. This is done on a dyadic basis, that is, each son's enterprise is separate and not necessarily identical to those of his brothers. In one case, a father's cash crop garden will go to his youngest son, who at an early age began working in tandem with his father; another son obtained government employment through his father's intervention; and, the third son was apprenticed by his father to an artisan. But all three were expected to share their father's *piwog* and gear. Beyond this initial support by the father, each son is then expected to develop on his own his other economic activities. In each case of a specific factor of production, the *de facto* ownership is joint with the specific son well prior to the father's death.

Whether considering the *inter vivos* inheritance of specific factors of production, or of the *lakour* or subsistence gardens, one aspect remains throughout. None of these processes, or transactions, take place in a manner involving the government. Although the original title in the case of a freehold parcel, or the original lease in the case of rented lands, is registered in the name of that originating individual, the papers are not altered subsequently to reflect the devolution of title to each generation. Thus the passage of property from one generation to the next is removed from any kind of official authority or even knowledge; this in practice, as well as by intention, as we shall see.

Furthermore, in this respect, not only is the land, freehold or leased, held *de facto*, rather than in any *de juris* manner (*vis-à-vis* the government), it is also in effect held collectively by all those men resident on it. This common ownership is integral, of course, with their mutual solidarity and cooperation. Thus the house is not only the

visible link between a father and his sons, but it is also the link between an individual man and his patrilineal kin, the means by which he takes his place within a collectivity, materially defined by a plot of land, both in the immediate and in the long term.

Just as the house provision rule reveals the configuration of relations among male patrilineal kin, marriage, or the establishment of a union, reveals another set of relations among men. It was noted earlier that a young man achieves adulthood by two features, the first is a house, and the second is a wife — the latter predicated on the former.

A young man chooses his own wife. While there may be a certain amount of influence or guidance wielded by his father, mother or elder brothers behind the scenes, this was not in evidence in actual practice. On the other hand, a young woman is expected to obey her father's directives on her future spouse. He can and does bar certain individuals to her, both ideally and in practice. However, young women can and often enough do have their way, as in a certain instance where the daughter threatened suicide if her father did not acquiesce, which he eventually, and grudgingly, did.

The authority of the woman's father, over not only the woman but also her prospective husband, is underlined in the whole process of courtship. Once a tacit understanding has been achieved between a young man and woman, and he is serious in his attentions, he will formally present a *let mariaj* to her father. The *let mariaj* is a handwritten letter requesting her hand in marriage, composed in bombastic and flowery French, copied directly from *Le Secretariat des Amants*, a French publication consisting of model letters and messages appropriate to lovers and fiancés and much in use in the Mascarenes.

On the occasion of the presentation of the *let mariaj*, the young man arrives at his prospective father-in-law's house, and proffers the letter together with a special song. The letter and the song are gradually replacing the more traditional practice in which a basket of fruit and flowers was presented in lieu of the *let mariaj* and, in addition to the song, the young man took a couple of cobs of maize and ground them in the father's presence. After several weeks lapse, the acceptance or rejection is made known.

Two aspects of this visit make clear the inferior status of the prospective groom. One is that in Montagnard society, secondary social status in a given situation is signalled by the initial giving of a gift, even when immediately reciprocated, and, even more importantly, by being the person who visits, the guest, rather than the host. Further on, the full articulation of this will be seen in the *Fèr lanne* cycle. Two, a quite dramatic indication of inferiority is contained in the act of grinding maize. Grinding maize is directly associated with shame and humility in the course of daily activities. First of all it

is exclusively woman's work; secondly, it is an activity that is done secretly, away from any observers, and alone. In every instance, my insistence on seeing the grinding, when in progress, was resisted and then occasioned great distress and embarrassment. My efforts to elucidate an explanation of this behaviour and attitude were met by stubborn silence, although my impression of an association with slavery was probably correct, and not denied.

The father's acceptance is marked by a *fet fyansel*, a small celebration in the girl's *lakour*, attended by her *fanmi prè* and her prospective bridegroom. The *fet fyansel* initiates the *koze dimanch*, literally "Sunday talk". The *koze dimanch* is a weekly visit by the boy to the girl's *lakour*, where he is formally received by the family and the girl. The *koze dimanch* is the socially recognized, permissible form of interaction between prospective spouses expected during the engagement period. Initially the visit will take place in the context of the whole family, but as the Sundays wear on, the boy will increasingly be allowed to sit alone with the girl, accompany her to festive occasions or stroll about, albeit always chaperoned, even if at a distance.

During this period, which usually lasts about a year, the boy will cultivate a friendship with the girl's brothers and even assist in menial chores around the *lakour*. He will also start to accumulate what he can to furnish his house. In her turn, the girl will begin accumulating what she will take to the marriage: her own personal clothing, as well as all the household *linj*, sheets, blankets, tablecloths, towels, and so on. Most typically, the two will also surreptitiously sleep together during this time.

About three or four months prior to the agreed-upon wedding date, the couple, together with their witnesses, will go to Port Mathurin to purchase a marriage license and to be married civilly. The girl's witness is normally her godfather, and the boy's, either his best friend or his own godfather. Sometimes this occasion is marked by a small party at the girl's *lakour* and can also be called a *fet fyansel*. However, this civil marriage does not change the tenor of the relationship between the two — they do not live together, or openly sleep together at this point, nothing changes.

Only after the wedding occurs, in Church and celebrated at length, does the couple actually reside together in the boy's house and *lakour*. Once this new union is established, a regular and formal visiting cycle begins. Not only do the new husband and wife visit her family on all the occasions of formal visiting: the *Fèr lanne* period, Easter, the Feast of the Assumption (August 14th) and Christmas, but also every month or six weeks in between these holidays. The girl's family does not ever visit the boy's *lakour*. Integral to these visits is a fairly casual exchange of gifts, usually foodstuffs: a Montvue

son-in-law will bring dried fish and coconuts, and will come home with a variety of vegetables, or even a pullet. The actual food item exchanged is not as important as the exchange itself. Quite apart from these formal occasions, the wife may go alone to visit her family occasionally, but only with her husband's express permission. Likewise, she may send older children to stay with her family during the periods immediately preceding and proceeding the birth of a new child.

During the formal visits, the husband is more fully included in the gatherings in his father-in-law's *lakour*, *i.e.*, he will sit and talk and drink with the men, as well as help in any activities they may be engaged in. Most notably, his relationship with his mother-in-law, and also the other women of the *lakour*, changes from a formal, stiff manner prior to the wedding, to one marked by frequent jocular teasing and mild insults. The theme of this "joking" is invariably about shirking his obligations of garden work and other menial chores around the *lakour*. When questioned on this oddity — odd in terms of normal male/female relations — people say it is because the son-in-law is obligated to lend a hand, even if he is rarely asked to, and it is most unusual for a woman to enjoin directly, and publicly, a man to perform any particular chore or errand. Here again, a man's secondary status in his wife's natal *lakour* is highlighted.

The kinship term for son-in-law is *gendre*, it and its feminine counterpart, *bru*, are French terms. The use of this particular term, not *beau fils*, and the non-existence of the term *bru* for daughter-in-law, and all other affinal relations designated by the *bel/bo* prefix [*bel fi*, *bo pèr*, *bel mèr*, *bo frèr*, *bel sèr*] seems to further signal the marking of the relationship father-in-law/son-in-law.

A man's relationship to his father-in-law recalls most significantly the relationship between a son and his father. They are both visibly characterized by formal respect and deference, by social superiority and inferiority. And, like a man's relationship to his father, this asymmetry does not entail actual concrete interference or specific duties in quotidian affairs — although in both cases that potential is ideologically inherent in the relationship. The parity of the two relationships is explicit in *Fèr lanne*.

While the quotidian substance and nominal obligations inherent in the two relationships are virtually identical, they differ in their respective modes of establishment. Where a father's link to his son is established by genealogy, *mem sinyatur*, and incorporation, through the house provision rule, into the *lakour* and subsistence garden and the patrilocal kinship group, a father-in-law relationship is established by affinity, marriage of his daughter, and the consequent *defanu* relationship between the father-in-law and the new husband.

Recall that a man achieves adulthood by two complementary means, one, the ownership of a house, and, two, the acquisition of a spouse. In the former, his membership in an ongoing kinship group and his access to the socioeconomic resources inherent in the *fanmi prè* is enacted, in the latter, a specific *defanu* relationship to another senior man, and, by implication, his *fanmi prè*, is established. The one by blood, by genealogy, the other by marriage, by alliance. Thus in any group of brothers, their own mutual support and domestic socioeconomic base is shared through the fact of one father, *mem sinyatur* and the *fanmi prè*, but they are each individually linked to another *fanmi prè* as well. In this way, any married man has two sources of social capital, first and foremost his *fanmi prè* and his entire *mem sinyatur* network, and secondly, his affinal relations with yet another, separate, *fanmi prè*, not shared with his brothers.

That these two relations, one agnatic, one affinal, can have equal social weight is most clearly seen in their essential interchangeability in the context of uxorilocal marriage. While there are various reasons for uxorilocal marriage, when it does occur, the in-marrying husband takes on all those obligations and rights normally accruing to a son, save the automatic *defanu* relationship among those of *mem sinyatur*. His wife, of course, is already integral to the group of *lakour* women, and through her, access to the subsistence garden is already established. The question of provision of the house is variable. In the Alcindor *lakour* in Montvue, all of the four daughters continue to reside there with their respective husbands. Their father had assisted in the building of each of these houses, but the prime responsibility remained with each in-marrying man. In the case of two of these, their respective fathers assisted the house-building despite their residence in another *lakour*, while the other two had no assistance from that quarter — and this is reflected in the poorer quality of the houses. Similarly, the Salomon *lakour* contains a series of in-marrying husbands. While Ton Numa, the senior man, helped in their construction, the prime responsibility was the husband's. In either case, however, in the next generation each son will be provided with a house in the *lakour*, as a full member of the *fanmi prè*, and despite his separate *fanmi*, will be accorded full membership in the *lakour* and *fanmi prè* group.

By uxorilocal marriage, a man suffers no loss of prestige, and still retains the social capital inherent in his own natal *fanmi prè* and *mem sinyatur*, as well as that established by affinity to his father-in-law and his *fanmi prè*. In actual day-to-day affairs, the only change is the identification of the group with which he interacts most and upon which he has first recourse for mutual assistance.

This is evident when the particular instances of each uxori-local marriage are examined. The reasons for uxori-locality fall into three categories. First, there can be a voluntary and amicable severance of patrilo-cal residence. This can occur if, for example, access to land is constrained either because of its limited extent or its deteriorating viability and cannot support all of a man's sons and their families. In *pawas* that have been newly settled in the last thirty or forty years, there is both a greater preponderance of uxori-local, and neolo-cal, marriages involving men whose natal *lakour* are in the more densely, and continuously settled, *pawas* of the interior. This sort of voluntary severance also occurs when a man is determined to pursue a certain livelihood, e.g. livestock raising, or fishing, whose potential is limited in his natal *pawas*. Not uncommonly, a man who does not get along well with his father, or brothers, will also follow this course.

Secondly, a man may have only daughters and few, if any, brothers. It is therefore in his own best interest to encourage his daughters' husbands to take up residence in his *lakour*, and thereby retain the advantages of a mutually supportive *fanmi prè*. Monsieur Alcindor in Montvue exemplified this tendency. Likewise, a single son may also encourage his sisters' husbands to join him.

Thirdly, a man whose genitor has not acknowledged his paternity and whose matrilo-cal male kin are either poor or unavailable, has little other alternative to achieve security and solidarity with an on-going *fanmi prè*. The single man who has immigrated to Rodrigues, alone with no resources of his own, also falls into this category. Two of the in-mar-rying men in the Salomon *lakour*, one Réunionais, one Mauritian, are in fact such.

Placing cases of uxori-local marriage alongside more typical viri/patrilo-cal marriages illuminates another aspect of Montagnard kinship organization. Because the relationship between a man and his father-in-law, is in fact dyadic, although it implies the backing of the father-in-law's *fanmi prè* by extension, when either dies the relationship ceases to exist. Formal visiting of the father-in-law's *lakour* stops, and a man has no further obligations to any of his other affinal relations, including his daughter's children in the virilo-cal instance. However, when a man is married uxori-locally, the death of his father-in-law does not change his position within that *fanmi prè*. But the death of an uxori-locally married man's father results in the severance of practical ties with his natal *fanmi prè*, although it does not thereby negate his *défanu* relations with all of *mem sinyatur*, his full *fanmi*. By definition, a senior man is one who has no obligations to a

superior, that is both his father and his father-in-law are dead, as well as any elder brothers who were co-resident.

What emerges is the fact that, with the sole exception of the *fanmi*, a man's relationship to a particular *fanmi prè*, whether through agnatic or affinal ties, is constituted by the enactment of the relationship. In other words, there is nothing absolute or predetermined in the relationship *per se*. It is as if each of these kinship ties has a latent substance which is only activated by co-residence and proximity. In contrast, the substance inhering in *fanmi* ties is only inherited patrilineally and is permanent, whether or not it is ever acted upon. In Schneider's words, while the definition of the relationship denoted by *fanmi* and *mem sinyatur* is in "the being," the definition of affinal relations and those within the *fanmi prè* is in "the doing" (1984:72). Of course, when a *fanmi prè* is strictly patrilocal, the "being" and "doing" are unitary.

The strategic importance of enactment emerges quite distinctly when examining godparenthood among Montagnards. Like the father/son, father-in-law/son-in-law relationships, the *parren, marren* relationship to his [or her] godchild, *fyel*, is one of superior to inferior and entails social and, where possible, economic support on the part of the godfather, and deference and reciprocal support on the part of the godchild. Like the others, this relationship implies potential support should the need arise, but in the day-to-day it manifests itself only in a generalized solidarity. This obligation arises from the godparents' stated designation as stand-ins for the parents, as responsible for the well-being of the child should something happen to the parents. Hence godchildren are often *zenfans ramasse* of their godparents, especially when the child's parents are poor, or when the godparents are relatively well-off, or when one or the other of the godparents is childless or whose own children are all grown. This aspect of parental substitution, or its potential, is highlighted by the fact that a godparent's own children are referred to as *demi-frèr* or *demi-sèr* by the godchild, and vice versa. In many cases, a godfather is the donor of an animal for his young godson's eventual herd — there were three men in Montvue whose cattle herds were begun in this way.

Note that although the designation of this relationship comes from Catholic tenets, it does not in itself entail any of the obligations normally attending the usual Catholic understanding, *viz.* the assurance of the godchild's adherence to the Church's teachings. But the godparents do stand in for the parents on occasions that involve direct contact with the Church itself, *e.g.* Baptism, Confirmation, and for a girl at her wedding. The significance of this relationship, and its primarily secular content, emerges from the stated ideal method of choosing each of one's children's godparents, thus:

1st child:	his/her mother's father his/her father's mother
2nd child:	his/her father's father his/her mother's mother
Subsequent children:	mother's and father's siblings child's older siblings — in no particular order

Notice first that godparents are never couples. For the first child, the preference for matrilineal kin is obvious, for the second, alternate patrilineal generations are linked, and another matrilineal link is specified. For subsequent children, the siblings are emphasized, either in same or senior generation. What is not visible in this listing of preference, but emerges in practice, is that the choice of *parren* and *marren*, while following both matrilineal and patrilineal ties, overlays ties that are already enacted, but not predictably so. Thus one man in Montvue, separated from his *fanmi* by *nom divize* and residence in a *pawas* distant from his father's *fanmi prè*, chose for six of his seven children, his own matrilineal uncles and aunts and a series of his wife's siblings. These were all resident in Montvue or close-by in neighboring *pawas*, and because of his marginalization from his father's *fanmi prè*, these were all relations already active. For his youngest son, he chose his oldest son and daughter. Despite the difficulty of untangling the different relations opted for in the choice of *parren* and *marren*, a generalized tendency emerges which seems to reaffirm relations that were already actively engaged in. Choices within the *fanmi prè* seemed to occur most often when there was a large age gap between siblings.

Thus while the kinship system is organized to allow a flexibility of manoeuvre — inherent options for both with whom and how one allies oneself — the institution of godparenthood reifies, in effect, those choices. Godparenthood allows the formalization of those ties which fall outside the more structured relations within the *fanmi prè* or through the ties between a man and his *gendre* and clearly articulated in the ritual occasions of *Fèr lanne*, weddings and funerals. On the one hand, the Montagnard system structures choices through the “doing” inherent in any *fanmi prè* and marriage, but on the other hand, allows residual relationships, enacted by virtue of practice, to be institutionally articulated. In one, the kinship system structurally integrates choice and flexibility, in the other, individual choice beyond the *fanmi prè* and marriage gets reaffirmed, “structured in” through godparenthood.

The *fanmi*, *fanmi prè*, marriage and godparenthood, all link adult men together through the idiom of kinship. But men are also linked among themselves with no reference to kinship at all. These ties inform what is called the *korom*.

The *korom* (deriving apparently from the English/Latin *quorum*), also variably referred to as *ekip* [team] or *kompani* [company], is a group of male friends, of roughly the same age, all usually living in the same *pawas*. This group forms during the early adolescence of its members, precisely during the period when boys begin their forays into the world beyond the *lakour*, and continues intact throughout the lives of its members. Its membership is fairly fixed, and *pawas*-based, though there may be occasional adding and sloughing off. A man may sometimes be a member of more than one *korom*, when, for example, he moves to another *pawas*, or if he rations his time between two different *pawas*, when, for example, he maintains two polygamous households.

The *korom* is neither ego-centered nor hierarchical. It is rather a loose aggregate of friends, and even leadership is temporary and contextual. The egalitarian nature of a *korom* is underlined by its members' explicit non-recognition of any kinship ties or status considerations. It is fairly common for a *korom* to have several brothers or *kouzen* as members; their behaviour toward each other, especially between an older and younger brother, is markedly different between their *lakour* and *korom* activities. Within the context of a *korom* activity, a man will refer to his brother as an *ami* or *kamarad* [friend], while in any other situation will refer to him as his *frèr*, usually even specifying which kind, viz. *ene*, *kade*, *bèjamin*, or *demifrèr*. Quite frequently, I was introduced to the same man at two different times by the same person, once in the context of the *lakour*, with his kin relationship specified, and then again, outside the *lakour*, as a *kamarad*. This differential status is also reflected during *Fèr lanne*. The non-kin nature of the *korom* is brought to the fore during another important ritual occasion, funerals. There it is specifically the *korom*, albeit specifically not those members of the *korom* who are also kinsmen, who are the pallbearers for their deceased *korom kamarad*.

Most *korom* have between five and ten members, and these normally encompass an age range of about five years. But one *korom* had eight members between the ages of 19 and 24 except for one who was 27; another more elderly *korom* had an age range of 15 years between the oldest and youngest. Most *korom* have an identifiable core, those who are more often together, with others more peripheral due to their economic activities or their, for instance, more solitary nature.

The primary activities of a *korom* are leisure, or pleasure, oriented. A *korom* is most often seen together while drinking, playing dominoes, or chatting after work hours. But the *korom* also goes, as a unit, to specific events: a political rally, a soccer game, a Saturday night dance at a nearby *klub*, a Port Mathurin tavern or club, or to an illicit gambling session, or a legal one at a *pryèr-hwi-jou* [wake]. In the southern and eastern *pawas*, an annual *piwog* regatta is organized by *korom* of all ages, and is eagerly attended and participated in by several Montvue *korom*.

But *korom* members also engage in more substantial intrarelations. Money is commonly borrowed and lent among *korom* members, overseen by all its members. These are most often small amounts, Rs.5-25, and paid back at each pay day, but can also involve large amounts of several hundred rupees. Similarly, possessions are lent and borrowed within the *korom*. These can include radios or cassette players, a camera, a motorcycle, a *piwog*, a special item of clothing. For certain items, the borrowing is so continuous, that ownership is in practice collective.

Another, not insignificant, aspect of *korom* relations has to do with sexual adventures and the sharing of sexual information. Older boys may help younger ones initiate their first sexual liaison. The identity, or availability, of certain “loose” women is made known within the *korom*. As some of these women are in effect prostitutes, information as to whether they have venereal diseases is also vital knowledge and shared among *korom* members. (This information is usually obtained through the male nurses at the hospital or clinic.) As the *korom* ages and begins to marry, this sexual aspect of their relations can become a source of tension within the group. The exclusive relationship between a husband and a wife is at odds with the sexually predatory aspect of a mainly unmarried *korom*. This overt tension does not entirely dissipate as each member in his turn marries or establishes a union. The exclusively male orientation of the *korom* is continuous: there are no activities, nor situations, where a *korom* qua *korom* interacts with women, except when women are the object of sexual adventures.

While a *korom* is still in adolescence, its members may also sporadically contribute labour to the building of a boy’s house, but this sort of mutual labour takes on more importance after the members are married. Thus a man’s *korom* will be in evidence whenever he undertakes a major task, one that is tied to his particular livelihood, like building or cleaning a *piwog*, clearing a new garden, butchering an animal, and so on. The participation of the *korom* and the *fanmi prè* in these sorts of activities is not mutually exclusive.

A *korom*, like the *fanmi prè*, both patrilocal and affinal, and *mem sinyatur*, provides a man with a mutually supportive group, another set of *defanu* relations, on which he can rely for support and assistance should the need arise, and to which he is also obligated to provide assistance. While the *fanmi prè*, defined by both genealogy and co-residence and the passage of property from one generation to the next, is marked by vertical relations of authority, the *korom* is defined by friendship and horizontal, egalitarian relations.

Although a Montagnard man, in principle, can rely to a relatively equal extent on both his *fanmi prè* and his *korom*, nevertheless a certain bias is evident in the kinds of activities for which he chooses one or the other. The assistance of a man's male *fanmi prè* is most typically marshalled only in the context of major social events: house construction, weddings, funerals, and the occasional large-scale garden clearing. While a man's *korom* also participates in these occasions, they are peripheral to the man's kin. In contrast, the *korom* assistance is most often utilized in the many, sundry activities of a man's daily life: cleaning a *piwog*, butchering an animal, painting a house, sorting and drying an octopus catch, bulking onions or garlic, and so on. Thus the relations among *korom* members can be viewed as being constantly activated, by mundane daily reciprocity. In contrast, the male members of a *fanmi prè* are rarely seen together except in the *lakour* itself, and even then only if their daily activities coincide. But, as a group, they are much in evidence at the major occasions noted above. Besides the obvious symbolic value of the patrilineal group on these occasions, it is clear that a continually enacted reciprocity among them is irrelevant to the patrilocal group's unity and solidarity. Once established, this unity and solidarity is permanent and automatic, even if only occasionally visible. In this respect also, the *korom* is almost a precise opposite: it is not only egalitarian, bound by horizontal relations, it also depends for its viability on the continuous affirmation of reciprocity, for it is not anchored to anything material, like a house or land or a wife. While a man's relations in the *fanmi prè* and in the *korom* both depend on the "doing," in the former, once enacted they can be assumed, but in the latter that assumption must be constantly reinforced.

Viewed from a global, and male, perspective, the Montagnard system of social relationships clearly selects and valorizes certain kinship relations. Thus a principle of patrilineality and an ideology of descent is evident in the definition of the *fanmi*, a principle of seniority and a *de facto* corporateness is clear in the *fanmi prè*, and both

seniority and exchange or alliance value are seen in affinal relations, while the representation of the *korom* deliberately eschews any kinship dimension.

At the same time, the operational importance of house provision within the *fanmi prè*, the dyadic and limited term of the affinal relationship, the ease by which uxori-local marriage is accommodated within a *fanmi prè*, and the uses to which godparenthood are put, alert us to the importance of actual enactment of particular relationships for their existence. In other words, the rights and obligations inherent in a particular kinship relation are not *sui generis*, they are not the result of adherence to particular rules. That is, a man is not part of a *fanmi prè* by virtue of patrification or a particular inheritance right. Rather, his membership in a *fanmi prè* only occurs through the fact of a house being provided there for him. House provision is crucially important because it precisely conjoins an ideology of descent, patrilineality, to a particular enactment, its praxis. Put another way, the *fanmi* — defined genealogically, bounded by exogamy and imbued with diffuse, enduring solidarity — has no currency in the quotidian affairs of a man until it is enacted in the *fanmi prè*.

The lack of enactment, or its withdrawal, is tantamount to disinheritance: “Demèn apre demèn, ou les zot ale. Apre sa ou pa pou kapa ed zot.” [Tomorrow after tomorrow, you send them away. After that you are not made to help them.] This enactment, both symbolic and concrete, in the house provision, engenders the various political, jural, ritual and economic dimensions inherent in the *fanmi prè*, and absent in the relations between those of *mem sinyatur*.

It is only by understanding the essential role of praxis, and its disjunction or conjunction, with an ideological principle such as patrilineality, that the inherent flexibility of Montagnard social structure can be appreciated. Without this understanding, the unremarkable inclusion of an uxori-locally married man, with full rights and obligations, into a *fanmi prè* is problematic. Here, the praxis integral to the *fanmi prè* is conjoined with affinity, rather than patrification, and is transformed in the next generation into patrilineality. In the obverse instance, where the praxis more typically entailed by agnatic kin, for example, is taken up by others, especially maternal kin, the designation of godparenthood rejoins the enactment with a kinship status, even if fictive or only cognatic. In the typical patrilocal *fanmi prè*, the principle of patrilineal descent is activated, is enacted, by the house provision — praxis and ideology are conjoined. In the typical designation of godparents, *de facto* enactment itself activates an ideology of parental substitution — praxis and ideology are conjoined.

It is, of course, only praxis, pure and simple, which creates and delimits the *korom*. While the precise opposite, the *mem sinyatur*, is created and delimited only by an ideological principle of patrilineality, severed from any necessity of enactment for its existence.

Once praxis and the ideology of kinship are united, in the *fanmi prè* and in godparenthood, the morality, the diffuse enduring solidarity, of kinship is permanent and automatic in the day to day. But it's reaffirmation is nonetheless periodically necessary, in the context of the extraordinary and the sacred. Thus the rituals of birth, marriage, death and the annual *Fèr lanne* are celebrated by the *fanmi prè*, certain active *fanmi lwen*, and godparents.

Within this overall system, the nature of affinal relations draws attention to another crucial aspect of Montagnard social structure. It has already been noted that a man's social life has two apparently opposing aspects: on the one hand, he is part of a *de facto* solidary group, the *fanmi* and *fanmi prè*, from which he receives his patrimony, his place of residence, his subsistence base, his ability to take a wife; on the other hand, he is expected to make a livelihood on his own, as an individual. A man's status as an individual, rather than as part of a collectivity, is what is engaged in the workings of a *korom*, where kinship relations are negated. And in the pursuit of his livelihood, his efforts and rewards are his alone. Marriage involves the transfer of the responsibility for a woman from her father to her husband — that this is conceived as a transaction between two individuals is manifest in the content of affinal relations. Affinity almost entirely consists in the cycle of visits that a man must make to his father-in-law in his *lakour*, both at set holidays and regularly in between. Within the context of these visits, three elements are most important: one, the deference a man owes his father-in-law, two, the exchange of foodstuffs, and three, the inchoate obligation of labour to the father-in-law's *lakour* as articulated in the joking relationship that obtains between a man and his mother-in-law. These relations only involve the man, not his agnates or other members of his *fanmi prè*, and, furthermore, cease upon the death of the father-in-law or the wife.

However, the ceremonies attendant to a wedding are organized and carried out by the two *fanmi prè* qua groups of agnates. The relationship between the two *fanmi* is entirely egalitarian, though the relationship of inferiority between a man and his father-in-law, and between the woman and her mother-in-law, remains clear. It was noted earlier that the relationship between a man and his father-in-law parallels that with his own father, both enacted in the giving of a house in the latter case, and the gift of a woman in the former. The joking relationship indicates another parallel: where the new wife joins

the collectivity of women in her new *fanmi prè*, the husband replaces her in the collectivity of women in her natal *fanmi prè*. It is as if the whole transaction of marriage only involved the exchange of individuals without thereby altering the *fanmi*. Thus, a man loses a daughter but gains a son, her mother loses her labour but it is replaced by her husband's labour. This ostensibly equal exchange appears to have the effect of maintaining the equality of the two *fanmi*, no one loses, no one gains. But the social terrain upon which affinity operates is only within the purview of a man as an individual. Thus each man shares with his brothers his ties to the *fanmi* and *fanmi prè*, but separately and in distinction to his brothers, his ties of affinity (and his *korom*) are his alone.

Once the *fanmi prè* is enacted by the house provision, the implications following from that are in effect permanent. The morality contained in the father/son and brother/brother relationships assures the long term reciprocity inherent in the *fanmi prè* (cf. Bloch 1973:75-87), albeit renewed and specified with each generation through house provision. In contrast, the unspecified solidarity between a man and his father-in-law, emblematic in the exchange of foodstuffs and an incipient source of labour, is limited to the lifetimes of the parties, and must be actively maintained by the required cycle of visiting. If we follow Bloch's lead, the contrast reveals the adaptability of the *fanmi* and *fanmi prè* to long term social change, while affinity responds to an efficiency of adaptation to a relatively shorter term. From the point of view of an individual, the *fanmi prè* provides him with a social base, but affinal relations allow recourse to another social base as either an alternative, a substitution, or a potential augmentation to his own base.

From this interplay between group and individual, between long term and short term, between the permanent morality of the *fanmi* and the constantly maintained reciprocity of affinity and the *korom*, comes the realization that each man has recourse to a whole series of different kinds of relationships for both specific and unspecified mutual aid. The larger social effect of this system emerges from a functional analysis.

Recalling the ecological constraints of this island, this network of mutual assistance among individuals is revealing. Rodrigues has two productive bases: the first, terrestrial, is marked by great insularity and limited space, making it both extremely diverse internally and extremely vulnerable and unstable; at the same time, its second resource, the marine ecosystem, is relatively stable, has great organic diversity and responds to events beyond the island itself. Thus failures in the one are not necessarily mirrored in the other, and the potential of one specific area on the island cannot be

replicated in another. This diversity and consequent independent variation in productive viability is overlaid with the regular passage of cyclones and their attendant destruction. The resultant natural environment with which Rodriguans must interact for their livelihood precludes any kind of specialization, any kind of even short-term guarantee in the success of any one particular economic activity. The Montagnard adaptation to this, and one could argue the only possible one, is the individual's reliance on a whole series of economic ventures, where the failure in one would not doom that individual's entire livelihood.

From this perspective, land is only one in a series of productive factors, as is livestock, a specific crop, fishing, wage labour, artisanal work, or government assistance. At the same time it is physically impossible for one individual to engage in all possible avenues of livelihood. In this respect, he relies on others, as they rely on him, to provide the stopgap measure should all else fail.

The risk-averse, maximization of economic diversity, concern is evident at both the level of the individual, in his conscious pursuit of a variety of economic ventures, and at the level of the overall society, where social relations are informed by both mutual support and relative term. In either case, this kind of "strategy" is accomplished through the control of labour, a sort of cultivation of economic reciprocity among adult men. In purely economic and functional terms, the "bottleneck" in this system is labour, rather than any particular resource such as land or livestock. Note that labour, in this context, is not so much valuable in and of itself, as it is more the means to access different resources. Thus the entire thrust of relations among men mirrors this need to maintain economic reciprocity with other men, not just in the vagaries of the day-to-day, but also in the extreme case.

In effect, Montagnard society is organized along two axes. In one, a series of solidary groups allies men vertically, through patrilineality and through the passage from one generation to the next. In the second, links of economic reciprocity tie myriad individual men together, cross-cutting the vertical relations of patrilineality. These horizontal ties, through individuals, preclude the emergence of hierarchy among both groups and individuals. It is revealing that the huge influx of cash following from massive government employment in the 1970s was overwhelmingly spent in house construction, not on the individual conspicuous consumption of luxury or prestige items. Economic competition among individuals, a characteristic of Western society, does not appear as either value or motivation. Even with an individual's purchase of an item, considered prestigious, like a radio, a camera, a motorcycle, its sharing among the members of a *korom* or within the *lakour*, negates any competitive value. And we have

seen how the mere act of providing a house sets in train a whole series of reciprocal, solidary ties. The money earned and spent on house construction is, in effect, a symbolic capital investment (Bourdieu 1977:178) in the *fanmi prè* and the social relations it entails. This quite concrete affirmation of the fundamental importance of the *fanmi prè*, which contains within it the source of relations of affinity, underlines a kind of prohibition of inequality, and is further borne out in the *korom*.

The social common denominator evident in the *fanmi*, the *fanmi prè*, affinity and the *korom* reveals that in its most basic and simplest characterization, Montagnard society strives towards egalitarian relations among its members. This egalitarianism is achieved through the balance between individual autonomy and reciprocity. This balance is evident within the *fanmi prè*, between each individual man and his collective male kin; a balance evident between an individual man and his father-in-law and at a higher level between a man's *fanmi prè* and his male affines; and a balance among men in the *korom* and the *korom* itself as a counterpoint to the *fanmi prè*, *fanmi* and affines.

Relations among Women

While the *fanmi*, the *fanmi prè*, affinity and the *korom* form the fundamental units of social organization, notably they involve men. Although women are obviously integral to these modes of organization, relations among women, and between men and women, differ significantly from those among men.

The sexual division of labour and the nature and scope of women's economic activities gives a first indication of the more circumscribed, and consequently more intense, character of women's social lives. Thus either an unmarried girl, or a married woman, spend the bulk of their time within the *lakour* and subsistence garden, and interact primarily with their co-residents within the *fanmi prè*. Furthermore, due to the separation between the sexes in daily economic activities, a woman interacts primarily with other women.

Until a young woman marries, most typically virilocally, her daily activities and her most intimate relations are focussed on her mother, primarily, and her siblings secondly, and finally her aunts, *kouzen* and sisters-in-law. A girl can also develop friendships with other young girls in neighboring *lakour* or in school, but these remain marginal to her primary relationships within the *lakour*.

Viewed from without, the *lakour*-bound group of women appears homogeneous and mute, especially in contrast to men. But from an internal perspective, the reality is quite different.

While relations among the men of a *fanmi prè* are predicated on the hierarchy of the patriline and marked by circumscribed behaviour, they nevertheless only very rarely manifest the actual wielding of authority. A man's quotidian affairs are in practice independent and free of interference from his agnates. A woman's position within a *fanmi prè* is also ranked, ranked according to her spouse's, or her father's, place. But, unlike men, her rank has distinct repercussions on her daily affairs.

The senior man's wife has the highest authority among women within a *fanmi prè*; the material basis of this position ultimately rests on her control of the subsistence gardens. It is she who makes the decisions in regard to not only the various agricultural matters, timing, crops, amounts, etc., but also to the assignment of tasks, and the allocation and consumption of these crops. How much will be stored, how much surplus sold, what proportions to each *pti fanmi*, and who will do what each day in the garden. Although it would be inconceivable that any particular *pti fanmi* in the *lakour* did not receive a fair share of garden produce, the quality of that woman's daily life could be made miserable, or contented, by the treatment she received from the senior woman.

Although each woman in a *pti fanmi* retains a certain autonomy within that context, *i.e.*, the privacy of the house itself, the preparation and serving of meals, and her immediate relations with her husband and children, because of the sharing of tasks among women in the *lakour*, her relations outside the *pti fanmi* are in large measure dictated by the senior woman. In practice, it is only a woman who is particularly irksome — selfish, irritable, demanding, or putting on airs — who would feel herself retaliated against by constant assignment to the most menial tasks in the garden, or required to stay in the *lakour* during family outings to a festive occasion, or left out of the lively gossip and subject herself to behind-the-scenes criticism. In most cases, however, the daily life of the women of a particular *lakour* achieve a relatively peaceful and cohesive ambience.

Since in-marrying wives are, by definition, strangers, it is not surprising that unmarried older girls, daughters and sisters of the men of the *fanmi prè* are most *gate* — coddled or given preferential treatment. But these girls are destined themselves to marry out and take secondary place within their new *fanmi prè*. As time goes on, of course, with maturity and children, each in-marrying woman will achieve a certain status and respect, especially as other younger women marry in.

The intimacy and solidarity among women, and especially between mothers and daughters, is dramatically highlighted during wedding festivities. During every Montagnard wedding I witnessed, the bride broke down into disconsolate tears and sobbing, or withdrew into a sullen morose silence, or, on one occasion, approached hysterics — all brought on by the impending separation from their natal *lakour*. The emotional significance of marrying virilocally, into a group of strange women, is underlined in the bride's post-wedding sequestration and ritual incorporation into her new *fanmi prè*. Not surprisingly, her visits to her natal *lakour* in the first years of marriage are frequent. Thereafter, and with the birth of children, a woman's prime orientation shifts to her own *pti fanmi*, and, by extension, the other women in her new *lakour*.

Predictably following from the predominance of virilocality, relations between women and their siblings become attenuated. Once a woman and her sisters are married, they rarely see each other except if their formal visiting to their parents coincide, or at weddings and wakes. A married woman is more likely to see her brothers, during the affinal visits, while their father is alive. But once the father is dead, even these occasions will cease. In the recounting of family genealogies, those most commonly forgotten, or sloughed off, were women, not just in ascending generations, but also in own generation, especially if the woman has married in a distant *pawas* — this regardless of whether ego was male or female.

The “loss” of female kin through virilocality is, however, not felt when residences are not distant, or when a *de facto* regularized exchange occurs between two *fanmi*. Thus Madame Prophète [Calixte], the senior woman in a Montvue *lakour*, had a younger sister married to a man in a neighboring *lakour*; not only did they visit each other regularly, although rarely in their respective *lakour*, but Madame Prophète also regularly gave her sister garden surplus and small amounts of cash, without either husband's knowledge, the sister being in more straitened economic circumstances.

The same Calixte *fanmi* had regularly married with the Salomon *fanmi* in one of the western *pawas* for two generations. Initially, two Calixte women had married two Salomon brothers, in the next generation, a Calixte man married a Salomon woman, and the youngest Salomon man was engaged to a Calixte girl. In neither this case, nor in regard to Madame Prophète, were these interactions structured in any way. For Madame Prophète and her sister, their continued mutual help was a function of their proximity. In the regular marital exchanges between the Calixtes and the Salomons, the individual choices of spouses were fortuitous, albeit more likely given the frequency of interaction between the two *fanmi* because of affinal visiting on festive occasions.

For married women, virilocality and the less frequent instances of uxoricity, discussed earlier, predicate their membership in a particular *fanmi prè* and its collectivity of women. Their place, or the house, in their husband's *lakour* is not lost when he dies. A woman continues to have the right to live in that house until her death. But when women do not marry or establish a union, their circumstances can be problematic, or at least ambiguous. The major disadvantage, obviously, is having a house to live in. Often fathers provide a house for an unmarried daughter, though I never heard of one being actually built for a daughter. Most often, in these instances, the daughter is attached to a house that may have another cohabiting couple in it, for example, Marcel, with his wife and children, had his unmarried sister and her children living with him. Their father and mother had died early on, and Marcel had received from his father's brothers a site in the *lakour*. In another case, thirty-five year old Marguerite, childless, lived with her widowed father and younger brother, also childless and unmarried. Although her younger brother was planning on marrying, she was expected to continue living there, her prospects for marriage unlikely.

Needless to say, a woman without the support of either her own natal *fanmi prè* or a spouse's, is seriously handicapped. One woman was left an orphan in her teens, without paternal or maternal kin upon which to depend. She lived alone, with her children, in a rude hut on squatted-upon land, eking out an existence on the gifts, of cash and food, given her by various visiting men. Despite each of her children having different fathers, she was not considered immoral, merely unfortunate in not having a spouse or support group. Men who visited her regularly explained that they were beholden to give her gifts as she had no other support. The attitude toward this particular woman was in marked contrast to certain other women in Port Mathurin, also unmarried, living alone with children, but who overtly sold their sexual services. Their primary clientele were the Mauritian seamen who came with each ship, as well as any other visiting foreigners. Rodriguan men also availed themselves of their services, but, in contrast, considered it necessary to both bargain and trick these women into sleeping with them gratis. It was as if these women, either by expressly selling their sexuality, or by sexually serving non-Rodriguans, thereby alienated themselves from any kind of solidarity with Rodriguans as a whole, even if only an ideological solidarity, and thus were subject to outright exploitation or manipulation.

While these particular women and their circumstances are extreme examples, it is neither rare nor abhorrent that a woman live without a man. Often these are older women, sometimes widows, sometimes having separated from their spouses, but

possessing a house in each case — either through their fathers, spouses or happenstance. As we have already noted, there is an observed regularity that older widowed women live with their unmarried, *i.e.*, living-alone, daughters. Having garden access, they make do for cash by the various means open to women: laundering and sewing for others, basket weaving, sale of chickens or pigs, and so on. When these women have adult sons, they can also count on assistance from them. Most often, a widowed woman, living in her husband's *lakour*, has with her one of her daughters, unattached, and her children. When the widow dies, the house remains in the daughter's hands. Sexually active women living alone or with their widowed mothers often have regular relations with a particular man, who is expected to help out, especially if the children are his. Although such women are not subject to social opprobrium, a man in this situation is most often called a *vagabon* by his father and others. In contrast to the not uncommon fact that women can and do live alone, with the exception of the Chinese *boutikèr*, I never once encountered any man living alone anywhere.

While on the face of it, a woman's lot is very much tied to first her father and brothers, and secondly her spouse and his kin, in practice women's lives can demonstrate an unexpected amount of independence, especially if material circumstances are sufficient. Many of the older women made explicit their preference to live alone or with a daughter rather than establish another union with a man. And while a woman's independence, or authority within a *lakour*, is nowhere formally sanctioned or defined or ritually marked, it is not thereby nonexistent. Thus as a woman ages she can wield a considerable amount of influence, not just within the *fanmi prè* but also beyond the *lakour* women. Behind the scenes, she can influence her husband in myriad ways and is often privy to the private affairs of her sons through their wives or children. Her sons, although more casual with her than their father, do act with deference toward her and respect her advice and opinions. And, despite her physically separate position, and ostensibly marginal participation, when a group of men gathered, her comments and opinions were discreetly heeded by them.

In terms of structured social relations, women's social positions are directly, and explicitly tied to a man: ideally, and commonly, it is the husband to whom her status is most dependent, but failing the establishment of a union, her father and brothers retain the obligation to support her. Women, just like men, are as much prey to the vagaries of individual families' misfortunes, whether material or in lack of progeny. Thus both women and men can find themselves socially adrift without any real support from anyone, especially when through circumstances they are shorn of close male kin.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fundamental interdependence between men and women in achieving full social status as adults, Montagnard men and women behave toward each other as if they were each distinctly different kinds of human beings. Men see women as separate and secondary to themselves, while women see themselves as at the least “separate, but equal” to men. Especially in regard to practical affairs, women see men as not only separate beings, but distinctly inferior. The festive occasions of *Fèr lanne*, weddings and wakes allow the congregation of greater numbers of women. In these contexts, in addition to eagerly discussed gossip, the primary conversational topic is men — most usually, their ignorance and stupidity, their naïveté, their lack of foresight, their overindulgence in drink, their childish behaviour. And the fact that the subject is one’s husband does not save him from these fiery disapprobations.

This view of men is especially evident when a man is derelict in his duties and obligations within the *pti fanmi* or *lakour*. In virtually every instance, the fault was viewed as not his, but rather another woman’s, whose pawn he was. Whether through her sexual wiles, or through sorcery, it was understood that the other woman had caused the man’s irresponsibility toward his *pti fanmi*. Interestingly, a woman’s recourse in a situation such as this was not to appeal to the man, nor the other woman, but rather to buy the services of a sorcerer, or sorceress, or in minor cases an herbalist, with which to regain control of the man — inevitably through sexuality. Thus, typically, most of the magical recipes herein involved had to do with controlling a man’s sexual urges: either by means of “infecting” the specific man with the sexual essences (hair, urine or menstrual blood) of the woman, who he then could not resist, or obtaining the sexual essence of a man — his semen. For example, a magically endowed bottle of a man’s semen needed only to be shaken vigorously by the woman for him to immediately come to her side. When these various measures failed, this was viewed as due to the competing woman’s superior finances, and hence superior magical forces at her disposal. In all these cases, although the means of controlling a man are sexual, they are not motivated by sexual jealousy or competition, but rather by a concern to ensure a primary call on his material resources. Thus it is only when a man’s behaviour has repercussions on his economic responsibilities, that these measures are resorted to — even when the “other” woman is unknown.

Ironically, when a woman is involved in sexual misadventures, men do not view this as her fault, but rather due to her being taken advantage of by another predatory male. Rodriguan men carefully explained that Rodriguan women were *cho* [hot], that is that their ready sexuality made them vulnerable to any male advance. Thus when a

woman is seduced, it is not her fault — it is rather her spouse's or father's or brother's fault because he, or they, left her unguarded and unprotected and thus open to another man's prowess. Hence a young woman who is allowed to leave the *lakour* unaccompanied, or a wife whose husband is constantly away at night, is virtually an open invitation to another man. A desired woman, who is too well protected by her kinsmen, can be made to come to a man through sorcery also — by his control of her sexual essence, in a bottle, on a handkerchief.

Thus, while women see men as credulous, naive overgrown children, easily subject to manipulation by women, men see women as helpless and weak, also easily manipulated by men. In both cases, each sex sees the other as weak precisely in the nature of their respective sexuality. And, hardly surprising, it is by their respective sexuality that men and women are both manipulated and brought together in union.

Marriage or Union

It is regularized sexuality in the institution of marriage which not only joins men and women's socioeconomic domains into one system, but also brings each man or woman into full social adulthood.

Thus, it is in a household with a cohabiting couple where the respective divisions of labour and economic responsibility come together. And it is in procreation that the patriline, and through it group allegiance, access to resources, and economic security, is established and maintained. A man only becomes a fully responsible, social adult when he obtains three things: first, the house, and second, a wife, and through those, children of his own. For a woman it is first a mate, and thus a house, and second, children. It is worth noting, furthermore, that marriage provides a man with access to yet another network of mutual solidarity — through his father-in-law or son-in-law as the case may be. Marriage not only brings together male and female domains, but also grounds the *fanmi prè* through both the working of the subsistence garden and the fulfillment of the social implications of house provision, and establishes affinal relations between a man and his father-in-law. It should not be surprising that weddings are prime ritual and festive occasions, and, as will be seen later on, manifest these different principles of solidarity in their celebration.

The overwhelming majority of unions in Rodrigues are in fact legitimated, either civilly or religiously and usually both, and celebrated in weddings. The 1972 census lists 3,541 married men, and 402 married consensually. For women, it is 3,536 married, and 687 in consensual union. Thus even from these crude statistics, virtually 90% of all

unions are official marriages and less than 10% are consensual, with between 8 and 6% of women in polygamous unions.

In the day-to-day, there is no visible difference between a marriage and a consensual union. In this context, it is only marked by the difference in terms of address for the woman: a married woman is always addressed as *Madanm* with her husband's first name, while the direct address of a woman only in consensual union is avoided. When referring to a particular couple, the man is always referred to as *bonn hom*, which is also a male term of address, while his wife is *bonn fam* and his consensual mate is *menajèr* [French lit: housekeeper]. A consensual union is called *en menaj*, "in housekeeping." There is no stigmatization of a woman in consensual union, although a man in such a union could be called a *vagabon* by his father.

In fact, the only real difference between formal marriage and consensual union is precisely in the latter's lack of ritual celebration in wedding festivities. The fact that many consensual unions are eventually "legitimized" by a *pti mariaj*, usually when the couple is elderly and expected to die soon, draws attention to two key features of consensual union. First, except in polygamous situations, consensual unions are the result of straitened economic resources of the two *fanmi*. Weddings require large outlays of cash and goods in addition to reliable, economically comfortable *fanmi prè* and male *fanmi*, and so may be unrealizable. The characteristic feature of a *pti mariaj*, besides the small scale the name implies, is that the couple themselves pay for the festivities it entails. That a *pti mariaj* is even thought necessary, especially so late in life, highlights a second significant feature of marriage: its ultimate legitimation lies in the realm of religion. This religious aspect also emerges in certain other consensual unions, those where one of the partners was previously married and now either widowed or separated.

The religious signification of marriage is underscored by the devaluation of the civil aspect of a marriage. We have already noted that a civil marriage has its proper place in the pre-nuptial arrangements of a wedding, not in the wedding itself. It is integral with the engagement period and does not, by itself, signal married status. It is explicitly recognized as a union legitimized by the state, but not by the Church or society. The crucial contrastive feature is that a civil marriage is dissoluble by divorce, also bestowed by the state, whereas a Church marriage is indissoluble full stop. Consensual unions were not civil marriages, they had neither civil nor Church legitimation. Indeed, the only marriages legitimized by only civil decree, were those contracted with non-Rodriguans, most usually with the few Indo-Mauritian, or Chinese Anglican, immigrants, male or

female. This phenomenon was explained by the fact that these alien spouses were not Catholic, they were *payen*, pagans, and therefore a religious ceremony was not possible.

Properly contracted marriages, legitimized by the Church, could not be broken. The permanence of this married state was thought to continue beyond death: a widowed woman or man could not remarry in the Church, while he or she was quite free to establish a consensual union or a “visiting” relationship. While the Montagnard conception of marriage was in many respects identical with official Church doctrine, it differed in these two respects: permanence beyond death, and the insignificance of strict fidelity, especially with respect to men. Church-married couples could also live separately and establish other, consensual, unions. This divergence suggests something other than an interest in piety and assurance in one’s hereafter. Because a wedding is more than its legitimation in the Church, depending equally, if not proportionately more, on the activation and participation of the respective agnates of the bride and groom, the absolute significance of a marriage is precisely in the interrelationship it establishes between two *fanmi* — through the transference of the responsibility for a woman, and the bestowal of adulthood on each of the pair.

The lack of fidelity as a defining feature in marriage, much to the dismay of the priests, highlights what is thought to be the most substantive aspect of marriage: economic reciprocity. The most severe opprobrium a man, as husband, can receive follows from his lack of providing for his spouse and children. A woman who is forced to intensify cash-garnering tasks to make up for her spouse’s deficiency is an object of pity, her husband a scoundrel. And, as we have seen, when a man engages in extramarital affairs, the concern is not with his sexual infidelity but rather with his diminished ability to provide for his spouse. A man who is able to provide for two women, two households, in relatively equal measure is not subject to criticism. In every case of polygamous unions, the man was relatively well-off, although the fact that these separate households were invariably in different *pawas* suggests that a certain amount of social distance contributes as well to the peaceful functioning of polygamous unions.

What wedding festivities highlight, *viz.* the relationship between and among men from distinct *fanmi*, appears to be echoed in the concerns evident when a woman becomes involved in adultery. As mentioned earlier, because women are seen as *cho* and thus not in direct control of their own sexuality, ultimate responsibility is laid on her spouse for his inadequate protection of her. Thus, paradoxically, a woman’s adultery is a male affair, it calls into question relations between the husband and other men, not between a husband and wife. In effect, the seduction of a married woman is both a

challenge and a threat to her husband's status among men. Material or economic concerns are not important in this context. A man's ability to guard his wife from other men is crucial and this ability, in turn, reaffirms the importance of a man acquiring a wife to the establishment of his own autonomy and full adulthood vis-à-vis other men. Thus a wife's adultery is a direct challenge, by other men, to his own standing as a fully adult, independent man.³

Women as wives are crucial not only as the means to establish the cooperative affinal tie, but in the very self-declaration of adulthood. Where a father provides the house and all its social implications for a man's membership in a *fanmi prè*, and having children assures the continuation of the *fanmi prè* and a man's security in old age, acquiring and keeping a wife is the result of a man's individual efforts — the social arena wherein he proves himself as an independent adult.

Given such a conception of the value of women for men, a woman's sexuality, rather than her fertility, would expectedly have more social weight. The lack of stress on female fertility can be seen in various situations. When asked about biological inheritance, or views on conception and procreation, both Montagnard men and women were surprisingly idiosyncratic in their responses. Some believed children were the result of the commingling of both male and female "essence", others thought the male contribution more determinative, still others the female. A single, unitary Montagnard perception of biological procreation does not seem to exist. When a couple failed to have children, men usually maintained it was due to the woman's barrenness, whereas women blamed men's sterility. In either case, children were readily adopted, casually and without much ado. In one *fanmi prè*, one brother's third-born son was transferred at birth to his older brother and his wife and was subsequently considered their own. This occurrence, while not frequently discussed, was revealed casually to my not particularly probing questions. Likewise, in other *pti fanmi*, the fact that one of the children, or all of the children, were not the biological offspring of the couple, was casually revealed or alluded to. In many cases, these *zenfan ramasse* were in fact children of agnates, particularly brothers or *kouzen prop*, but if they were not, this was not a cause of reticence or remark. In all cases, these children had equal rights, in the *lakour*, in the *fanmi prè*, as those of children naturally born and co-resident to their parents. While children in and of themselves were considered crucial in a *pti fanmi*, their actual biological identity was not. Which is not to gainsay that a child of male agnates, thus with *mem sinyatur*, was preferred.

This stress on female sexuality, rather than fertility, and its implications for relations among men, makes more understandable the tension that arises within a *korom* when the young men begin to court young women and eventually marry. Likewise, the concern for women to always be accompanied when they leave the *lakour*. This stress also emerges in a superficially trivial feature of the *sega* dance as performed by Montagnards. The *sega*, danced to syncopatic, percussive music with clear African provenance, begins with a man and woman facing each other. The woman's bodily movements are restricted to her maintaining a stationary place on the dance floor; in contrast, the man, crouching, moves in tight circles around her, then after a short interval, he is pushed or shoved out of this path by another man, who in his turn is replaced by yet another. Thus during a typical Montagnard *sega*, one woman has many male partners, notably, forcefully replacing each other. This feature of the *sega* was frequently ridiculed or condemned by non-Montagnards, especially the priests and righteous Creoles, and was quite unique among all the forms of the *sega* in the Mascarenes, from the Seychelles to La Réunion.

The marking of sexuality, rather than fertility, would not be possible where strict biological paternity or maternity had formal or legal implications. One would expect clear and inviolate definitions of genealogical connections when property or authority devolved along prescribed, hierarchical kinship statuses. But among Montagnards, the house provision rule and the system of *inter vivos* inheritance results in only those relations that are in fact enacted. Thus *zenfans ramasse* are not disadvantaged in any way vis-à-vis an actual son or daughter, just as an uxorilocal husband is not thereby marginalized. By the same token, a woman's fertility is not crucial in either the functioning of a *fanmi prè* or its continuity. But control of her sexuality does, through and in marriage, establish independent adulthood for any individual man.

This aspect of womanhood illuminates what at first sight may seem an anomaly. While various women, especially older women, choose to live without a man, either by themselves (albeit always with at least one *zenfan ramasse*) or with an unattached daughter and her children, no where was there to be found a man who chose to do so. Of note in regard to polygamous men was the fact that their occupations took them far from home for extended periods of time; many of these men were in fact fishermen whose home *pawas* was not adjacent to fertile fishing grounds. These fishermen, like unmarried male schoolteachers, made it their first priority to establish a household with a

woman in the new *pawas*. In effect, it was inconceivable that an adult man remain single or live alone, while it was unremarkable that a woman choose so.

The social division between men and women with its consequent marginalization of women from major male activities and concerns, and women's dependence on men, fathers, brothers, husbands, for access to the factors of production, at first sight suggests the marginalization and subordination of women. While particular women, especially senior women within a specific *lakour*, can wield substantial authority and power, these are essentially individual achievements, behind-the-scenes and circumscribed by context, rather than structured into the nature of women's social positions. Yet women emphatically do not regard themselves in any way "second class citizens." The caveat here is married women, because once a woman is married her house, garden, and economic support is assured through her husband, and this relationship is permanent. Once a woman is married, in her husband's *lakour* and *fanmi prè*, she is in effect autonomous within the constraints of her husband's productive powers and seniority among the *lakour* women. The security, and insularity, among *lakour* women is reflected in their attitude to men, which, most diplomatically, could be called patronizing. A woman's security follows from two social facts: one, husbands owe their wives, and two, men cannot live alone.

When a man takes a woman for a wife, he replaces her father as her guardian and support. He takes on the full responsibility for her material well-being. A bad husband is one who is derelict in his material support, not by sexual infidelity. That a man must take a wife is predicated not only by the sexual division of labour — for that entails only female labour, not spousal labour — but also by the fact that a wife is critical to the achievement of adulthood, maturity and independence. A man who can, but does not, marry, even if in consensual union, is called a *vagabon* by his father. What is a *vagabon*? — a person with no place, with no social ties, with no social substance. While a man receives his start in life from his father, through a house and his membership in a *fanmi prè* and a *fanmi*, beyond that point a man must make his own way: both in his individual economic livelihood and in marrying. Marrying implies not only economic responsibility toward another person, and children, but also the initiation and maintenance of cooperative ties with his affines, and the full assumption of adulthood vis-à-vis other men. It is not enough for a man to be recognized and supported by his father, he must prove himself beyond his natal *lakour*, as an individual and in face of other men.

It is interesting to note that from the inception of Rodriguan society in the first half of the 19th century up until at least the 1920s, the number of women was considerably less than that of men.⁴ This shortage of women was the main complaint of the imported Mauritians, and various of the priests and magistrates throughout the nineteenth century attributed the moral “laxness” of the Montagnard population to the fact that there were not enough women. By the early twentieth century, the proportion of men to women was relatively equal, but, revealingly, many Montagnard men cited too many women as one of the most important contemporary social problems. Though perhaps speculative, the fact of a shortage of women through the formative years of Rodriguan society needs to be considered when examining the place of women in Montagnard society. The sequestration and control of women, first by their fathers and then by their husbands, and the element of competition among men for women, can surely be attributed to this fact. The competition for a woman’s sexuality, rather than her fertility, in the constitution of a man’s fully adult status, would seem to reflect socially this demographic imbalance.

At the same time, there is nothing inherent in the lack of sufficient women to cause this stress on sexuality rather than fertility. Children are still necessary for the reproduction of the *fanmi* and the *fanmi prè*. But when social relationships, kin-based or otherwise, depend for their social definition on their actual enactment, not by their jural or ideological denotation, children need not be identified in purely biological, or paternal terms. Women, however, remain women, no matter their ideological status.

Returning to our characterization of Montagnard society, in its fundamentals, as egalitarian and animated by a balance between individual autonomy and reciprocity, we can see that reciprocity among men is essential to ensuring economic security. This economic security is essential to keeping a woman, but at the same time keeping a woman entails keeping other men away, asserting, as it were, a man’s independence from other men. It is as if women are the fulcrum on which the balance between reciprocity and autonomy weighs.

Marriage, then, is the linchpin in this system: it articulates not only the separate economic worlds of men and women, it also ensures a man’s, and thereby a *fanmi*’s relationship with other men and *fanmi* through *fanmi* exogamy. The achievement of marriage is at the same time the realization of a man’s independence vis-à-vis other men, but also, this newly acquired responsibility is only possible through, and ensures the necessity of, the maintenance of his various ties of reciprocity.

A CREOLE COMMUNITY: CREOVISTA⁵

Creovista is also situated on the coast, the northern coast in this case, part of the generalized residential area encircling Port Mathurin. Amid its various residences are about half a dozen houses built and owned by the government which serve as living quarters for government functionaries on assignment in Rodrigues. On its margins are a couple of buildings housing ministry offices of various sorts. At its center is one of the five Creole *klubs*, *i.e.*, restaurants *cum* taverns, most often used for weddings or parties. There are also two boutiques, one owned by a Creole now resident in Australia and leased to a Chinese man and his Rodriguan wife, the other operated by the recognized mistress of a Chinese man who lives with his family in Port Mathurin.

The forty-five houses of Creovista are stretched along about a mile of beach front and about 1/4 mile inland and up into the hills which here gently slope down to the coast. The social center of Creovista is a grove of *filao* trees, on the beach, where children most often play, teenage boys hold raucous games of soccer, and groups of adults promenade and congregate to chat or play dominoes. Although on any one evening, the *klub* might have several adult male patrons, it is mostly only open for specific festivities.

The 1972 census lists 291 people residing in Creovista. Of the forty-five privately-owned buildings, two are the boutiques both of which include living quarters, one is the *klub*, another, empty, belongs to a private fishing association, and two are *kampman*, *i.e.*, vacation beach houses, one belonging to a Mauritian business on Rodrigues, the other to a Mauritian politician. Of the remaining 39 houses, two stood empty, although one of these was promised, and three were in construction. Altogether, including the two lived-in boutiques and those in construction or empty, Creovista consisted of forty-one households.

The majority of Creovista houses were built of cement blocks, with set-in glass windows and flat roofs designed to catch rainwater, and lacking any sort of porch or *verang*. But about a dozen houses were in the traditional Creole style: wood-frame houses with elaborate carved wooden verandas and wood plank floors elevated a couple of feet from the ground. A handful of houses were the more modest and most common wood-frame sheathed in *tôle*. None of the houses had more than four rooms, and all were characterized by a *lakour* and a kitchen hut, usually to the side or behind the main house, and a small garden of table vegetables, lime bushes, a mango tree.

A flat, sandy road ran the length of Creovista, parallel to the beach, ending at its far boundary and connecting with the main paved road into Port Mathurin at the other

end. The majority of houses in Creovista had electricity, part of the Port Mathurin grid, and all had private connections to the water system.

At its Port Mathurin end, Creovista was a relatively busy area due to the ministry offices and the location of a large primary school; at its other end, residents made up the large part of daily comings and goings, although the Creovista road formed a section of the route from Port Mathurin to the hinterland and so there was a relatively consistent flow of non-residential pedestrian traffic, especially when the ship was in port. While the two *boutik* were the site of daily food and drink purchases for the neighborhood, most families shopped at least once or twice a week in Port Mathurin itself. Likewise, any extraordinary event in Port Mathurin — a soccer game, a political rally, the arrival of the Minister of Rodrigues, the arrival of the ship — occasioned forays into the town by many Creovista residents.

Virtually all the men in Creovista, from the age of about 16 up to about the early 40s, had some sort of full-time wage employment, ranging from manual labour, to technical jobs, to white collar positions. Several younger men were schoolteachers, others were work bosses at the Ministry of Public Works or orderlies at the nearby hospital, a few mechanics or chauffeurs at Motor Vehicles. But several had relatively important positions: one was the head of the local airline office, another the chief clerk at the bank, another the head assistant of the Resident Commissioner. Still others were cooks or gardeners for the expatriate Mauritian functionaries.

However, the most senior men in this *pawas*, those above the age of 50, were either full-time fishermen or owners of large cattle herds, and in a few cases both. In the largest five *fanmi* resident in Creovista, all the senior men had herds in excess of 40 head, a couple reaching 100 head. These they considered small herds as by their own reckoning they had lost over half of their cattle in the droughts of the late 60s and early 70s. These cattle herds were pastured, and paddocked, in the cattlewalk which abuts the *pawas* at one end, and tended by young boys or paid *gardyen*. No one in Creovista cultivated cash crops, although two families residing alongside the cattlewalk grew maize for their livestock. Virtually every family had a few pigs, a couple of goats, and an array of domestic fowl — not just chickens, but also ducks, guinea hens, turkeys. Similarly, every house had a small kitchen garden alongside their *lakour* where vegetables, such as tomatoes, *brèd* (greens), onions, garlic, thyme, and fruits, such as papaya, mango, limes and oranges were grown for the family's own consumption.

In marked contrast to Montvue, a good half of the teenaged girls in Creovista had finished secondary schooling and were employed as clerks, typists, secretaries, and schoolteachers in Port Mathurin.

This preponderance of wage employment in Creovista was reflected in the significant presence of imported purchased items. Thus most houses displayed fancy glassware, framed pictures, radios and cassette players, Mauritian magazines. Although no one owned a car or jeep, quite a few men owned motorcycles and outboard motors for their *piwog*. And both young men and women consciously followed the dictates of fashion emanating from Mauritius. The ubiquity of purchased goods was even evident in the daily diet where tins of tomato paste, evaporated milk, bouillon, bread, tuna, anchovies and tinned meats, tinned butter and cheese and packaged drinks and sweets were integral to the repertory of food items. Predictably, from this relative cash wealth, most of the younger generation had been to Mauritius at least once, and a few had completed their secondary schooling there. In fact, most of the larger *fanmi* in Creovista had relatives living in either Mauritius or Australia.

The more wealthy *fanmi* in Creovista, those whose members held higher status jobs, socialized with many of the transplanted Mauritian functionaries, including the Resident Commissioner, several police officers, Ministry managers, bank and airline staff. When the Resident Commissioner hosted a dinner or a cocktail party, the Rodriguans invited were part of this Creole elite, including Chinese, living in Creovista, but also in Baie aux Huitres, Anse aux Anglais, and Port Mathurin. The social arena for those living in Creovista, not just those most wealthy, was fairly tightly confined to these three population centers, with only a few marginal ties to Grand Baie and La Ferme.

Given that Creovista was bound on one side by the beach, on another by steep foothills, on another the uninhabited cattlewalk, and on the other government offices and the beginning of Port Mathurin proper, it was a much more densely settled area than Montvue. The separation of houses and their *lakour* from neighbors, although still distinct, was minimal in relation to the dispersed character of Montvue, lending the effect of a small rural town.

In further contrast to Montvue, there were no discernible clusters of houses. Each house had its own *lakour* and kitchen hut, its own boundaries marked by anything from bushes and trees to arrangements of rocks and shells. The only two exceptions were two rude houses, each built alongside a more substantial house; in one lived the mother and unmarried sister of the wife in the larger house, in the other, the widowed father of the man in the larger house.

In Creovista, as in Montvue, each house had only one cohabiting couple. But, in Creovista, there was one exception. In that house two sisters lived, both married, but only one of their husbands lived there full-time, the other residing primarily with his mistress and only occasionally visiting his wife.

Although the house cluster, as the visible manifestation of patrilocal *fanmi prè* in Montvue, was lacking in Creovista, an enumeration of the 41 households there reveals the existence of eight *mem sinyatur* families, comprising 31 households, and another 10 household heads with no other *sinyatur* family affiliation in Creovista itself. The eight *fanmi* represented by more than one household are, referring to the Montvue Household list on page 148, and the Map of Creovista on page 149:

Perrier:	4 Households	[# 2, 3, 32, 37]
Celestin:	9 Households	[# 4, 8, 10, 16, 17, 20, 25, 27, 28]
Rigaud:	3 Households	[# 5, 6, 26]
Apollon:	5 Households	[# 7, 9, 11, 12, 18]
Polynice:	3 Households	[# 1, 19, 40]
Chéry:	3 Households	[# 36, 38, 39]
Zamor:	2 Households	[# 21, 22]
Nazon:	2 Households	[# 30, 31]

Comparing the list to the map (page 149), one can see that certain contiguous households share the same *sinyatur*, especially those of the Celestin family. Nonetheless, even these neighboring kin households do not evidence any of the material features we have seen associated with the Montagnard *fanmi prè*: orientation toward a single *lakour*, the contiguous *lakour* treated by members and visitors alike as one unit, any sort of collectively-worked garden, or sharing of domestic tasks among women in contiguous *lakour*, and a social separation between *lakour* members and non-*lakour* members in the course of daily domestic interaction.

The individualized orientation of each household which arises when contrasted with the Montagnard pattern, is carried further when we consider the division of labour and the nature of Creole economic activities.

Creole women, like Montagnard women, were primarily responsible for the domestic functioning of the household: housekeeping, food preparation, child care, tending the *lakour* animals. And, like Montagnard women, they were assisted in these tasks by their children. However, in marked contrast to Montagnards, the allocation of tasks to children, even teens, was much circumscribed by the fact that all Creole children went to school regularly, and virtually all grown children, including most girls, had paid

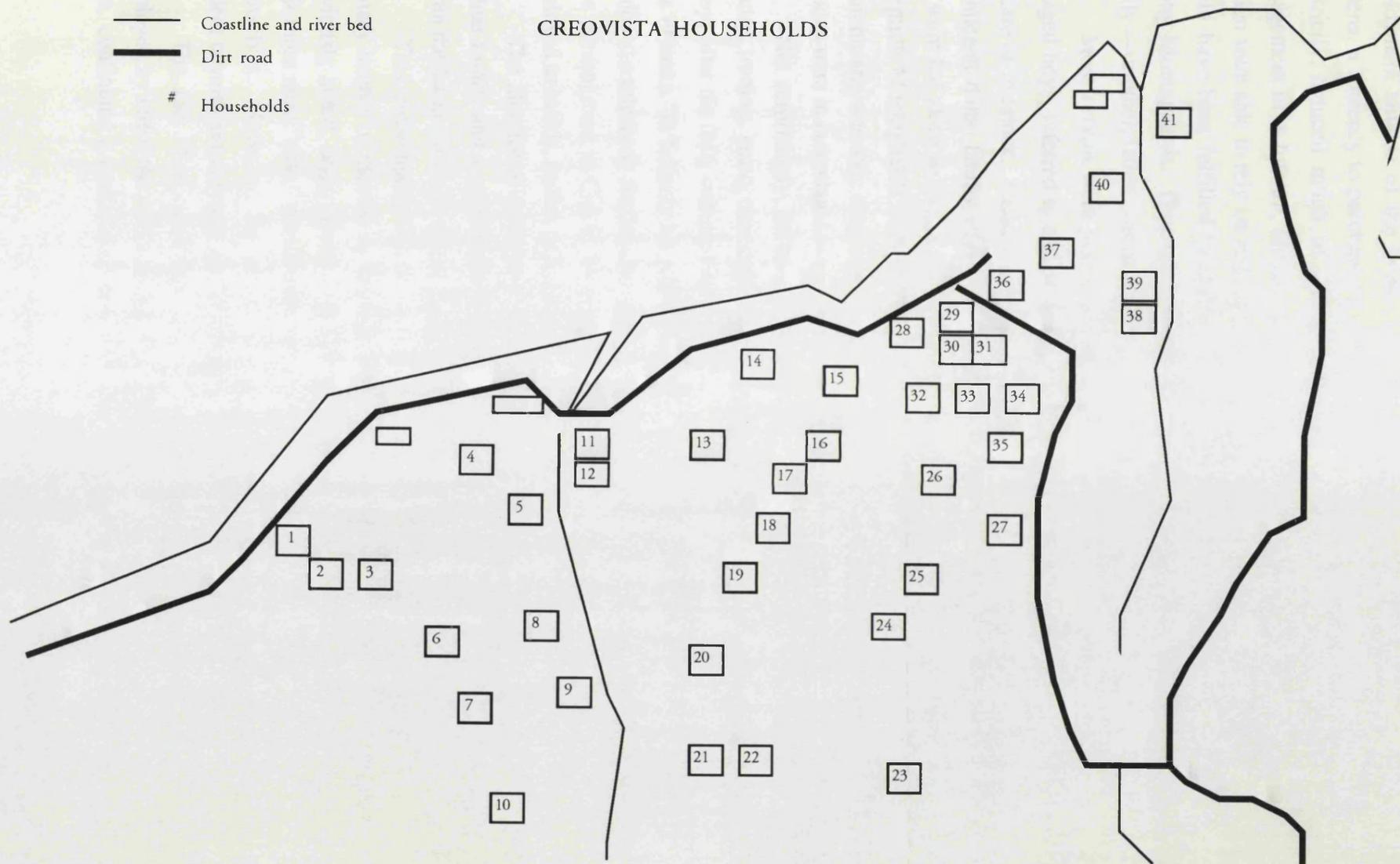
CREOVISTA HOUSEHOLDS

HOUSE - <i>FANMI</i> NAME	MEMBERS AND RELATIONSHIPS
1. B. Polynice	w/wife and children
2. A. Perrier	w/wife and children
3. Y. Perrier	w/wife and children
4. E. Celestin → J. Celestin	alone - unmarried
5. S. Rigaud	w/wife and children
6. F. Rigaud	w/wife and children
7. J. Apollon	w/wife and children
8. E. Celestin	w/wife and children
9. P. Apollon	empty
10. D. Celestin	w/wife and children
11. M. Apollon	in construction
12. D. Apollon	w/wife and children
13. R. Celestin → M. Lacombe (boutique-house)	w/children
14. A. Lacombe (boutique-house)	w/children
15. J. Augustin	w/wife and children
16. M. Celestin	w/mother, wife and children
17. B. Celestin → N. Remy	w/wife
18. A. Apollon	in construction
19. C. Polynice	in construction
20. F. Celestin	w/wife and children
21. P. Zamor	w/wife and children
22. [P. Zamor]	mother and sister of Mme. Zamor (in house #21)
23. C. Baptiste	w/wife and children
24. B. Leroy	w/wife and children
25. Y. Celestin	w/wife and children
26. S. Rigaud	w/wife and children and unmarried daughter w/child
27. N. Celestin	w/wife and children
28. P. Celestin	alone - unmarried
29. S. Prosper	w/wife and children
30. W. Nazon	w/wife and children
31. C. Nazon	alone - widower
32. A. Perrier	w/wife and children and Mme. Perrier's sister
33. F. Colas	w/wife and children
34. S. Saliba	w/wife and children
35. I. Denizé	w/wife and children
36. A. Chéry	w/wife and children
37. M. Perrier	w/wife and children
38. Mme. Chéry	w/unmarried daughter and her children
39. F. Chéry	w/wife and children
40. V. Polynice	w/wife and children
41. J. Faustin	w/wife and children

NOTE: I have substituted fictitious names. Five of the actual *fanmi* names appear on the 1874 petition.

- Coastline and river bed
- Dirt road
- # Households

CREOVISTA HOUSEHOLDS



employment outside of the home. Although the absence of collective, subsistence gardens, a tendency to purchase many food items, and private access to both water and electricity, reduced much of the female labour required to assure the successful management of a *lakour*, female tasks remained time-consuming. However, Creole women were able to rely on assistance by the substitution of paid labour for tasks which would have been fulfilled by children and unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law among Montagnards. Thus every household in Creovista not only contained a nuclear family — mother, father, unmarried children — but also included *servan* [lit: servants].

Most *servan* were young teenaged girls, but many households also employed teenaged boys, referred to and addressed as *tiboy*, whose primary responsibilities were the care of livestock. These *servan* and *tiboy* lived full-time in the household, but were not integrated into family affairs. They slept, most often, on the floor in the kitchen hut, and were fed alone and apart from other family members. These servants were without exception Montagnards coming from some of the interior *pawas*. What was not apparent, and was only discovered over time and social intimacy, was that many of these servants were in fact related to the families which employed them.

Not surprisingly, the most onerous household tasks were assigned to the *servan*: laundry, ironing, heavy cleaning, kitchen garden work and general fetching and carrying. *Tiboy*, after the daily completion of their livestock responsibilities, also assisted in these sorts of tasks. In households with young children or infants, a second *servan* was often employed exclusively for the care of these young children. It is worth noting that *servan* were present even in Creole households where one or more members were themselves employed as maids, cooks, or handymen by Mauritians.

The absence of collective or cooperative economic ties outside of the immediate nuclear family and a consequent reliance on wage employment for supplemental labour within the *lakour*, is also evident in male economic pursuits.

This individualization of economic pursuits is readily obvious when a man's primary source of income is through wage labour, whether skilled or unskilled. As previously noted, wage labour is the predominant mode of livelihood for Creole men, from those most "elite," professionally employed, to those less so, employed as servants themselves. However, the individualistic nature of Creole economic organization is evident beyond just the mere predominance of wage labour in Creovista.

The fact of a significant age division between younger men almost entirely employed by either the public sector or in activities directed toward Mauritius, and older men, continuing a tradition of livestock production and fishing and, in some cases,

retailing, is clearly a function of the unprecedented influx of government monies in the late sixties and early seventies. This same division was evident as well among Montagnards. But, upon examining the economic pursuits of older Creole men, or even younger Creole men in other *pawas* not employed on a wage basis, the emphasis on individualization remains clear.

The description of economic organization or relationships as individualistic is meant here to suggest an orientation to a market economy, albeit one primarily centered in Mauritius, not Rodrigues, where production involves the individual appropriation of a factor of production, where distribution is through the market, and where consumption draws from the market and rests with the individual and his nuclear family. While we have also characterized Montagnard economic organization as initially, at least, individualistic, it is nevertheless firmly integral to a wider socioeconomic organization which encompasses relations in the *fanmi prè*, with affines, and even with the larger *fanmi*, as pointedly revealed in distribution and consumption. In Creovista, the men who are employed as wage-earners sell their labour to institutions which are located outside of Rodrigues, *viz.* the government sector, the various branches of Mauritian-owned businesses (airline, bank, certain commercial establishments) and the Rodriguan retailers who form the local nexus of exchange with Mauritius. These wage-earners meet the greater portion of their needs through the market with the cash they earn, within the context of their own immediate nuclear family.

The older Creole men, the non-wage-employed, engage in productive activities which, on the face of it, are not different from those of the Montagnards — fishing, animal husbandry, cash-cropping. Creole men, like Montagnard men, each control their own factors of production, the fishing boat and gear, their cattle or goats, their at least *de facto* control of plots of land. In both cases, the fruit of their labours are their own and devolution is accomplished through *inter vivos* inheritance.

The differences between Creole and Montagnard in these superficially identical economic pursuits, however, precisely mark the distinction between the two which gives rise to an opposite social configuration. Consider Chéry, a Creole owner of 40 head of cattle, and Simon, a Montagnard with about 20 cattle.

Chéry regularly sold an animal to the weekly Port Mathurin meat market, patronized primarily by not only expatriates, but also Creole residents in the immediate locale, including Mme. Chéry. Barring adverse weather conditions or mechanical problems, the regular, Mauritian-owned ship arrived in Rodrigues every six weeks, bringing with it a dozen or so Mauritian *banyan*. *Banyan* are Mauritian buyers, some

independent, some agents for Mauritian enterprises, who purchase cattle, as well as pigs, goats and poultry, in Rodrigues for sale to the Mauritian market — a market, especially among Sino-Mauritians, which prefers fresh meats to imported frozen meats despite minimal price differentials (Street et al 1978). Chéry usually had several, sometimes up to a dozen, cattle ready for sale to a *banyan*. Chéry employed a *tiboy* full-time to attend to the herd in the cattlewalk, taking it to pasture each day and penning it each evening. Chéry's calculations in regard to his herd included factoring in the not infrequent fines for garden damage incurred by the cattle and the *tiboy*'s negligence, as well as covert strategies to minimize the government head tax. Chéry was decidedly reticent on providing an actual amount of profit earned from his cattle, but, given the 1978 average price for one animal, Rs. 2500-4000 (US\$500-800), depending on size, age and quality, Chéry's earnings must have been on the order of \$10,000 to 12,000 a year, if not more — a princely sum for Rodrigues.

In contrast, Simon, with his 20 head, during the course of eight months, sold only one animal, this to the weekly meat market in Le Chou, a market that only occasionally offered beef, and provided two others, one for a wedding in his *fanmi* and another for *Fèr lanne*. Furthermore, the sale of the one animal was occasioned by the need to purchase school uniforms and supplies for his children. One of Simon's teenaged sons had primary responsibility for the herd. Of course, unlike Chéry, Simon also cultivated onions on a $\frac{1}{8}$ ha of leased irrigated land, the virtually total harvest of which he sold to the Marketing Board, and also had a full-time government job. Both Chéry and Simon went fishing, strictly for household consumption, a couple of times a week. Simon's total annual income was well below \$3,000, despite the additional government wage.

Side by side, the economic strategies of these two typical household heads reveal several salient points. It is clear that productive strategy in the two cases is qualitatively different. Chéry raises cattle for sale to a particular market and his strategy clearly concerns maximization of profit. His goal is increasing cash income, and with this he purchases most of his needs, even the very beef he produces. His profit will be invested in increasing his herd, his children's education and their weddings. Simon, on the other hand, is clearly uninterested in maximizing profits from his cattle; his is the typical peasant approach of utilizing his herd as a kind of savings bank — only selling animals when a particular monetary need must be met. Furthermore, the social value of his cattle, *viz.* for the two festivities, are equal, if not greater, to the purely economic return of a straight sale. While it is true that Simon has another source of income from cultivating

onions and wages, unlike Chéry, it is equally clear that Simon is not motivated by increasing his cash income by investing in, and expanding, either his herd or his agricultural plot. Simon's objectives are about increasing his means to produce symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977:178), while Chéry is straightforwardly increasing his economic capital.

Analogous cases for different economic pursuits reveal the same difference in orientation. A Creole man in La Ferme devoted his entire 2 ha plot of land to the cultivation of garlic and onions; during the labour-intensive periods of the agricultural cycle he employed *journalyèr* to meet his crop's needs. He also has twenty or so cattle, for which he follows a virtually identical pattern as Chéry. Of note is the fact that this man's grandfather, at the turn of the century, devoted all of his land and time, including extra leased plots, to the cultivation of tobacco — which enjoyed particularly high prices during that era. Frenel, a Baie aux Huitres fisherman, goes out every morning before dawn, and during the net season is away for weeks at a time. His entire income is earned from fishing.

Creole economic production is completely oriented to the market, whereas Montagnards display production incentives for which the market is only one aspect. Creole production yields are translated into cash which accrues only to the individual, whereas Montagnard yields are distributed equally in circuits of reciprocal social relationships, *e.g.* a wedding or *Fèr lanne* or a monetary need within the *fanmi prè*, not just the *pti fanmi* — the Montagnard locus for the accumulation of symbolic capital. Likewise, the Creole unit of consumption is the individual and his immediate family, from the marketplace, whereas the Montagnard unit of consumption is the *fanmi prè* not just from the marketplace, but equally from those social relationships entailed by affinity and *fanmi*. These differences are obvious when a Creole son's 13th month bonus salary is spent on buying a motorcycle for himself, while a Montagnard son's 13th month salary is spent on purchasing a table for his father's *sal*; when a Creole man puts aside the proceeds of a particular cattle sale for the rental of a *klub* and catered food, including beef, for his daughter's wedding and a Montagnard man reserves one animal to be butchered and cooked at his niece's wedding.

The individualized and market-oriented nature of Creole economic pursuits further leads to the marked difference in attitudes to wage employment and education from those of Montagnards. Although secondary economic pursuits are also evident among Creole wage workers, these are minimal in relation to Montagnards. Despite the large scale wage employment available to Montagnards in recent years, they did not thereby decrease

or eliminate their other productive activities: the effect of such an enormous increase in cash flow was visible in the sprouting of cement block houses all over the interior of the island, not in the abandonment of land, or livestock, or fishing. Employed Creole men, on the other hand, generally engaged in extra fishing only on weekends, or invested in cattle, often quickly sold at the next ship call. Although these various pursuits certainly garnered extra cash, they were hardly integral to the totality of a Creole man's economic livelihood.

However, the importance of wage employment, especially that more skilled or professional, was such that education was absolutely pivotal to a Creole's future economic livelihood. The importance of wage employment, though greatly facilitated in recent years, well predates the large influx of government monies in the late 60s and 70s. Recall that the ETC was employing record numbers of Rodriguans at unprecedented wages, and the ETC employees privately hired many as cooks, housekeepers and gardeners. By the 1910s, there were two government primary schools, in addition to those of the church, and not all these teachers were Mauritians. Government expenditure on the island indicates salary items for local people, even prior to 1917, both occasional and regular, albeit the latter a small number. By 1958, these patterns are well-entrenched, and are full blown by the end of the sixties. The point here being simply that Creoles, from at least the turn of the century, had opportunities for not only regular wage employment, but also access to more skilled occupations, *viz.* teachers, clerks, agricultural agents, as well as those more menial, but also relatively prestigious — cooks, housekeepers and gardeners for expatriate families, especially Europeans.

Thus it is clear that regular wage employment, especially in skilled occupations, was a feature of Creole socioeconomic organization from at least the beginning of this century. Given this option for Creoles, education is an investment equal to, if not greater than, investment in any purely productive factor like land, or cattle, or fishing gear. This is not an avenue exploited by the majority of Montagnards, although it is indeed a possible means for achieving Creole status. Most Montagnards do not attend school beyond the elementary levels, at most. But virtually all Creole children finish secondary school, and those families who have relatives in Mauritius often send their older children there to finish school.

The individualistic nature of Creole economic activity can be understood as contingent to the particular livelihoods they follow, livelihoods which do not require even periodic marshalling of collective labour. But as the fact that paid labour, rather than family labour, is utilized in Creole cash-cropping shows, this individualistic orientation goes beyond the mere nature of the economic task. Just as among Montagnards the mode

of house provision and the relations entailed in a marriage reveal the active principles in their social organization, so also for the Creoles.

Like Montagnards, Creole men are not adult until they are married, and they cannot marry unless they have a house. While Montagnard house provision embodies the various reciprocal and solidary relationships in the *fanmi prè*, house provision among Creoles highlights the essential independence of a Creole man and a Creole household. Thus, among Creoles, the primary responsibility for acquiring a house lies with the man himself. To state this does not gainsay the fact that a relatively wealthy father will assist his sons in acquiring their houses, but this is coincidental to the expectation, even if only ideological, that a man is solely responsible for his own house, as well as his own family.

Most typically, a young man saves his money to either commence the long-term construction process or, alternatively, to buy an already built house, or, in fewer cases, to merely lease a house. With the fairly recent phenomenon of migration to Mauritius or Australia, existing houses may be given to male members of a man's family. For example, when E. Celestin moved to Australia with his family, he gave his house to one of his brother's sons. On the other hand, the now-deceased senior Apollon house stands empty although two of his brother's sons are in the process of building their own houses. And the widow, B. Celestin, sold her house to someone outside the family, and went to live with one of her daughters, rather than bequeath it to any young Celestin men.

The material costs of constructing a house are no less than those of Montagnards, in fact, they can be considerably more given the tendency nowadays to build with cement and prefabricated windows and doors, all imported from Mauritius. Except for specialized artisanal labour, like masonry, most of the labour employed in construction is a man's own, with the further assistance of non-remunerated labour. While a Montagnard man's father and his *fanmi prè* primarily provide this labour, a Creole man primarily relies on his *korom*.

On the face of it, there is little difference between a Montagnard and a Creole *korom*. In both cases, the *korom* is an egalitarian, same-age group of men, formed in early adolescence and remaining intact throughout the members' lives, with only minimal or marginal changes in membership. Its major orientation is recreational, although in both cases it contains the potential for mutual solidarity and labour cooperation.

The first noticeable difference between the two is that the Creole *korom* spends a much greater amount of time together. Virtually all of a Creole man's leisure time is spent in the company of his *korom*. This is considerable for unmarried men who are

only at their parent's house for a quick meal and to sleep, but only relatively less so for married men, who are only seen in company with their wives in the *lakour* or at mass or a particular festivity. The bulk of this time consists, as with Montagnards, in drinking, gossiping, playing cards or dominoes, and forays throughout the island either in search of amorous adventures or lucrative deals. The fact that Montagnard *korom* occasionally organize larger events, such as the regattas and camp-outs, and Creole *korom* do not, suggests the absence of a competitive edge between and among Creole *korom*

The lack of competition among Creole *korom* appears to coincide with the relatively greater intensity of inwardly directed concerns. Even within the context of amusements, a Creole *korom*'s focus is on *business*. Some of this *business* is identical to a Montagnard's *korom*, for example the lending and borrowing of money. However, unlike among Montagnards, these transactions were strictly and efficiently monitored, on paper, by all members. Each monthly pay day, the *korom* met to settle accounts, and for larger debts, the accounts were settled each December upon receipt of the 13th month salary coming to government employees. Creole *korom* often held property in common, such as motorcycles, outboard motors and *piwog*, and the times and responsibilities allotted to each member in regard to this common property were strictly accounted for on paper. *Business* was wide-ranging: keeping watch for policemen during illegal night fishing (using lights, which attract the fish, and using spears for lobster — which is at all times illegal) and then sharing the proceeds; setting up a particularly lucrative deal with a Mauritian *banyan*; manipulating friends and connections to get a *korom* mate out of jail for some minor infraction; and all kinds of political activities, most usually forming cliques, both for and against, particular candidates at political rallies.

However, the most important *korom* activity, one which took precedence over even weekend amusements, was the mutual assistance given in house-building for unmarried men, and house improvement among those already married. As one would expect, given the greater preponderance of cash among Creoles, as well as the individual responsibility for house-building, Creole men don't usually start building their house until their late teens at the earliest, and most often in their middle to late twenties. By this time they have put enough money aside, sometimes augmented by a bank or *korom* loan, and the house is usually built at one go, rather than over a number of years as among Montagnards. More than simply the accrual of sufficient funds for the construction of a house, Creole men initiated the construction of their house, or the purchase or lease of one, only when they had chosen a prospective wife and become engaged (*afyansé*).

This close social identification of house acquisition with an actual marriage among Creoles more than anything else sets off the distinction between Montagnard and Creole significations of the house and marriage. While the provision of a house for Montagnard men both symbolizes and concretizes the solidarity of the *fanmi prè*, aside and apart from an actual marriage, for a Creole man the house is integral to marriage, and this achievement is seen as his own, despite the *korom*'s not insignificant contribution.

While the site of a Montagnard house within the *lakour* of a *fanmi prè* is intrinsic to a man's membership in that *fanmi prè*, the actual placement of a Creole house is only an epiphenomenon of other factors. All of the land in Creovista is leased from the government. Some of these leases date back to the 1920s, others are of more recent origin. In those cases where several houses belonging to related men are in close proximity, e.g. the Celestin houses, this is due to the adequate size of the original plots. There is nothing besides convenience which dictates these choices. Likewise in the Creole community of Baie aux Huitres, where most of the land is freehold, those plots of adequate size typically contain houses of related kin. Furthermore, in neither of these situations are the related kin necessarily patrilineal. The Creole man's decision as to placement of his house is fundamentally a practical one, constrained by availability, convenience, affordability, although he will usually manage to remain in the same community as his parents. Looking at the Creovista Map (p.149), the households 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, and 27, all form a rough circle. Households 13, 16, 17, 20, 25, and 27 are all owned by Celestin men, but one of these has been leased to someone outside the family. Households 15 and 24 belong to the husbands of two Celestin women, and all the others, 18, 19, 21, and 26 belong to men who have other patrilineal kin in the immediate area. Just on the periphery of these, is a house built by a man whose natal family resides in another community further down the coast and from where his wife comes also. In fact, the original Celestin-leased plot comprises households 13, 15, 16, 17, and 28, the other parcels having been acquired at later dates by different individuals.

At the same time, it must be recognized that there is a visible tendency for certain families to at least numerically dominate certain areas. Of note are two features of this tendency: one is that there is not an overwhelming stress on patrilineal kin, that is daughters of the family with their husbands are also typically present in any loose congregation of households; and, two, the residential proximity of kin does not entail any sort of collective, or even reciprocal, economic enterprises, for either gender.

As noted earlier, the lack of any collective enterprises among Creoles can in large part be attributed to the nature of their economic specializations, but as the case of agriculturally-oriented Creoles demonstrates, it is not strictly the nature of the activity which precludes any collectivity. In its essence, inheritance among Creoles and Montagnards is virtually identical. In both cases, by the time a son marries he is either well-embarked on his own economic career or else he is a full participating partner in his father's. Currently, in Creovista, virtually all of the men under 50 years of age have some sort of full-time wage employment, whether "professional" and "white collar" or only skilled. However, of the older men, predominantly cattle owners, fishermen, and in one case a *boutik* owner, all had embarked in their economic careers in tandem with their fathers. Thus A. Chery and E. Chéry, half brothers by the same father, had both begun their respective cattle herds with the help of their father, a large cattle owner, while their other three half brothers had emigrated to Mauritius. Rigaud had been employed for thirty years as a cook for various ETC or government expatriates, while one brother had emigrated to Australia, another was a full-time fishermen, another was a cattle owner, and yet another was a retailer. The father had been a fishermen, the mother the daughter of a major retailing family in Port Mathurin. While Rigaud had early on taken domestic employment, one brother had worked with his father, another took over his few head of cattle and expanded it, and the last had begun his own *boutik* with the assistance of his mother's father. The point here is that inheritance of anything that could be termed material family patrimony, the family estate, did not occur. While certain factors of production are essential for certain careers, e.g. the initial head of cattle, fishing boats and gear, especially nets, access to a plot of agricultural land, or even the provision of secondary education, or the initial money which would allow emigration, these were bequeathed well before the father's death, given in fact at the time of each son's embarkation on his economic career — in other words, an identical kind of *inter vivos* inheritance as among Montagnards.

Clearly, a crucial factor, without which none of this could occur, is the lack of pivotal concern of land *per se* and its virtually universal accessibility. Even among those Creole families in La Ferme, owning several hectares of agricultural land, the land devolved to the son, or even son-in-law who was most interested in farming it, without being parcelled out to each child. This system of devolution is most familiar in modern industrialized societies where in fact the conditions for its operation are similar to those for Creoles in Rodrigues: the possibilities of choice in economic livelihood, the lack of dominance of one particular mode of production, and thus absence of stress on

preserving a material family estate for the benefit of descendants. Even for those Creole families holding land freehold, there was no concept of a shared patrimony for descendants, even in the form of trees or other perennials.

Thus the site of post-marital residence does not in itself indicate the operation of any particular socioeconomic principles, except in a father's interest in his son's viable adult life, namely marrying and having a family of his own. Thus while a young man was expected to build his own house at his own expense, only those whose fathers were exceptionally poor did so without their assistance. And where young women were only expected to bring to their marriage the bridal trousseau (linens, clothing, etc.), it was their father's interest also to see to it that the future husband could adequately provide furniture, a house, and a house plot to their daughter. Thus the land most often available to a young man for the building of his house was usually adjacent to his father, or his father-in-law, or available in the immediate area through their intercession. Nevertheless, the ideological depiction of a young man's marriage was as the result of his independent agency, despite the tacit understanding that fathers certainly assisted, financially and materially, their soon-to-be-wedded offspring.

The tacit assistance in this aspect of setting up a new household, the house, its site, its accoutrements, was quite markedly different in respect to the wedding itself. In the celebration of a Creole wedding, the respective fathers of the bride and groom quite explicitly undertook the expenses associated with it. This responsibility was theirs alone and entailed not only the payment for the clothing of the couple and bridesmaids, but also the place, a *klub*, and all the refreshments, as well as the choice of the guest list, the band and the time.

Thus while the independence of each nuclear family was stressed in its quotidian activities, both domestic and in the economic livelihood of the male head, and in its inception — as a result of a man building a house for a particular woman, at the same time the authority of the father was evident in the necessity of his approval in the choice of spouse as well as in the actual public celebration of the marriage. A father's disapproval resulted in not only the loss of a public celebration and hence legitimation of the marriage, but also, to a less visible degree, the loss of his assistance in building a house. Significantly, when an elopement occurs it is publicly, and symbolically, declared by the fact that the couple spends the night together in the house of the acquiescent parent — two non-approving parents would preclude the possibility of elopement as there would be no place to sleep together.

Not surprisingly, the relations between parents and children, but especially between fathers and grown children, were somewhat ambivalent. Strict conventions of

respect and deference were expected toward one's parents, especially one's father. This palpable hierarchy of authority went beyond mere politesse. It ranged from the *de rigueur* deference given to a father in his company, to his absolute right to treat his children, even abusively, as he saw fit, to his expectation of absolute obedience even from adult sons. One man in his mid-twenties, with his own house and full-time government employment, had made all the necessary applications and received a visa to migrate to Australia. However, as much as he desired to go, he could not because his father had denied him permission. A revealing and curious reversal of western Christmas celebrations, where Creole children present their parents with gifts, not vice versa, quite succinctly expressed this structure of authority.

Yet, contrary to the relationship between father and son among Montagnards, there is no quotidian material dimension to the Creole one, the father and mother do not play any significant role in their adult children's households. And even a father's assistance in acquiring a house is tacit. Yet, at the same time, the Creole father's support, symbolic and material, is absolutely essential in the establishment of a marriage, in the wedding celebrations themselves.

The inherent ambiguity in the relationship between a father and his offspring may be what contributes in fact to a tendency among Creoles which would be shocking to a Montagnard. That is, despite postures of respect and deference in his presence, both Creole men and women were constantly parodying and belittling their fathers out of his hearing. The constant derisive mimicking, sneering, snickering and name-calling of their fathers was so pervasive that it could not be attributed to particular personalities or idiosyncratic families. One of the civil court officials spoke of the "alarming" rise in domestic cases between fathers and sons — accusations of unwarranted beatings, money owed, and politically motivated accusations of libel — some of these even arriving to the point of a public hearing in the courthouse. This latent, though often enough overt, hostility between a Creole father and son or daughter surely lies in the disjunction of the authority a father wields in the establishment of their marriage with the expected independence of action of the son and a newly established household. Significantly, this often visible hostility ceased, or at least was never noted or remarked upon, once a couple was married and living in their own house.

If the ultimate sanction for a father's authority among Montagnards is the fact that he can "send them away, after that you are not made to help them anymore," and thereby deny them the security of the *fanmi prè* and the ties of "diffuse enduring solidarity" that arise from his *fanmi*, then a Creole father's ultimate authority rests on something quite

different. As we have seen, his authority is not grounded in economic reciprocity or the material benefits of diffuse enduring solidarity among kin. The key to a father's authority is to be found in the social implications of the part a father plays in his children's marriages.

We have noted that the first indication of the importance of the father in marriage is the necessity of his approval, not just for the daughter, as is the case for Montagnards, but also for the son. During 1978-79, eight elopements occurred on Rodrigues, and in each case at least one of the partners came from one of the Creole communities. These cases were all in reaction to one of the fathers denying permission to marry. In another marriage which caused much comment, the father of the bride was opposed to her proposed spouse. However, her and her groom's (with his own family's support) determination to be married forced the tacit acquiescence of her family. The wedding occurred, a small affair, with the glaringly obvious absence of her parents and close kin. The officiating priest sermonized at length on the subject of discord between parents and their offspring and the necessity of respecting love between two individuals sanctified by the Church, not just at the ceremony itself, but at several Sunday masses. In this instance, the bride's parents, however reluctantly, allowed the marriage rather than bear the scandal of an elopement.

The crucial role of the respective fathers does not rest on the subsequent economic viability of the newly established household. Rather, his role is clear and unequivocal in the wedding itself. It is the two fathers alone who host and pay for the wedding festivities. As among Montagnards, an uncelebrated wedding is virtually not a marriage at all. Similarly, a civil marriage has no value, and a Church marriage, with no attendant celebration, is only relatively more meaningful. The importance of the public celebration in the legitimation of a marriage, together with the pivotal role of the father's approval inherent in its celebration, leads us to appreciate the importance of its public nature, and by implication, the element of status display integral to any wedding. As will be explicated further on, the aspect of status display is reiterated throughout a Creole wedding celebration. While status display is also evident in a Montagnard wedding, the fact that the whole celebration is conducted by and for the extended agnatic kin of the couple critically marks the difference with a Creole wedding. A Creole wedding is conducted by only the two immediate nuclear families of the couple vis-à-vis the larger society. Here is the site of Creole display of symbolic capital.

Alerted to the crucial nature of status display for the two families, it is clear why a father's approval is so important. The social standing of his own family is brought to bear in the creation of a new marriage and its resultant family and household. In effect, it

is through a wedding that a father, or the parents, bequeath to their offspring a particular position in society, and by the same stroke announce and validate their own position. It is the father, through the wedding celebration, who bequeaths the symbolic social capital he himself has acquired, to his son or daughter. This symbolic capital is in essence a particular social standing, or relative social rank, within Creole society, already self-consciously elite.

While in any society marriage is one element in a “system of biological, cultural and social reproduction by which every group endeavors to pass on to the next generation the full measure of power and privilege it has itself inherited” (Bourdieu 1976:141), among Creoles marriage carries virtually all the weight of social reproduction. Because marriage is the social site where any two families are brought together, it implicitly entails not only relative social ranking between them, but also between each and the rest of society. Because marriage is where adult life begins, and where the material assets for that adult life are already in play and fully demonstrated (in the completion and condition of the house, in the occupation of the husband), it further establishes the relative social position of the new family.

Rather than providing the fulcrum whereby Montagnard autonomy and reciprocity are balanced, marriage among Creoles eschews reciprocal and egalitarian social relations with the rest of society and narrows its focus to the two natal families and the creation of the third. Among Creoles, who one marries, more than any other social fact or material asset, or more precisely, embodying every other social fact or material asset, establishes a particular social standing. Where *Fèr lanne* is the most important and most obvious social festivity among Montagnards, among Creoles, marriage celebrations eclipse all other social events.

Thus marriages are arenas of social competition. A marriage is at once the declaration and the negotiation of social standing. The various diacritica of Creoleness — lightness of skin, residence, occupation, education, wealth, ancestry — are precisely the elements that are evaluated when a particular person is deemed an acceptable spouse. Thirty years ago, Lamy, the grandson of a Chinese man and a Montagnard woman, of the darkest mien, but managing to acquire several hundred head of cattle and a house site in Creovista (his natal home was in the interior) was the accepted spouse of Céline Frenel, a pale woman, one of the daughters of a “white” Baie aux Huitres family of impoverished fishermen. Their children today are fully integrated in Creole society, two of whom have married well within the elite of Creoles. On the other hand, Gabriel Polynice, a dark-skinned young man, son of the mistress of a Creole man, was the only Rodriguan with a university degree and held a professional post with the government.

He was unmarried and never included in Creole affairs and he often, vehemently, decried the racist nature of Rodriguan society. Also unaccepted in Creole society, Agnès was a decidedly white girl from an impoverished La Ferme family whose father was an Australian who had briefly visited the island — she was employed as a *servan* by one of the married Lamy children.

In the case of Lamy, wealth whitens. For Agnès, white skin was insufficient to counteract poverty and the lack of a father. And, for Gabriel, he would most likely have been accepted in Creole society had his father not been Creole — the differential ranking of family lines that occur when a man has a second family perforce favor the legitimate offspring, so accepting the one precludes the acceptance of the other. One of the largest families on the island was divided into Creole and Montagnard lines, the latter acknowledged descendants of the Montagnard mistress of the founder at the turn of the century. The social distinction between the two lines was marked by the legitimate descendants' insistence on a difference in the spelling of the *sinatur*. However, in the case of Gabriel, who at this point was not married, his “arrival” in Creole society was not totally impossible: he still had the possibility of achieving a “good” marriage. Likewise, Agnès still retained the potential of “arriving” in Creole society, when and if she made a good marriage.

As these cases demonstrate, acceptability within Creole society is not formulaic: it depends equally on the achieved qualities of the individual or family and on the perception of the larger society. At each instance, in each particular marriage, not only are the markers of acceptability presented and demonstrated, they must be acknowledged socially — not just by the mere mutual acceptance of the marriage by the two natal families, but also by the extent of the celebration and the “quality” of the guests. It is each family's social achievement that is presented at each marriage, the display of *zourit bouit* as the Montagnards would have it, making marriage at once the declaration and the negotiation of social status.

As we have seen in the historical record, the achievement of Creole social status entails a self-conscious separation, a declared distinction, almost a manufacture of difference, from the larger society, the Montagnards. The self-definition of this elite is always relative to the bulk of Montagnards. The ties of solidarity and reciprocity that provide the foundations of Montagnard society are precisely contrary to those which structure Creole society. It is from individual achievement and competition for social distinction that the contours of Creole society arise.

These social concerns have their full realization in any given marriage, but they are present as well in more mundane social affairs. Thus the separation and independence of nuclear families is not only evident in their economic pursuits but comes clear in the construction of the kinship universe. A Creole family, *fanmi*, is, like a Montagnard one, defined by *mem sinyatur*, but is not, on the other hand, bound by the stricture of *fanmi* exogamy, nor qualified by *nom divize*. Among Creoles the *fanmi* and the *mem sinyatur* entail strict legitimacy, defined civilly and in the Church. Thus, *ipso facto*, the various secondary wives and families of polygamous Creole men are not considered *fanmi*, though the “blood” relationship is not thereby negated. Where Montagnards delimit those who are in *fanmi* and thus not marriageable by *fanmi* exogamy, Creoles delimit kin, and therefore those *en fanmi*, through specific genealogical links.

Creoles appropriate what they perceive as the Catholic Church’s proscriptions: marriages can only occur with kin who are related less than “three degrees.” However, with special dispensation, marriages can occur within only one and two degrees. First, second and third degrees refer to collateral links in a bilateral genealogical grid. Thus, *kouzen premyèr lye* were ego’s immediate collateral relatives: parents’ siblings’ children. *Kouzen douzyèm lye* were ego’s parents’ parents’ siblings’ children’s children, and *kouzen twazyèm lye* grouped all other same generation kin known to be related, though not necessarily specified. (It is worth noting that Montagnards know and recognize these so-maintained Church proscriptions, but explicitly acknowledge their non-applicability among themselves.) Not only is the Creole *fanmi* conceived of as bilateral, there is a distinct stress on consanguineal linkage to certain originating ancestors of the family. In every Creole genealogy collected, the family founder was always cited, and in every case this founder, male or female, was either European or Chinese and described as coming to the island from one of the *grands pays*. Notably, none of the spouses of the family founders, presumably all already resident on the island, were ever named, and similarly, in the lists of members in the ensuing generations, certain individuals, especially affines, were either sloughed off or their family names forgotten. These individuals, like the forgotten “native” ancestor, apparently failed in some way to meet “Creoleness.”

The patrilineal focus of Montagnard kinship reckoning implicitly recognizes all collateral lines of males in the ascending generations, thus the Montagnard *fanmi* ever increases with each generation, but the genealogy itself retains the patrilineal focus

relatively evenly in each ascending generation. In contrast, a Creole genealogy not only includes bilateral affiliation to two different founding Creole ancestors, it also includes immediate collaterals, male and female, and their spouses. A Creole genealogy is extremely bottom heavy: in own and first ascending generation, virtually every sibling and parents' siblings are included together with their spouses, but further ascending generations thin out rapidly, usually only citing single individuals until reaching the founding ancestor. In several instances, the names of deceased collaterals in the ascending generation were forgotten while their spouses were faithfully listed. And here and there, specific individuals were either omitted completely or their names were completely forgotten — among certain of these it was discovered, through third parties, that the missing individuals were Montagnards. In fact, as earlier noted, it was found that quite frequently the *servan* in the subject household were related through the nominally “unrecognized” kin.

The bilateral and differential reckoning of kin among Creoles is also manifest in the lack of currency for certain kin terms used by Montagnards. The *frèr ene*, *kade*, and *bèjamin* ranking was not used and neither was the distinction between *kouzen prop* and *kouzen par alyanz*. When Creoles specify cousins, it is only by degree as described above.

The ritual apparatus apparent in various Montagnard celebrations whereby principles of seniority and reciprocity are carefully observed do not exist among Creoles. Not only are extended kin excluded from active participation in marriage celebrations, but *Fèr lanne*, Easter, Christmas, and Assumption holidays are only marked by visits to one's immediate parents, who, notably, do not return the visit. And, even then, parents were not necessarily all so honored: Lamy never visited his own mother, whereas he was at his mother-in-law's house at every holiday. Creoles regarded the elaborate visiting cycles of the Montagnard *Fèr lanne* as quaint and amusing, and certainly alien to their own way of life.

Despite bilateral reckoning and the inclusion of affines in what Creoles regarded as *fanmi*, the universe of kin was remarkably limited. The narrowness of Creole kinship networks is most immediately obvious in two typical features: one, the limited repertoires of *sinyatur*, and, two, striking *pawas* endogamy. In any genealogy, but even for a series of genealogies, the same family names reappear. It will be noted that certain family names are present in all the Creole genealogies presented, *viz.* Celestin, Apollon, Rigaud, Perrier, Baptiste, Nazon, Faustin, Frenel, Polynice. Similarly, the same *pawas* are ever present: Baie aux Huitres, Port Mathurin, La Ferme, Anse aux

Anglais, Baie du Nord, Caverne Provert, and among the *grands pays*, Mauritius, France and Australia.

Of course, such a limited pool of potential partners, limited by suitable family and *pawas*, could not operate without the widest possible definition of marriageable kin. Thus, although *kouzen premyèr lye* and *douzyem lye* were ostensibly prohibited, various cases of such marriages had occurred, with, it was said, appropriate Church dispensation — albeit specific instances could not be cited. Similarly, besides signalling the significance of parental approval and status considerations, elopements could also be understood as consequent to a dearth of potential spouses.

Even without the evidence of social practices which restrict the repertory of active kin, like holiday visiting and wedding responsibilities, the kinship system by itself demonstrates the differential reckoning of kin, not on the basis of “diffuse, enduring solidarity,” but rather on association with specific elite families, specific individuals. Where Schneider elucidates a “Famous Relative” syndrome for American kinship (1968), here an “elite Creole relative” syndrome clearly operates. As we have noted, this status concern goes well beyond the economic and material interests of any individual or family.

This status concern reaches one of its fullest expressions in Creole selection of godparents for their children. Creole godparents have virtually no social role in their godchildren’s social lives except in the bestowal of certain favors integral to their own social or occupational positions. Even this appears secondary when we note that the couple with the most godchildren were the Resident Commissioner and his wife, Mauritians whose stay on the island was known to be of limited duration. With only marginally less godchildren were all the high-level functionaries, mostly Mauritians, assigned to the island. Notably, Indo-Mauritians or members of the one large Indian family on the island, were excluded, presumably because they were *payen*. Not surprisingly, these same elite, Mauritian and Rodriguan alike, were present at virtually every Creole wedding. Even godparents selected from among kin were recognized as unarguably elite.

Given this manifest concern for status achievement among Creoles, the emphasis on legitimacy should not be surprising. While Creole men are not constrained by ideals of fidelity within marriage, their offspring from other than legal, religiously sanctioned marriages are not recognized as *fanmi*, even when such offspring are acknowledged and materially supported by the Creole man. Polynice in Creovista had six children by his Creole wife. These children were well within the mainstream of Creole society. But Polynice had another eight children by a Montagnard woman in another *pawas*. Not

only did they all recognize each other, Mme. Polynice occasionally had the household assistance of Polynice's mistress, and the legitimate sons of Polynice occasionally pursued business deals, or attended funerals and taverns, with their half-brothers. While a sentiment of mutually beneficial assistance could be said to hold among the two sets of offspring, their social separation rendered this more on the order of a straightforward patron-client relationship, limited to specific instances of interaction, rather than anything more generalized. Likewise the frequent vague kinship relation of *servan* in Creole households: from the point of view of the Creole family, these youths were employed as a favor behooving a patron, rather than as an aspect of some kind of kinship solidarity. For the Montagnard family, this favor was a fortunate opportunity for the child in the pursuit of his or her own livelihood and made possible through the kin relationship.

While the importance of family legitimacy did not compromise the social acceptability of a Creole man despite his various permanent or fleeting amorous adventures, the reverse, for Creole women, was decidedly not the case. Whereas among Montagnards the ultimate fidelity of a woman depended on the man responsible for her, among Creoles, women themselves were ultimately responsible for their virginity and fidelity, and failure to uphold these brought shame to their family. After Lamy unequivocally stated that he would kill his daughters if they slept with anyone before marriage, but the same behaviour of his sons was inconsequential, he explained that this was so because men had strong sexual urges and were like bulls in a herd, able and willing to have sex whenever the opportunity arose. But for women, on the other hand, lack of chastity ruined them permanently: it made them bad, corrupt and dirty and thus unfit for marriage and motherhood. Therefore, he argued, a woman had a much greater stake in remaining a virgin until marriage and should thus be able to exercise self-control and discipline.

Although Lamy's statements and sentiments on the topic of female chastity were perhaps exaggerated — he did have four daughters — they do not really overstate the case among Creoles. Creole girls and unmarried women were always strictly chaperoned. This did not involve merely being accompanied by someone else, as among Montagnard women, but rather always having a monitoring adult nearby. In the evenings, even the gaggles of young girls under the *filao* trees in Creovista were supervised by at least one adult woman. It took several months before young Creole women were allowed to visit my house, or accompany me on various little forays, without their mothers in close attendance. A brief exchange out of others' hearing

between a young man and a young woman, even in public, was sufficient to arouse enormous rounds of gossip and speculation.

And yet, behind this screen of chaste and maidenly behavior, illegitimate births did occur. In Creovista, there was one such, a young girl with an infant, still living with her parents. At first curious, this instance did not occasion any particular ire, or stigmatization, or even great scandal. It was explained to me that the couple *te fe Pak avan Karèm* (lit: made Easter before Lent), but why this should be acceptable was to be found in the fact that the father was another Creole, and that she was only waiting for him to finish his house to be married. Their wedding would be a disappointingly small affair, but their union did not shame their respective families, they were both of sufficiently Creole status. On the other hand, a scandal was brewing because one Creole daughter was consistently flirtatious with a young expatriate Indo-Mauritian functionary. The girl's parents were vehemently opposed to such a marriage, and if the girl decided to consummate this affair her subsequent fate would be ostracization, probably to Mauritius. One of the major scandals of the year was a case where a young Creole girl was seduced by an Indo-Mauritian policeman. The girl herself was sequestered at home, and if her brothers and father had not physically attacked the policeman in a drunken brawl and been brought to court, and overtly public scandal, the matter would have remained quietly hidden. At the same time, the presence of Mlle. Lacombe and several children, the mistress of a Chinese *boutikèr*, and operator of one of his *boutik*, was acceptable in Creovista society. Although relatively light skinned, she came from a Montagnard family in Le Chou, and her current status was certainly a step up for her. The question here would concern her children, and their acceptance into Creole society would largely depend on what their father would provide for them and their prospective spouses when the time came.

All these cases demonstrate the play and interpretation of status considerations at work — and these clearly operate in the context of the natal family and their particular security or aspirations in Creole society. In the first case, not only would the illegitimacy soon be righted by marriage, but the two families in question were not either compromised by the prospective spouse. In the second case, not only was the prospective husband unacceptable, but the girl's family already had weak Creole connections on her father's side — he was the first in his family to marry an undisputedly Creole wife by virtue of his wealth. In the third, only the brawl and subsequent court case brought by the policeman would have allowed such publicity. And the young girl will never make a “good” marriage if she marries at all. In the fourth situation, Mlle.

Lacombe clearly had lost nothing, she had in fact gained an entrée into Creole society, and assuming their father's material assistance and a "good" spouse, the children could achieve a clear social position in Creole society. Unlike Gabriel Polynice's mother, Mlle. Lacombe' status as a mistress was not eclipsed by the existence of a 'legitimate' wife and children, as this particular Chinese man was married to another Chinese woman, Anglicans both, and thus beyond the strictures of Creole society.

The kind of chastity expected of women, as articulated by Lamy, is a literal application of an ideal, and as with any ideal, especially moral and ethical ones, there is more often than not a disparity between it and the actual. Although the considerations of status manifestly qualify the application of this ideal, its statement does underline the symbolic importance of the conjunction of female chastity and marriage among Creoles. Thus, where a good marriage is the outcome of successful status achievement, a pure and unsullied woman is the conduit whereby status — respectability and standing — is transmitted from one family to another. If among Montagnards women in marriage symbolize the full achievement of manhood, with its double aspect of independence and reciprocity, among Creoles, women signify a particular status in society — it is her comportment which reflects both her natal family's respectability and her own new family's future standing. Notably, it is men primarily who "climb up" the Creole social ladder. It is out of this understanding of the role of women in the reproduction of Creole status that gives rise to the ideological construct of Creoleness being biologically derived, rather than socially achieved.

Despite the ideological importance of women, or, perhaps, because of it, Creole women, relative to Montagnard women, lead very circumscribed lives, even those who have wage employment outside the home. Not only were young women strictly chaperoned while outside the home, the only socially acceptable occasions they could participate in were explicitly family ones, *viz.* weddings, holiday visits, church attendance. A source of frustration and bewilderment was often expressed by expatriates when they hosted dinner parties or cocktail receptions. Virtually without exception, these kinds of occasions were attended by only the men of the Creole families invited. The men themselves explicitly excluded their wives and daughters, even when specifically requested to bring them along.

Similarly, a frequent topic of conversation between older men and myself was their puzzlement over European women's social freedom and independence. For the men who had served in the British East African Rifles in Palestine shortly after World War II, the women soldiers who had served in the Israeli forces were a source of curiosity, puzzlement and admiration. On the one hand they could not accept or condone this

decidedly undomestic and unfeminine behaviour, while on the other hand they thought these women were exceptionally courageous and committed. Not surprisingly, my own presence on Rodrigues was an obvious source of consternation, giving rise to often contradictory behaviour toward me — either constantly attempting to goad me into appropriate womanly behaviour, while at the same time according me a respect and deference normally only displayed to the Resident Commissioner or the visiting Minister of Rodrigues.

Indeed, there was a certain contradiction in the fact that so many young Creole women had paid employment outside of the home, in work situations that were not only public but clearly dominated by men. For the young women themselves this social contradiction further exacerbated the already present covert hostility toward their fathers. For their fathers, and their husbands, this apparent contradiction was apparently mitigated by the greater gain of cash and prestige consequent to such employment. It was perhaps only the limited and insular social universe of Rodrigues that could contain an incipient female sense of autonomy engendered by wage employment outside of the private confines of the home.

In this light, it is legitimate to ask what it was that kept the majority of young women on the straight and narrow path of appropriate behaviour. While it was obviously in their parents' interests they do so, values of status and rank without accompanying material sanctions usually have little currency in the romantic pursuits of young women. The answer can be seen in the enormous role gossip played in Creole society. Gossip was the ever present primary topic of conversation, among adults and adolescents, as well as among women and men. It was no exaggeration to state that gossip pervaded all aspects of social interaction. And, typically, gossip revealed an overwhelming interest in public comportment of women, and especially women vis-à-vis men. Who spoke with whom and when and where. Which two were observed to have a tête-à-tête. Who was invited to such and such a wedding, or family party, or reception. Despite my exalted status as a foreigner, this did not exempt me from being the victim of gossip. Further, I was constantly taken aside and cautioned on speaking with certain individuals as their reputations compromised my own standing. The young woman mentioned above who was interested in a certain Indo-Mauritian functionary was watched like a hawk by not just her own family, but also every young man and woman in the neighborhood on the lookout for anyone's untoward behavior.

While this pervasiveness of gossip indicates the importance of public behaviour, it also delineates appropriate behaviour, especially between the sexes. It wields its authority precisely in what it deems acceptable, and therefore not worthy of remark, and

what it condemns as wrong, the subject of endless discussion and speculation and, often, fabrication. But gossip does not simply operate solely in relation to judgements it passes on particular individuals. In the social exchange itself of gossip, between two or more individuals, each individual demonstrates his or her knowledge of another, tacitly indicating his social intimacy with an entire network of people beyond the victim. In other words, the gossiper displays the fact that he or she is privy to the private conversations, concerns and dismays, of certain of those others who find the victim's behaviour condemnable. At the same time, the gossiper establishes a tacit solidarity with his or her audience, a clear demonstration that they together are beyond such reproach. Thus the mere participation in gossip establishes an arbitrating group, a solidarity founded on their own righteousness. Gossip's ultimate power lies in the creation of this kind of solidarity whose expression lies in the imposition of tacit social ostracization — in its least virulent form, whispers and snickers behind the victim's back, and at its most vicious, the social "invisibility" of the victim, deserving or not. Escape via emigration is one recourse, the other is "sinking" into the mass, into Montagnard society. In either case, gossip, and the conventions it embodies, draws an invisible line around Creole society while simultaneously ranking it internally. Significantly, these conventions concern women, their appropriate comportment and, ultimately, their relative social worth.

Creole gossip relative to Montagnard gossip is instructive. Montagnards do gossip, but their gossip is directed toward the private doings in a particular *lakour*, the conduct of household affairs, and often this does include the amorous affairs of the man or woman. But as was discussed, the onus for misbehaviour always seems to lie with another — it is not the man's fault, it is rather another woman's fault through her use of sorcery, or it is a man's fault, through his lack of care and supervision, that a woman has an affair. In other words, gossip among Montagnards highlights the responsibilities inherent in particular social relationships and each individual's, or *fanmi's*, fulfillment of those responsibilities, rather than the "quality" of a person *per se*. Creole gossip, on the other hand, focusses on each individual's demonstration of his or her inherent quality. As Lamy explained, it is only a woman's inherently flawed character that would allow her to compromise her social standing, her social value, by losing her virginity before marriage — not her father's, or husband's, irresponsibility. Proper comportment indicates the innate quality of the particular individual, not the proper fulfillment of responsibilities by others. Creole gossip embodies the contradiction inherent in the Creole depiction of itself: on the one hand it depends on the achievement of a particular

style of life, a particular standing, while on the other hand it portrays itself as inherently superior, a quality transmitted through biological links and manifest in a person's comportment.

As evident in the social history of the island and in the stress placed on status associations, Creoles are a self-conscious elite. This self-consciousness has two fundamental dimensions: first, it entails an effort to distinguish the particular from the general, that is, to create and maintain the distinctiveness of Creoles from the more numerous Montagnards. Second, it must recognize the presence of the metropole, not just in the arena of wealth, power and authority, imposed by alien institutional domination and economic force emanating from Mauritius, but also in embracing cultural artefacts associated with the metropole.

Given the historical and current socio-political realities of Rodrigues, the pursuit of the first automatically and logically implies the second. The lived-in paradox of Creoleness arises precisely from their juxtaposition between Montagnards, on the one hand, and the metropole on the other.

It would be facile, however, to assume that merely because Creoles are at pains to separate themselves from Montagnards that they are only Naipaul's "mimic men" or the *zourit bouit* of the Montagnard perspective. For it is equally clear that Creoles do not attempt, or pretend, to wholly identify with the metropoles, be they Mauritians or Europeans. Their perplexity as regards the status of women in Europe, or their full commitment to a literal Catholicism despite their realization of an over-riding secularization in the *grands pays*, or the inconsistency between male and female fidelity or their reluctance to including their women in dealings with expatriates, signals a self-aware distinction vis-à-vis the metropole as well. The reluctance or even refusal to accept Mauritian spouses, especially Indo-Mauritian ones, further reveals this boundary. This disjunction with the metropole is equally clear in the history of first British, then Mauritian, administration of the island — consistently marked by resistance, subversion and competition between Creoles and this "other." Thus face-to-face with a Mauritian or a European, a Creole is a Rodriguan only.

While it is a banal truism to say that any elite is determined to maintain the *status quo*, it is quite another thing to understand how they do this over time and through different socio-political circumstances. The strategy employed in the Creole case is contained in the Janus-faced principle integral to their identity: at one with Montagnards, together Rodriguans, when facing outward; but, identification with the metropole when facing inward. This strategy utilizes the social, economic and cultural resources at hand,

from the incentive to accumulate material wealth to the value of fraternizing with expatriate government functionaries to the appropriation of certain metropolitan values. However, the ultimate configuration of a resultant Creoleness arises from and is continuously animated by the initial social facts of Rodriguan society: free/slave, black/white, African/European, and foreign governance. It is precisely these cultural facts which drive Creole society's continuous efforts to maintain and augment the symbolic capital it has identified as its own.

Creole social efforts to maintain and augment this symbolic capital are predicated on the independence of an individual and his or her immediate family. It is this focus on the individual which allows the manoeuvrability, flexibility, and negotiability essential to the operation of achieved status. Montagnard society also focusses on the independence of men, but this independence and implied autonomy is balanced with equally essential relations of reciprocity and solidarity; in a fundamental sense, relations of reciprocity and solidarity are the basis on which individual men attain autonomy, not just to their fellows but to the larger society. In contrast, the Creole focus on individuality is conjoined with a particular kind of social hierarchy — a hierarchy which is actively constructed and maintained continuously. Herein lies one crucial distinction between a Montagnard and a Creole stance: the nature of the relationship between the individual and the larger society.

IV THE CELEBRATED

There are certain social events in Rodrigues which are marked and elevated above the quotidian, yet they make explicit particular social ideas or principles which are manifest in the course of daily life. The very notion that certain events, and certain aspects of those events, are celebrated in itself draws attention to their signal importance in Rodriguan life. As much for a Rodriguan as an analyst, these different festivities single out certain relationships, visibly enact their importance, and for certain ones, re-relate them to the social group. This process is as evident in the form and content of ritual activities, as it is in their immediate and wider contexts — the participants, those excluded, the locale and the larger audience.

There are two immediately striking and related aspects to Rodriguan celebrations. For both Montagnards and Creoles, the behavioural components that go to make up their various celebrations are immediately recognizable to a western observer, they are virtually all of European provenance. And, secondly, they are virtually all associated with Catholic tenets and a Catholic calendar. As with Rodriguan creole in relation to the French language, this superficial similarity between Rodriguan and European, especially French, institutions and cultural motifs presents an immediate dangerous tendency: that of assuming an identification of form with substance, where an apparently European sociocultural form is taken to have the same social significance as its ostensible template.

This assumption is not only unwarranted but it also results in the patently absurd conclusion that where Europeans have dominated non-western societies, either through political or economic means, and that domination has resulted in certain 'European-looking' social institutions, then these are homogeneous "variants of European culture" (*e.g.* Benedict & Benedict 1982:146). *Ipsa facto*, a much more insidious, albeit subtle, corollary of this conclusion is the negation of a people's own awareness and systematic means of dealing with relations of power. The assertion, or assumption, of wholesale adoption of European cultural artefacts, conflating their form and substance, automatically denies any independence of thought or action on the part of those adopters, those dominated.

As the following descriptions will make evident, the very conduct of celebrations embodies particular stances to the State, to the Church, to the received items of metropolitan culture, while at the same time revealing emphases on certain relationships among participants. It would be a serious mistake to characterize these celebrations and the stances they reveal as the result of unexamined tradition, or mimicry, accepted and

enacted without conscious awareness of their implications. It is Montagnards and Creoles themselves who are the first to point out the differences, and similarities, between what they do and what is expected of them from the State, the Church, or their difference with metropolitan cultural models.

The guiding principles, the thrust of social organization that has emerged from the analysis of the quotidian is here, in the context of the celebrated, brought into relief. Despite the overwhelming presence of familiar European cultural motifs, these have been reworked, rearranged, and recontextualized into sociocultural events uniquely Rodriguan.

MONTAGNARD CELEBRATIONS

Montagnard celebrations predictably revolve around the conventionally marked life crises of any individual: birth, marriage, death. Furthermore, given a society that is nominally, at least, of the Catholic faith, these events are in each instance linked to the institution of the Church itself. Beyond these, Montagnards have one further celebration that is not directly linked to any particular individual and his or her particular life transition: this is the yearly *Fèr lanne*, although it too has an ostensible association with the birth of Christ and the Feast of the Epiphany. We begin, however, with wedding celebrations, not so much because they eclipse other ritualized events as because they evidence many of the sociocultural features which are variably present in other celebrations.

A Montagnard Wedding

The social events which culminate in a Montagnard wedding begin with a declaration of intention, the *let mariaj*, presented by the prospective bridegroom to the parents of the prospective bride. Recall that the *let mariaj* is a handwritten letter requesting the young woman's hand in marriage, closely modelled on samples collected in *Le Secretariat des Amants*, a French publication.

The *let mariaj* is delivered to a young woman's parents together with a basket of fruits and vegetables by the unaccompanied young man himself. Within living memory, the *let mariaj* has replaced a formalized, rhetorical speech given by the young man to the parents. Also within living memory, and still in isolated instances, the speech and basket were further accompanied by the young man formally grinding maize at the young woman's parents' front door. These various presentations always occur in the woman's *lakour* and are attended only by the *lakour* members.

The young man's request is not immediately answered, this may take a couple of days or several weeks, a time during which discreet inquiries are made as to the character and standing of the young man. Typically this waiting period is only symbolic, as the young man is most commonly already well-known by the young woman's family. The response is invariably positive, as objections would have already been readily apparent, obviating any further actions.

Once permission is given, the *koze dimanch*, literally "Sunday talk," period begins. The young man is allowed to come each Sunday afternoon to visit the family and sit with the young woman alone in the *lakour*. The length of the *koze dimanch* period is variable, but it typically lasts up to a year or so. During this time, appropriate behaviour between a young man and his future father- and mother-in-law, as well as other *lakour* members, is established — including the exchange of food gifts and the expectation of token labour on the part of the groom.

This period comes to a close with the *fet fyansel*. The *fet fyansel* entails the young couple going to Port Mathurin and getting married there in the civil office and then returning to the bride's family's *lakour* for a small party involving the members of her *lakour*. For the civil marriage in Port Mathurin, the bride is accompanied by her *parren* and the groom by either his best friend or his own *parren*. The *fet fyansel* usually occurs a couple of months before the wedding proper and does not constitute a marriage: the couple continues to live apart and maintain the discreet *koze dimanch* visits until the wedding proper.

A couple of weeks before the wedding, printed invitations are sent out; those invited are the respective kin of the bride and groom, as well as the *korom* of the respective fathers and the groom. A small wedding usually involves around 150 people, a large one up to 450 guests. Upon receipt of the invitation, the invitee responds by sending money — the amount of money depends on the degree of consanguinity to the bridal pair. These gifts range from a dollar or two sent by *fanmi lwèn* to the equivalent of \$25-50, as well as a cow or a pig, sent by the male agnates in the *fanmi prè*. These contributions are set aside to pay for the costs of the upcoming festivities, which include not only the purchase of food and drink, but also the wedding attire of the bride, groom and bridesmaids, an elaborate cake, firecrackers and a photographer if affordable.

Most weddings take place in the months of December and January, the hiatus between agricultural seasons. The wedding begins with the celebration of a mass at the Catholic Church, normally around 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This mass only differs from the regular Sunday one by the fact that the couple and their attendants assist the

mass directly in front of the altar, and that the priest preaches on some aspect of marriage. The groom has a best man, who is usually a close friend of his; the bride is attended by her *parren* and her bridesmaids, *fi donèr* [lit: girls of honour], who are most often sisters. The men are dressed in suits, the bride in white with veil and flowers, and the bridesmaids identically dressed in long gowns.

As soon as the mass is over, a procession, *en kortej*, is formed outside the church. It is led by the bride and groom, accompanied by two musicians — one playing the accordion, the other playing the *triang* (a percussion triangle), with the rest of the company following two by two, always a man and a woman, a *kavalyer* and *kavayez*. This procession wends its way over mountain paths to the *lakour* of the bride's parents.

There the exterior *lakour* has been converted into a *sal vert*, a “green room,” completely roofed over and walled with palm and *vacoa* greenery and bougainvillea flowers. Inside the *sal vert*, long rows of tables have been set with individual place settings. The linen, tables, chairs, plates and cutlery have all been borrowed from kin and neighbors for the occasion.

When the bride and groom reach the archway into the *sal vert*, firecrackers are set off — heard from afar and signalling the beginning of festivities. Once inside the bridal pair greet each guest as they enter, and who then receives a glass of sparkling cider. Many guests only now join the wedding, having foregone the mass and procession.

By around 6 o'clock, the bride and groom, each flanked by their godfather and best man, respectively, have sat down at the head table, which is marked by the imposing white wedding cake. The rest of the guests then take their places at the tables.

At this point the festive meal begins. The meal has been prepared and cooked, and now will be served, by each of the couple's male agnates — their respective fathers, fathers' brothers, their own brothers, and their patrilateral male cousins. The food items and the order in which they are served is relatively fixed by tradition. There are always eight courses, each course separated from the next by a serving of just white bread. There is always meat, usually beef and at least pork. Most weddings include at least one serving of beef, the cattle having been provided by the respective fathers and their agnates, and all weddings have at least pork, the pigs provided in the same manner. In addition to beef and pork, served more than once through the meal in various modes — stewed, fried, boiled, traditional dishes also include plain white rice, a salad of beets and boiled eggs, purchased “macaroni” and chicken noodle soup, and tinned meat (Spam). Conspicuously absent, as they are eaten everyday, are chicken, fish and any dish of maize or beans (lentils). Beverages for women are either Coca-Cola or Mauritian-made

banana wine, for men beer and cane spirits, also imported from Mauritius. An enormous amount of food is served and guests are provided with paper to wrap up and take home what they do not eat.

Once the meal is underway, one of the *servitèr* announces, in grandiloquent Gallicised creole: “*Monsieurs et Mesdames, je vous demande un moment de silence pour Monsieur X qui va vous offrir un chanson. Monsieur X, mettez vous debout!*” [Ladies and Gentlemen, I ask you for a moment of silence for Monsieur X who offers a song. Monsieur X, stand up!] The person so announced then goes to stand in front of the couple’s table and sings what are called *chanson romanz*, romantic songs — these are love songs, with slow cadence, and are clearly related to French provincial music. Anyone in the company can offer a song, and most do, from groups of tiny children to 90 year old men and women. Each performance is vigorously applauded. Occasionally, more so in the past, older men known for their eloquence and wit would present formal toasts, *diskour*, extolling the virtues of the bride and groom, in lieu of a song.

Throughout these offerings the bride remains seated, while the groom periodically circulates among the company. The bride is inevitably very morose and often in tears, although this is hardly remarked on nor is she comforted by anyone. All the while, she is meticulously served by her *parren*, who pours her drinks, arranges her food, even cuts her meat for her. Through her *parren*, she is thus *gate*, or pampered, throughout the festivities.

After all the eight courses have been served, by which time it is around eleven o’clock, the *servitèr* take the cake away, slice it and then serve the individual portions. Instrumental music begins at this point and people commence dancing. The music is both the *chanson romanz*, which involves quadrille-like dancing much like French provincial dancing, and the *sega* which relies heavily on percussion instruments and is of African origin — both provenances explicitly recognized by all Rodriguans.

The bride and groom do not dance, they slip away unobtrusively during this period, accompanied as always by the best man and the *parren*. They are taken to their new house, usually in the *lakour* of the groom’s father. Their attendants leave them there alone and then return to the festivities which continue through the night, finally dwindling down in the early morning hours, and concluded with a serving of chicken noodle soup for breakfast.

That same day, at the house of the bridal couple, the bride is visited by her husband’s *fanmi prè* and welcomed to the *lakour* with a small party. From the time the bride entered her new house, until eight days later, she is not allowed to leave the house

and must burn a candle all night. At the end of this eight day period, the groom takes her back to her own family: this is called the *retour denos* [lit: nuptial return], where, at a small party given by her family, the groom formally thanks them for his new wife.

Thereafter, the husband must take his wife to visit her family periodically throughout the rest of the year, prescribed at least once a month. At these visits, food gifts are exchanged and a festive meal is eaten. The wife may go by herself to her family with her husband's permission, but these visits are neither formal nor festive because of the husband's absence.

Certain features of a Montagnard wedding and their social implications bear emphasis. We have already remarked upon the fact that a civil marriage carries no meaning, called, significantly, *marye deyor* or to marry outside; it is required by legal statute, but otherwise conveys no alteration in status. The distancing between Montagnard society and the State that the use of *deyor* unambiguously conveys is paralleled by a similar distancing between Montagnards and the Church. While a Montagnard marriage needs to be consecrated by the Church to be socially recognized, its role is limited. Thus Montagnard couples do not attend pre-nuptial counseling sessions conducted by the priests, although urged to do so, nor are priests invited to the festivities. Similarly, government functionaries are excluded, although a local "big man" may be invited. Finally, and significantly, in each instance of the bridal couple's encounter with the State or the Church, they are assisted by someone outside their *fanmi prè*, the *parren* and the best man. The lack of formal *fanmi* representation in these encounters with metropolitan institutions is in marked contrast with their crucial role in the context of the wedding festivities themselves.

Both the identity of the guests invited and the form their gifts take, signal the importance of the *fanmi* and especially the patrilineal *fanmi prè*. Not only does the *fanmi* provide the bulk of celebrants, they are in effect their own hosts given that it is they who also collectively shoulder the costs of the wedding.

The male agnates of the respective *fanmi prè* are not only pivotal in the cost-sharing, they assume further importance in their roles as *servitèr*. Their role within the wedding festivities displays a striking reversal of their quotidian responsibilities. Here they not only serve, instead of being served, they also prepare and cook the food — an explicitly female domain of activity. This reversal not only raises a wedding out of the ordinary round of affairs, but further highlights the responsibility and solidarity entailed in the relations of a *fanmi prè* in this, the creation of a new *pti fanmi*.

Besides the formal seating of all guests together, reversing patterns in daily meal-taking where men eat first and the meal is eaten casually outside in the *lakour*, the mere repertory of food items elevates the proceedings to the extraordinary. Not only is beef and pork an infrequent item in the daily diet, so also are bread, rice and the purchased items, all explicitly associated with the metropole. The beet and egg salad also carries some symbolic association — it is said insisted on by the *grandimun*, although no particular meaning could be provided — for it is only eaten on formal occasions. Conscious associations with the metropole, the *grands pays*, are also conveyed through the *let mariaj*, the wedding attire, the use of the accordion and *triang*, the announcing firecrackers (a Chinese custom) and both the *chanson romanz* and the ebbing tradition of *diskour*. The *sega akordeon* dancing is virtually never performed outside of a wedding, and even here it is rapidly eclipsed by the *sega tambour* as the evening wears on.

Despite all these conscious allusions to the *grands pays*, and the recourse to the outside institutions of the State and the Church, a Montagnard wedding is clearly focussed, through the *fanmi prè* and *fanmi*, on the bridal pair, the new *pti fanmi* and the new relationships it brings in its wake. The center of this focus is on the bride herself and her passage through these festivities clearly reveals the process of separation, liminality, and incorporation universal in rites de passage.

During the engagement period, the bride remains within her family circle, visited there by her suitor. But, from the Church ceremony on, the bride is separated from her immediate family and *fanmi prè*. At the Church she is accompanied not by her father but by her *parren* and her sisters *cum* bridesmaids leave her at the moment she is united with her groom at the altar. Throughout the festivities, though in her own *lakour*, she is set apart at the head table, there served and toasted by the company and meticulously catered to by her *parren*. Once she leaves the festivities, formally received by her husband's *fanmi prè*, she is sequestered for eight days in her new house. This liminal period is quite clearly articulated as such: people say the young woman is extremely vulnerable to sickness and sorcery during this time. Her marginality in her new *lakour* makes her easy prey for *lham traine*¹ and the manipulations of a *longanist* [a sorcerer]. For these reasons she must be kept out of harm's way in the protection of a house² and out of the malignant dark by burning a candle constantly. At the end of eight days, she passes out of this liminal state, now part of the *fanmi prè*, and is no longer in danger. Pointedly, this is when she returns to her parent's *lakour*, as wife to her husband, not daughter to them, thus acknowledged by the husband's formal thanks in the *retour denos*.

The wedding activities can be seen as a series of ritual steps which take a woman from her own *fanmi prè* and incorporate her into her husband's. The transference is accomplished by men — as a collective group — in the *fanmi prè*. And the imbalance created by a woman moving from one *lakour* to another is righted through the symbolic inclusion of the new husband into his wife's *fanmi prè*, most notably expressed in the requisite formal visiting following on from the wedding, as well as the expectation, even if token, of his labour obligations to his in-laws.

In its essence then, Montagnard wedding festivities concern relations between *fanmi* in a balanced, egalitarian exchange resulting in a new *pti fanmi*, with its own particular relations to the two *fanmi prè*. The festivities themselves take place away from the larger metropolitan institutions (of State and Church) but at the same time utilize particular associations with the metropole to express and highlight the reversal of quotidian affairs explicit in this celebration.

Birth and Death

The birth of a child occasions two sets of ritual actions, one centering around the mother, the other around the child. Despite the priests' urging and insistence that a child needs to be baptized as soon as possible after birth, Montagnards only hold the *baptèm* for the child after eight days, and usually much longer, up to three months. Until the child is baptized, it cannot be taken out of the house or be in the dark: a candle is kept burning at night until the baptism. Several women complained of the expense and poor quality of candles in reference to this period. Once the day of baptism is decided upon and arranged with the priest at the church, the respective *fanmi prè* of the parents, with the exception of the mother and father of the child, meet at the church for the mass and baptism. The child is brought there and is presented by its *marren* and *parren*. The entire company is formally dressed, as if for a wedding. After the mass and baptism, they all return to the child's mother's and father's *lakour*, where a small *fet* takes place largely consisting of a celebratory meal. Each guest gives money or food prior to or at the time of this *fet baptèm*.

Once the child is born, the mother undergoes an arduous sequestration. For the first eight days, she, like the child, cannot leave the house nor be in the dark. In addition, during this same period, she must be kept well-wrapped — wearing long stockings, a sweater, a head scarf, and remain in bed covered with sheets. Furthermore, she cannot eat or drink anything cool or cold; she eats only heated dishes and drinks only hot *tisanes* (or *sikid*, herbal teas). After this initial eight days, for the next thirty-two

days (forty days in all) she must still remain in the house, although not restrained in dress or sustenance. There she is frequently visited by *fanmi*. Her re-emergence is not marked by a *fet* or other festivity.

These various restrictions, as well as the mass and *fet baptèm*, are all explained as tradition, *zafe grandimun* (lit: ancestors' affairs). But upon probing, people explain that the child and mother are here also vulnerable to sickness, sorcery and even death through *lham traine*, and these various restrictions are for their protection.

The parallels with marriage are obvious: the child, as was the bride, is a newly introduced member to a *fanmi prè*, and before fully incorporated is extremely vulnerable. While the *retour denos* marks the full incorporation into her husband's *fanmi prè* for a bride, for the child incorporation is marked by the Church baptism and the *fet*, notably each conducted by the respective *fanmi prè*, not the parents. Here also, the *marren* and *parren* stand in for the parents when face-to-face with the metropolitan institution, the Church. In this instance as well, the priests lament the absence of parents at the baptisms, which Montagnards stubbornly resist despite the priests' exhortations.

The particular vulnerability of the mother is highlighted in her lengthy sequestration and associated restrictions. A young woman reaches full adulthood, maturity, upon the birth of a child, not just as an individual, but also as a full-fledged female member of a *fanmi prè* where she is the venue for the next generation. Her restrictions are directly linked to the house itself, and do not bring in relations with the outside world, the metropole. This focus on the mother firmly identifies her only with the house and her husband's *fanmi prè*.

Death is the occasion for the *pryèr-hwi-jou* [lit: eight day prayer] or *lamor* [lit: death]. A person, more often than not, dies of old age in their own home. Upon death, they are laid out, dressed in their best clothes, on a *kanape* in the front room of the house. *Fanmi*, neighbors and friends, visit the house to pay their last respects, offer a quiet prayer, console the family. The next day, the deceased in his or her coffin is brought to the church, where a funeral mass is said. The coffin is interred at the cemetery adjacent to the church, by the priest and company (all the *fanmi*, friends, close neighbors) according to the rites of the Catholic Church. It is marked by a gravestone or wooden cross. The pall-bearers, it is explicitly said, cannot be *fanmi*; for a man, these are invariably members of his *korom*, for women the pattern appeared to exclude not only her own *fanmi* but also members of her *fanmi prè*.

If the deceased has died before his or her time, “unnaturally,” at some point that day or during the night, a length of chain is surreptitiously attached to the stone or cross. The chain is the ritual means of anchoring *lham traine* to the grave site — an attempt to prevent it from being manipulated by a *longanist* and causing danger to its *fanmi*. However, all deceased persons become *lham traine* for a period of eight days following their death. It is this liminal period, perhaps corresponding to the Catholic tenet of purgatory, or limbo, before a soul passes on to its just rewards, that is the focus of the *pryèr-hwi-jou* which follows internment.

The *pryèr-hwi-jou* begins the same night as the internment, continues for eight days, and on the ninth day this wake period ends with another mass said at the church by the priest. Two points warrant notice here: one, the priest is explicitly and actively prohibited from attending the *pryèr-hwi-jou* — here, again, much to the priest’s dismay. (One priest actually asked that I attempt to gain him admittance, something which he had tried for the twenty years he had been on the island with no success.) And, two, the mass on the ninth day is insisted upon by Montagnards, although it has no place in Catholic practice and the priest does his best to discourage it, although he does, in the end, celebrate it.

The *pryèr-hwi-jou* begins soon after dark in the house of the deceased. It is attended by not only the *fanmi prè* and *fanmi* but neighbors and friends of those resident in the deceased’s house and *lakour*. All guests bring a gift of food, although the bulk of food and drink is provided by the hosts, aided in this by small gifts of money and food from *fanmi*. The food and drink so provided is eaten and drunk throughout the night, rather than at one sitting or serving.

Within the house, the front room has been cleared of furniture and the floor covered with rags and scraps of cloth for sitting. In one corner is a small table or chair set with a couple of lit candles, a crucifix, and a small bottle of wine or cane spirit. Into this room most of the guests will crowd, the large majority women and children. In the *lakour*, just outside of the house, at least half a dozen tables and chairs are set up. Here, during the course of the evening and night, various games of chance will be played — by men, with other men wandering between the *lakour* and the house itself. In peripheral rooms and adjacent houses, as well as the kitchen hut, various people, men and women, will also wander, attending to infants, food preparation, sleeping and chatting privately.

The *lakour* gambling consists primarily of different kinds of card games, where money is wagered. Some players have come only for the gambling, being relatively unacquainted with the deceased. It should be noted that gambling is illegal in Mauritius,

and in Rodrigues, except in the official casinos in Mauritius and in the context of the *pryèr-hwi-jou*. Otherwise, gambling is subject to relatively strict patrolling and prosecution by the police.

The *pryèr* proper begins with the recitation of a series of prayers and the singing of hymns, typically the Catholic prayers, the “Hail Mary,” recited many times, and the “Our Father.” The hymns are those sung in the regular Sunday masses. The prayers are begun by and are led by one of several older women, with the company at large (in the house) answering the opening lines and together reciting each prayer or singing each hymn. This prayer chanting and singing goes on for about forty-five minutes to an hour. The card games outside continue, oblivious to the activities within the house.

At the end of the last hymn, or prayer, a general babble of voices rises from the crowd for a few minutes, and then, in the midst of this hubbub, a single voice, typically that of an elderly man, can be heard above the others: “Il y avait un fois...” [“Once upon a time...”], or “*Kric*”, answered by “*Krac*” by the audience. Immediately a hush descends on the crowd as they turn their attention to the storyteller, the *rakontèr*. Each *pawas* usually has at least one recognized storyteller, some are elderly, some middle-aged, always men, but each acknowledged masters of the tale. The stories themselves are well-known to the company: when the *rakontèr* pauses or hesitates, the next word or phrase is shouted out by the company; or, in certain stories, a refrain is repeated periodically throughout, by the company. Interspersed among the stories are narrative chant-songs; these are chanted by all, although usually initiated by one of the *rakontèr*. During the course of the evening and night, actual recounted stories, by one *rakontèr*, diminish, replaced almost entirely by these chant-songs. Both the stories and the chant-songs are increasingly accompanied by dramatic gestures and elaborate pantomimes of the story events, not just by the *rakontèr* but by anyone in the company so moved to participate. The company is lively and participatory, this is a decidedly collective performance. Throughout all of this, the card-players continue their games outside in the *lakour*, although men move freely in and out of the games, into the house and out again.

A typical story/chant-story sequence, lasting in this case for almost four hours was:

- 1st: An old man, Isaiah, begins with a story about Petit Jean and his encounters with a certain king and his beautiful wife.
- 2nd: Isaiah, again, with a story about Bonhomme Misère in Italy during World War II.

- 3rd: Isaiah, still, with a story about Marc La Ligne, Marc La Haut, and Marc Soleil.
- 4th: Collective chant-song about a certain *Mamselle Cou-tay-o*.
- 5th: Another *rakontèr*, Edouard, begins a story about three children which quickly is eclipsed by its chanting refrain: “*doo-gai doo-gai mai-gayoo*” to a *sega tambour* rhythm. During the chanting, a young boy, dressed as a girl, stands up and plays coy to another man who repeatedly attempts to kiss him, all to the hilarity and delight of the company.
- 6th: Edouard, again, begins a story, which is immediately lost in the chanting of: “*vitay vitay vitay vitay man-ti-man.*”. Here, a young man stands, is blindfolded and stood in the center of a cleared space. He begins to dance to a *sega tambour* rhythm while simultaneously kicking people on the edge of the clearing and being slapped with a leather belt on the buttocks by another man. This is all accompanied by general hilarity and raucous laughter on the part of the company.
- 7th: Instead of a single *rakontèr*, four men stand, each playing a “musical instrument,” substituted for by a broom, a stick, an old paintbrush. Each man plays the role of *Kopèr Lichyen* [Comrade Dog], *Kopèr Licha* [Comrade Cat], *Kopèr Bourik* [Comrade Donkey] and *Kopèr Yèv* [Comrade Hare]³, sitting in the cleared space, playing the “instruments” and making the appropriate animal noises, and occasionally striking individuals on the edge of the circle with their “instruments” or occasionally rising to dance the *sega*. All of this accompanied by the company chanting: “*wa-ma-ti-wa-moo.*”
- 8th: A similar pattern, this time with an older woman lamenting over her “dead” husband; a “doctor” comes along and indicates that he can bring her husband to life if she pays him enough. She agrees. At this point singing begins, and four other men jump into the circle and lift the “dead” man to their shoulders while *sega*-dancing and singing. This entire pantomime was accompanied by virtually hysterical laughter, ending with everyone collapsing into uncontrollable laughter.

9th: A collective chant-song, with the refrain "*papa korite koko*".

The stories recited at a *pryèr-hwi-jou* have a limited repertory of characters, although the plots and situations they find themselves in vary according to the *rakontèr*. Besides the dominant Petit Jean (*Tizan*), other humans can be three brothers, variously called Marc or Jean or Pierre, or *Bonhomme Misère*, or *Liwa* [the king] and his wife, or a *Malbar* [an East Indian]. There is a frequently-appearing cast of animals, in addition to *Kopèr Lichyen*, *Licha*, *Bourik* and *Yèv*, there is also *Kopèr Jako* [parrot], *Balen* [whale], *Elefan* [elephant] and *Kayman* [alligator]. The situations these characters find themselves in are quite varied and clearly dependent on the *rakontèr*'s own experiences. Many of the older *rakontèr* set their stories in Italy or Palestine during World War II, other younger men often incorporated the theme of "development," and English monarchs often made appearances. Story motifs or themes from Mauritius or the Seychelles, heard on the radio, were also commonly used.

Virtually all the stories heard followed the typical pattern of trickster tales, in which a poor, or disadvantaged figure, most often Petit Jean, the youngest brother, or *Kopèr Yèv*, gains the upperhand, or wins the situation through their wits, wiliness or magic. However, in a not insignificant number of stories, the initial success of the trickster figure is overcome by his victims, and they often "kicked him away" to as far as Tahiti or Australia.⁴

The chant-songs, on the other hand, were fixed by tradition and none appeared to have a coherent story-line. Rather they seemed to merely present situations, without context or resolution. Despite their resulting in great amusement and hilarity, no one could explain what was so funny. Likewise, the chants were inexplicable as to linguistic meaning. For either aspect, people said it was the *grandimun* who did it this way, and they didn't know what it all meant. The most likely explanation of these is that they were stories and songs introduced by the original slaves brought to Rodrigues, passed on through the generations, the original meanings lost on the way.⁵ Of course, there is also the possibility that Montagnards preferred that I remain ignorant on this subject, despite the fact of my inclusion in the *pryèr-hwi-jou*.

Whether through the stories or the chant-songs, however, the same objective is met: the company is entertained throughout the night — they *kasse lanwit* [lit: break the night]. For the *pryèr-hwi-jou* is for the immediate family of the deceased, to pray with them, console them in their grief, and to sit with them through the night. The family of

the deceased are those most vulnerable to *lham traine* during the liminal eight days before it makes its final passage into the afterworld. They, like a bride, a new mother, or an unbaptized infant, are vulnerable to potential sickness and sorcery via *lham traine*, and thus must stay out of the dark and in the house during night-time hours. All this is accomplished through the *pryèr-hwi-jou*. As with the occasions of marriage and birth, the *fanmi* of the individual, as a group, is pivotal.

The *pryèr-hwi-jou* further highlights the simultaneous distancing of the Church and the incorporation of Catholic elements. The active exclusion of the priest, as well as unsanctioned use of certain Catholic elements (the prayer litany, the final mass) signal this distancing. At the same time the two masses, one at the beginning and one at the end of the *pryèr-hwi-jou*, the necessity of the priest's last rites at internment, and each evening's requisite opening with the prayer litany, are all integral to the *pryèr-hwi-jou*.

Fèr lanne

Fèr lanne [lit: make the year], *lanne* [lit: the year], or *nouvel an* [lit: new year] is the biggest Montagnard holiday of the year. The heart of the festivities consists of an ordered series of visits made between the first and eighth of January, and terminating with a more general party on *Wa bwar* [lit: *Roi Boire* or king drinks], the eighth. A remarkable transformation occurs at this time: the entire countryside is awash with groups of gaily dressed people moving about, in general high humour, trekking through mountain paths or crowded in the backs of pick-up trucks, or congregated in various *lakour*, all punctuated with rounds of firecrackers. No one reports for work, no one is seen in the gardens, and the animals are only minimally cared for. It is as if the entire countryside was engaging in a general celebration.

Notably, this general mood of festival does not reach into Port Mathurin and its environs, nor for that matter into any of the Creole enclaves. Furthermore, these festivities are social and secular, they do not include attending Church or engaging in any religious activity. Although, one elderly man, when asked why this celebration and its timing, replied that it was because it celebrated Jesus's baptism, eight days after his birth.

The substance of these festivities falls into two categories: the first consists of visits made among family and friends for the first seven days, and the second is the final large party of *Wa bwar*.

The visits take place in the receiving room of the house, in a *lakour* this house is mostly that of the most senior man. The visits vary in tone, dependent on those present:

very formal and correct when there are marked differences in status between the hosts and guests, more casual and relaxed among those of the same generation or close family, and totally lacking in formality among men of the same *korom*.

Guests are greeted at the entrance of the *lakour* with a barrage of firecrackers and then are ushered into the receiving room of the house, or during the day, into the *verang*. The *verang* or receiving room is dominated by a large table upon which are arranged bottles of cane spirit, rum, banana wine, coca-cola and pitchers of water, encircled by an array of glasses. The men in the company sit around the table, while the women retire to the secondary rooms. Occasionally, a senior woman who is also of high status will join the men at the table. As the visit wears on, people will circulate, to the other rooms, outdoors in the *lakour*. The designated host, a man and mostly the owner of the house, orchestrates the visit. He will begin by pouring out a little spirit onto the floor, saying it is for the *grandimun*, and then proceed to fill glasses first for each of the men, then serving wine or coca-cola to the women, and lastly coca-cola to the children. Taking a drink, a *pti for* [lit: a little strength], is mandatory, at least one upon arriving and one before departing — although it is usually only women who are reluctant to do so. Eventually *gandjak* or *amuse gueule*, *i.e.* snacks, are served. These snacks vary a great deal, ranging from pieces of fried fish or chicken, savory fried dough pastries, to purchased tinned cheese, Ritz crackers or bread. In better-off households, an obvious attempt is made to serve purchased items, but these are not requisite, so that, unlike at weddings, the food served is more an indication of relative capacity rather than adherence to traditional customs.

Besides serving, the host takes charge of the conversation, most often dominating it in tandem with his most prominent guests. After an initial period of silence, the women too soon join in. However, as the visit proceeds, general conversation tends to separate into smaller same sex groups. Children usually go off by themselves to play games and chat. Topics of conversation are the concerns and events of daily life — new marriages, children, deaths, general gossip, agricultural and livestock matters, the comings and goings of Mauritian officials, political news. A visit may last only an hour or two among those not particularly intimate, while among close family and friends the visit may go on all day or most of the evening.

While the content of these visits is relatively unremarkable, their mere occurrence carries two significant aspects. First, it is notable that such a mundane interaction is elevated to a formal occasion. People are dressed up, they sit at table, they are formally served. It is the fact of the visit itself, a structured event in the house of the host, with

specific guests, with a formal partaking of food and drink, that is of the most import. Second, and most significantly, not only is the visit itself carefully organized, but the order of visits, the specific guests and hosts in a particular sequence over the eight day period, is also carefully designated and adhered to.

The order of visits is fixed and evidences the existence of several operative principles. First is that the initial host is senior or superior to his guests; two, all visits are reciprocated; and, three, visits to kin, both consanguineal and affinal, take precedence over friendship and neighborhood ties. A further principle is evident when any of the above are in conflict: relationships across *pawas* boundaries take precedence.

Thus on the first day of *Fèr lanne*, January 1st, a senior man will receive most of his married sons and daughters, together with their spouses and children. He himself is senior by virtue of the fact that he has no living father or father-in-law. On the second day, he will receive all those married sons and daughters who did not visit the first day. This latter group are those who had fathers or fathers-in-law in another *pawas*. An adult man's senior is either his father or his father-in-law; his visit to one or the other on the first day is predicated on their place of residence. Thus, for most men, those who have married *pawas*-exogamously and themselves live patrilocally, their first visit will be to their father-in-law's *lakour*; on the second day they will visit their father in his own, their own, *lakour*. If they have taken a wife from the same *pawas* in which they reside, their first visit will be to their father, the second day to their father-in-law. Similarly, a man who has married in another *pawas* and lives uxorilocally, will visit his own father first, only on the second day visiting his father-in-law in his own *lakour*. While it is clear from this ordering, that a man's immediate superior is his own father, the relationship with his father-in-law takes precedence when distance is involved. As with affinal visits, this precedence reveals the social effort expended in consistently enacting the relationship between a man and his father-in-law, notably when that relationship is not buttressed by the daily comings and goings within one neighborhood.

By the third and fourth day, the senior men will reciprocate the visits they received on the first and second day. They will go with their spouses and unmarried children to the houses of their married sons and daughters, here also cross-*pawas* visits taking precedence. As the days wear on, each family will visit other significant kin, be they other close-by *fanmi*, uncles and cousins either near or far, the usually neighboring godparents, and toward the end of this period, their *korom kamarad*. While this subsequent ordering of visits is neither as rigid or as formal as those of the first two days, they remain nevertheless dictated by seniority, distance and reciprocity.

It is clear that the relationships marked and acted upon in these visits are patrilineal, *fanmi* ones, viz. those between and among men. Notably absent, beyond the visit to one's father-in-law, are visits to one's other affinal or matrilineal relatives. Thus not included in this series of visits are a man's mother's father and other relatives, unless he is, for example, unacknowledged, and therefore already involved in on-going relationships with them — in which case they stand for him as his own missing patrilineal kin would. In other words, a man's enacted kin take the same place as would his "true" patrilineal kin. Further, a man does not visit his married sisters' families, nor vice versa, nor his wife's brothers or sisters, unless they happen to live in the same *lakour* as his father-in-law.

The visits among *korom kamarad* toward the waning days of this period tend to be much less formal than earlier kin-based ones. Not only are they less formal, they tend to only involve men without their families and most often in groups. Thus three or four *kamarad* will go to the *lakour* of another, without their respective families, and though they will be greeted and probably served by the host's wife and daughters, these will not participate, even marginally, in the occasion.

The dialectic of hierarchy and reciprocity can be seen in certain situations where the normal conjunction of owner of the house with receiving host is somehow disrupted. For example, Marc Salomon visited his Montvue father-in-law, Prophète Calixte, on the first day of *Fèr lanne*. On the third day, Prophète and his wife and unmarried children went to visit Marc in his *pawas* of Le Chou. After a perfunctory stop at Marc's house, Marc took the whole company to his older brother's house in the same *lakour*. In his brother's house, Marc became the presiding host, directing the conversation and fare (served by his brother's wife and daughters). Certainly relevant to this change of venue was the fact of Marc's house being comparatively rude and ramshackle. But the most striking aspect of this occasion was Marc's ascendancy as host in his brother's house. For not only was Marc much younger, he was the son of his father's second wife, and in normal circumstances Marc was distinctly junior, even marginal, in the affairs of this *lakour*, displaying very circumscribed and deferential demeanor when in the presence of his *frèr ene*. Two facts were cited to explain this situation. One was that Marc was receiving the reciprocal visit of his father-in-law, despite the location, and the marked relation was the dyadic one of male affinity, in which Marc's brother had no place. Secondly, Marc's brother, simply in terms of age, was junior to Prophète Calixte and therefore could not act as receiving host to the initial, for him, visit of the senior

Prophète. The other status considerations that operated between Marc and his brother were set aside to accommodate those integral to a *Fèr lanne* visit.

In another example illustrating the same sort of play between reciprocity and hierarchy, before realizing the principles at work in the *Fèr lanne* visits, I made a visit to Narcisse and his family on the second day. Narcisse and his family were shopkeepers, of relatively elite status within La Chou; and, in this instance, I was also considered very elite despite being a woman. My appearance at Narcisse's house, before he came to visit me, violated the rule of those most senior being the initial host. Narcisse and his family righted this situation judiciously: I was instructed in my duties as hostess and encouraged to play the part. Narcisse explained I was "like his mother." The next day, Narcisse reciprocated the visit at my house, in this instance taking over many of the duties of host. The initial imbalance was thus carefully righted by redesignation of the host role.

A final example again shows the flexibility built into the role of host. Albert's son-in-law, Edouard, was better off than he, and within the context of the local community was considered more Creole than Montagnard. When Edouard when to visit Albert on the second day (they lived in the same *pawas* and Edouard's father was still alive though infirm), family in tow, Edouard virtually took over Albert's tasks as host — pouring drinks and dominating the conversation. When subsequently Albert went to his son-in-law's house, the role of host remained distinctly Edouard's, as per normal, and Albert was treated as any typically honored guest. While the principles of seniority and reciprocity were clearly operating in this case, Edouard's more elite status was sufficient to attenuate Albert's duties as host in the first instance.

The relatively rigid principles of seniority and reciprocity, together with the precedence of *fanmi*, male affinal relationships and extra-*pawas* residence, are straightforward in most Montagnard visiting cycles. But in the repositioning implicit in the various permutations of the host relationship, it is evident that competing status considerations are brought into play. These bring to the fore two points worth noting. By the mere fact that the normal conjunction of host/houseowner has to be realigned to suit the particular guests indicates that *Fèr lanne* visiting presumes the social and economic homogeneity of the participants — visits are clearly balanced with the only formally acknowledged differential being that of generation and *fanmi* relationships. Differences in economic standing or social status are not integrated into these visiting cycles; their expression, in these various examples, comes after the fact in the active accommodation made on the spot.

Secondly, and by the same token, the *Fèr lanne* visiting cycle is a conscious affirmation of particular relationships according to certain precepts. That is, *Fèr lanne* does not lay down certain rules of visiting devoid of any socially obvious implication. The rules do not say one must visit one's father on this day, one's father-in-law on that day, and so on. Nor do the rules rely on legitimation by previous practice by the *grandimun*. As each individual man goes through his particular round of receiving and visiting, he is perfectly aware of who he must so honour and why. In each instance, he is acknowledging and reaffirming the ties of reciprocity with those older men who have bequeathed him his social and economic standing — his house, his *lakour*, his *fanmi prè*, his wife, as well as all those with whom he has reciprocal and mutually beneficial relations. The necessity of the return visit not only reaffirms the relationship, but marks its inherent reciprocity. Beyond the fact that the ties of balanced reciprocity and egalitarian relations underpinning Montagnard society are here in full evidence to an outside observer, they are as much so in the active consideration of each individual participant.

The understanding that Montagnard social relations are egalitarian and predicated on mutual reciprocity, even beyond *fanmi* ties, is what is celebrated in the culminating *Wa bwar*.

This description of the *Wa bwar* should be prefaced by the fact that currently it has been replaced only by particularly large parties at individual *lakour*, incorporating not only kin but friends and neighbors in varying degrees. This is a much limited expression of its prior scope. In the past, at least well into the 1960s, the *Wa bwar* was a single large party which the entire *pawas* attended. Depending on locale, the *Wa bwar* had two basic forms.

In the one, a group of people, in a procession, visited each of the houses in a *pawas*. At each house, they were fed and given drinks, and then the whole procession, augmented with these latter hosts, went on to the next house. In this manner, they visited every house in the entire *pawas*, with every householder both hosting the procession and participating in it.

In the second, the entire *pawas* met and was given food and drink at one particular house or *lakour*. During these festivities, a *galet* [cake] was served, in which was baked six beans or kernels of maize. The six people who received the beans or kernels in their slice of cake became the designated hosts for the next party, eight days later. Together they hosted this next party, during which another *galet* with baked-in

beans was served, and another set of hosts so designated for the next *fet* eight days later. [Those already having served as host did not receive a piece of cake until the new hosts were identified.] This procedure was followed until all residents of the *pawas* had participated in hosting the *fet*.

Both of these two versions of the *Wa bwar* share the same principle. While the *Wa bwar* entailed reciprocal visiting and fêting, and the costs of such, it was explicitly based on only *pawas* ties, specifically transcending any ties of *fanmi*, seniority, or friendship. The *Wa bwar* manifestly required egalitarian and mutually beneficial ties among Montagnards in one *pawas*. Like *Fèr lanne* in general, it presumed a homogeneous society of autonomous individuals, at least ideologically undivided by considerations of wealth and status. The *Wa bwar* was not in its essence a leveling device or a redistribution mechanism, for it called on all equally, no matter their economic circumstances. The *Wa bwar* was both a celebration and a declaration of solidarity among Montagnards, above and beyond each *fanmi*.

The “vestiges” of *Wa bwar* seem most apparent in an undercurrent of not quite serious hostility accompanying the peripatetic groups of people during the entire *Fèr lanne* period. Thus yelling and shouting insults to the effect of “why haven't you invited us to your house” are traded among unrelated neighbors of the same *pawas* as they pass each other on the footpaths and roads. These taunts are accompanied by swearing, obscenities and various sacrilegious jokes and songs. However, these various offensive remarks and songs are never met with anger, instead a general atmosphere of hilarity and boisterousness reigns, even among the more sedate women.

On January 8, the actual day of *Wa bwar*, there are no longer any of the *pawas*-wide parties in evidence, although certain *lakour* [usually those of individuals most well-liked and respected] will be the site of particularly large gatherings, not limited to kin.

Undoubtedly, the gradual disappearance of the true *Wa bwar*, still quite vivid in the memories of not-so-old adults, must at least in part be attributed to the effect of the large scale government wage labour begun in the sixties and the attendant closer ties with Mauritius. While it is clear that wage labour has not yet resulted in the actual restructuring of *fanmi* relationships, it has, on the other hand, introduced visible economic differentials through the large influx of cash. Not only has this opened the way for an inchoate consumer market and consequent economic stratification, but the recourse to *de facto* permanent government support [for a wage, for relief] has begun to erode the extra-familial ties of mutual support, both social and economic.

Adding to these new material conditions is the fact of sheer numbers. It is clear that a *pawas*-wide celebration like *Wa bwar* must depend on familiarity and acquaintance with most of one's neighbors. In most *pawas* today, that threshold has long been breached. Even in Montvue, a relatively small *pawas*, to host its five hundred inhabitants, given their relative wealth, would be an undertaking too major to even conceive of.

Despite this disappearance of the *Wa bwar*, the collective joking relationship among non-kin *pawas* members evident in its wake alerts us to its still powerful ideological principle. It is one that recognizes an ideal of solidarity among Montagnards in one locale. Within the context of *Fèr lanne* visiting in which more individual ties of reciprocity and solidarity are in full evidence, the *Wa bwar* raises these ties to the level of the community.

It is clear that *Fèr lanne* is a celebration of a different sort than those attached to the life crises of any individual — birth, marriage and death. Where the celebrations of birth, marriage and death provide each individual with the context for a profound alteration in social status, *Fèr lanne*, on the other hand, only reaffirms existing social status and relationships. The celebrations of rites de passage achieve the passage from one status to another, and in so doing they confront the individual and his or her social group, society writ small, with the unknown. In these celebrations, the unknown is those “cracks” in society where other forces can and do intrude — the netherworld of *bann lham traine*, precisely those points where society must reorganize, must realign itself, in order to either aggregate or disaggregate a particular individual.

This aspect of rites de passage, the explicit confrontation of the social with the non-social, the chaos of the unknown, is certainly expectable given that it is an at least implicit feature of rites de passage the world over. But what is especially interesting and significant here is that this particular aspect is conjoined with this society's studiously few direct interactions with the metropole, the State and the Church. While it is true that, by legal statute, all births, marriages and deaths must be registered with the civil authorities, it is also true that such registration does not in and of itself confer any alteration in status from the point of view of a Montagnard. The Montagnard term for civil marriage, *marye deyor*, is unambiguous on this point. And the civil registration of a birth or death, which must be performed by the mother or father for a birth, or close kin for a death, has absolutely no place in the otherwise elaborate rituals surrounding these events. It would be perhaps an exaggeration to state that Montagnard society's attitude toward the

unknown, the netherworld, is replicated in its attitude to the State. However, there are some clear parallels that are suggestive. In the rites de passage, the social vacuum causes the significant social group, the *fanmi prè*, to be vulnerable, and this vulnerability is allayed not only by ritual means but also by distancing the *fanmi prè* from the sources of danger. Thus in the *pryer-hwi-jou*, the *fanmi prè* does not handle the deceased and must be accompanied during its nightly vigils in the dangerous eight-day period. The sequestration of an infant or a new mother or a bride not only accomplishes their respective isolation, but also distances the *fanmi prè* from them. The liminal period, the tear in the social fabric, endangers the entire group, with the individual the conduit of that danger. It is this posture of withdrawal or distancing from an at least uncontrollable or unpredictable entity which seems paralleled in relations with the State.

In each instance of direct interaction with the State, a stand-in for the *fanmi prè* is employed. For a civil marriage, the bride's godfather, the groom's godfather or best man, go before the magistrate. For birth and death, only one individual appears at the civil offices — the one required by law, and even this is done reluctantly, often pushed into it by the priest or a nurse or doctor. This behaviour occasions frustration and derision on the part of the civil authorities, who attribute it to ignorance and superstition. A priest with many years experience at Ste. Gabriel cited the following incident as both typical and illustrative of Montagnards' ignorance and superstition: extra relief monies were made available to those with more than three children in the early 1970s. A certain Claude came to this priest asking for his help in receiving this extra aid, which he had been denied based on the civil records showing he had only one child. The priest inquired at the civil records office and discovered that while Claude had indeed registered three different births, with different birthdates and three different sets of godparents, as required, all three children had exactly the same name. When the priest confronted Claude with this information and asked for an explanation, Claude replied that he had been so nervous and frightened at the Civil Status Office that in his confusion he could only repeat the same name each time. While this priest accepted this explanation, we cannot, for Claude was hardly an idiot, however timid he may have been in front of government officials. This instance of deliberate obfuscation is one facet of the more general and systematized means of keeping the State at bay, at a distance.

Thus, in addition to this example, there are other secular institutionalized practices which have the same effect. Montagnards have a relatively elaborate naming system. For the civil authorities and the parish records, each child is given a *nom baptize* [baptism name] with his *nom sinyatur*. While this name is widely known within a given

pawas, among kin and close friends each child is also known by two other names: the *nom lakaz* and the *nom gate*. The former, the “house name,” is used within the immediate family and a man’s *korom*, while the latter, the “pampered name,” is what in English would be termed a “nickname,” and is used among a wider circle of acquaintances. The *nom baptize* together with the *sinyatur* are normally only used in formal situations, although a married woman is always referred to as Madame and her husband’s *nom baptize*. Beyond these names, which hold for both sexes except for a married woman, there is another name which is only used by adult men. This is called the *nom badinaj*, the “joking” or “teasing” name. Unlike the other names which are conferred on an individual by others, a man’s *nom badinaj* is selected by the man himself and is only used in “foreign” contexts, *i.e.* situations where the man must interact with people he does not know. Often a man has several *nom badinaj*, one for each particular kind of alien situation. One typical example was a man who had three *nom badinaj*: one by which he was known to the government officials in town, another by which he was known to colleagues on the job, and a third by which he was known to several Chinese *boutikèr* or *komersan* to whom he often sold livestock. This particular naming system is too widespread to be simply attributed to individual idiosyncrasies. Taken together with another custom whereby certain numbers substitute for certain words, the social import is clear.

This system of number-for-word substitution is also only practiced by adult men and normally among themselves only in the company of relative strangers. In conversation a particular number is used instead of a particular word. While the number designation is basically arbitrary and arrived at by consensus among one’s friends, it is also changed periodically. What is most significant in this system of word substitution is the actual words substituted. Some of the words, as one would expect, are obscene or sexual, but most in fact have to do with the “outside” [to Montagnards] world. For example: shopkeeper, police, army, government, Chinese, Indian, Mauritian, sly, liar, money. The groups of men who share this code are much wider than just a *korom* or a *pawas*, they essentially include most Montagnard men, although at any one point, the particular number/word association may not be identical from one area to another.

Although taking just the *nom badinaj*, or just this number coding system, one could perhaps dismiss it as mere play, together and with other evidence discussed in relation to the quotidian and in the context of rituals, the implication of a conscious distancing from the larger society, *viz.* the State, the metropole, becomes quite clear.

The self-conscious distancing from the State is all the more apparent when we note the pivotal importance of the *fanmi prè* in each of these celebrations. Yet it is precisely they, as a group, that are conspicuously absent in any interaction with the State. Their absence is also notable in each interaction with the Church as well. As with the State, interactions with the priest are conducted only with those absolutely essential, the bride and groom, the infant, the deceased, and the various stand-ins appropriate to each situation, the godparents and best man. The quite conscious distancing from the Church is even more obvious than that from the State. For here, regarding religious matters, the priest actively seeks intervention in his flock's affairs, urging pre-nuptial counseling, early baptism, extensive catechism, as well as attempting to discourage the final mass of the *pryèr-hwi-jou*. The active obstruction of the priests' attempts is accomplished through pointed ignoring, perfunctory dismissal, pretense of misunderstanding, and deliberate confusion as to times and places in the case of a *pryèr-hwi-jou* itself.

Herein, however, lies a seeming paradox. Although the social distancing that Montagnards achieve vis-à-vis the Church through its representative, the priest, is fairly obvious, on the other hand, they actively incorporate certain Catholic rituals and precepts. It is the sacraments of baptism, marriage and extreme unction (the blessing for the dying) which provide the core symbols which validates each of those rites de passage. It is as if Montagnards accept as their own the core assumptions of Catholicism — a supreme deity, the holy communion of the mass, the nature of heaven and hell and purgatory, the indissoluble tie of marriage, and so on, but politely reject the priest's earthly interventions in so far as they do not provide access to these sacraments.

As is common in many variations of folk catholicism, there is a belief in a profusion of secondary (to God) sacred beings who are more accessible and thus more amenable to exhortation. In this realm, the readily familiar Catholic saints are joined with other beings, notably the *minisprins*, the *lougarou* and the *lham traine*. And while these latter are generally considered to be essentially evil, or potentially dangerous, the saints themselves are not necessarily so unequivocally beneficent. While a *longanist* disposes of his powers through the manipulation of *lham traine*, and sometimes even the dead themselves, a *nevem*, on the other hand, achieves control of certain saints through the power of his or her prayers. A *nevem*'s most typical activity concerns the recovery of lost or stolen items, as well as revenge on the thief in the latter case. By the efficacy and potency of the *nevem*'s prayers during an eight-day period, the item is produced on the ninth day. By then a thief begins to suffer, either through his or her own loss or sickness. In addition to the *longanist* and the *nevem*, the *gèrissèr* cures sores, rashes,

burns and other wounds by a passing over of the hands, the locus of his or her innate healing powers, divinely-bestowed. It is the *longanist*, the *nevem* and the *gèrissèr* who are the earthly intermediaries with the only sacred beings accessible to mortals, not the priest. The priest is taken at his word, he is the only representative of the supreme deity, but in as much as this god does not intervene directly in the affairs of mortals, the priestly functions are limited to only those essential sacraments.

Thus Montagnard rites de passage reflect this understanding of the universe beyond daily life. The social omission of the priest in the celebrations highlights and marks his importance as the conduit of the sacred essence of the sacrament, emanating from the supreme god, which validates birth, marriage, death. His lack of access to the middle range of supernatural beings, those most relevant to the daily lives of mortals, makes his presence inappropriate in the context of the social celebration itself. At the same time, the priest and the Church, apart from their representation of the divine, are alien, they are in their mundane features a metropolitan institution. Serge Clair was the first and only Rodriguan priest, and even he, in order to come back to Rodrigues, had to give up his priesthood. Thus the distancing visible between Montagnards and the Church preserves their social autonomy, without forfeiting the recourse to the supremely sacred that the Church provides.

Again, another seeming paradox occurs when the fact of distancing between Montagnard society and the metropolitan institutions of the Church and State is placed side by side with another consistent feature of weddings, *viz.* the use of and allusion to explicitly metropolitan cultural items. From the *diskour*, *chanson romanz*, and *sega akordeon*, only performed during weddings, to ideas of appropriate dress, to the repertory of food and drink items, especially cider, beef, and the various purchased items, these allusions are both explicit and relatively obligatory. An immediate and unexamined explanation to this phenomenon would attribute it to concerns for prestige. While this is certainly an aspect, a more profound rationale emerges when the entire context of the wedding is considered.

The pivotal nature of the activities of the men of the *fanmi prè*, as well as the bridal pair themselves, is readily obvious. Just as important is the fact that, within the context of a wedding, these activities and the treatment accorded the bride especially, are almost precisely the reverse of their quotidian activities and treatment. Thus the men cook and serve, the bride is isolated from family and pampered. Furthermore, the repertory of food items traditionally served at a wedding are quite different than everyday fare. These “reversals” of the mundane clearly mark the occasion as extra-ordinary as

befitting a special celebration. By the same token, by making allusions to the metropole “extra-ordinary,” the “ordinary” then is, *ipso facto*, that without reference to the metropole. In other words, a significant contrast is set up between the metropole, and everything associated with it, and the normal course of everyday life, Montagnard society. Here again, built into the very organization of a wedding, is the “social distance” that Montagnards conceive, and maintain, between themselves and the metropole.

What is at first sight curious, in fact further underlines this point. These allusions to the metropole are structured only into weddings. The various activities and restrictions surrounding birth and death neither reverse the normal activities of men or the *fanmi prè* nor require specific foods or dress or music. While certain behaviours are essential and could be read as reversals of the quotidian, like the sequestration of the infant and new mother, or the gathering at the wake, storytelling and gambling, none of these have explicit associations with the metropole. Why should weddings specifically entail the contrast between metropole and Montagnard, and not these other celebrations? I think the answer emerges when we first ask what is each celebration about in the minds of its participants. Weddings are about the creation of a *pti fanmi* from two other distinct *fanmi*; the important social relation spotlighted in weddings is that between two *fanmi prè*, two *fanmi*. The highlighted relationship for birth and baptism is that between a new being and the *fanmi prè* through the mother; it is a relationship internal to the *fanmi prè*. A *pryèr-hwi-jou* on the other hand poses the *fanmi prè* face-to-face with the afterworld, through the deceased; not just the *fanmi* vis-à-vis the supernatural, but the *fanmi* in its earthly guise versus the *fanmi* in its “heavenly” form, the *grandimun*.

With this perspective, it can be readily understood why, for example, the *pryèr-hwi-jou* is virtually the only occasion (not single social act, as when topping off a bottle) where the *grandimun* are specifically acknowledged by the recitation of songs and chants attributed directly to them, as well as the custom of storytelling. It is in the contrast of life to death, the play of fate as it were, implicit in the *pryèr-hwi-jou* that provides the only licit occasion for gambling, card games — pointedly, games of chance, of fate.

Similarly, birth is an event with significance internal to the *fanmi prè* — and both the participants and the nature of the celebration is decidedly domestic, focussed on the *fanmi* and the designated godparents. Neither birth nor death are occasions which confront what is, strictly speaking, public.

But the very *sine qua non* of weddings is precisely their public-ness: they both create and realign relationships between and among social entities. By their very social-

ness, their quintessentially Montagnard nature, their contrast and their opposite is precisely the metropole.

Recognizing the different contrasts set up in each rite de passage celebration, it seems equally clear why the *Fèr lanne* celebrations incorporate no explicit allusions to the metropole. Here, like in birth, the celebrated relationships are internal, in this case internal to Montagnard society. And here the quotidian is not reversed, rather it is elevated. *Fèr lanne* celebrates, reaffirms, even rejuvenates, those on-going relationships which provide the underpinning of Montagnard society *qua* Montagnard.

CREOLE CELEBRATIONS

It is in the differences between Montagnard and Creole celebrations that the contrast between their respective stances to the society around them is most visible. Significantly, in how a given family chooses the nature and tenor of their celebrations is to be found the most clear cut expression of their aspirations and their social concerns.

Like Montagnard celebrations, Creole ones also select from a repertory of European cultural behaviours and artefacts. The danger of conflating form and substance in regard to this ostensible adoption of European customs is even more pronounced when we consider Creoles. The virtually intact adoption of European practices makes it that much more difficult to detect the subtle differences. Yet differences remain and they do signal a tension between the metropole and Creoles. Furthermore, this elusive tension is often overshadowed by the more obvious one between Creoles and Montagnards. The relatively straightforward dichotomy between “self”/Montagnard, and “other”/non-Montagnard, evident among Montagnards, is much more nuanced among Creoles.

Not only do Creoles define themselves apart from the metropole, whether Mauritius or the *grands pays*, they also see themselves separate from Montagnards. Their “other” therefore is not only split, but the two are on either side: Creoles are in the middle. And to make matters more difficult, the “other” is as well among themselves. The status ranking among Creoles already signalled in the discussion of the quotidian is heightened in the celebrated — that optimal stage for public display and consumption.

As with Montagnards, Creoles select from and elevate certain social relationships evident in the quotidian to the level of that worthy of note, that warranting celebration. We take our cue from their own expressed foci and concerns.

A Creole Wedding

We begin here also with weddings, but not so much because weddings contain many of the sociocultural features which will reappear in other ritual contexts, rather because weddings are the single most important Creole celebration, eclipsing all others. Like Montagnards, Creoles also celebrate the various life crises, birth, marriage, and death, as well as certain others only perfunctorily recognized by Montagnards, like First Communion and Confirmation, but there the matter ends. For Creoles do not celebrate *Fèr lanne* and have no equivalent festivity. This absence in itself carries social meaning. But, just as the *Fèr lanne* is the largest and most visible Montagnard celebration, weddings are the largest and most visible Creole celebration.

A Creole marriage also begins with a young man's proposal to the parents of the bride-to-be. This proposal consists of the formal presentation of the *let mariaj*. But even before this event, the young woman has invited the young man to visit her at home. The *let mariaj* is the formal first step of the engagement period, rather than the point where visits may begin.

Unlike among Montagnards, both sets of Creole parents must approve their respective children's choice of spouse. By the time a young man sends his *let mariaj*, his own parents are well aware of his intentions and tacitly approve them, and the parents of the young woman, by having allowed the home visits, also tacitly approve. When parents are adamantly opposed to a proposed union, their disapproval is felt well before a *let mariaj* could be sent. Sometimes, a young man or woman can force the issue to mildly reluctant parents through the *let mariaj*, but they are usually convinced beforehand that their parents will approve when confronted. In other cases, when only one set of parents will approve, this can also force the other set to a decision. When one set or both sets of parents adamantly refuse permission, there are only two options for the young couple. They must elope, by spending the night together in someone's house, or they can spend the night together in the house of the parents who do approve.

The presentation and acceptance of the *let mariaj* is shortly followed by a visit between the two sets of parents, usually in the home of the bride-to-be and including the fiancéed pair. This is a closed meeting, formal in tone, and is depicted as an occasion for the parents to get to know one another. Wedding plans are here also discussed and coordinated.

Once the *let mariaj* has been accepted and the parents have met each other, the engagement period proper begins. Here, as with Montagnards, the young man visits his future bride in her *lakour* each Sunday, and this too is called the *koze dimanch*. If he is not already familiar with the bride's siblings, during these visits the young man will become friendly with them. Most often, they are all already quite well-known to each other, and most often already friendly. During the engagement period, the couple refer to each other as *fyanse*, and at least in public and at home in the presence of others maintain a chaste and reserved demeanor with each other. During this period, it is not unheard of that the young woman becomes pregnant, they *te fe Pak avan Karèm*, but, as we have earlier discussed, this is not problematic if the marriage is approved. Nonetheless, a young woman is expected to maintain her virginity during this period.⁶

Although this engagement period was not marked by any other public occasions or celebrations until the wedding itself, the couple was expected to attend the pre-nuptial counseling, at least four weekly sessions, given by the priest. This is expected both by the young couple's peers as well as their elders. One couple was apparently quite lax in attending these classes, and the priest threatened to not marry them unless they were more diligent — this threat was taken seriously and became the subject of disapproving gossip. Pre-nuptial counseling primarily addressed proper comportment between a husband and wife, their joint religious duties, especially as regarded future children, the sin of adultery, and so on.

Also during this period, all the decisions and preparations for the wedding are carried out behind the scenes by the parents. Details of this process were not forthcoming, however it was fairly obvious that the parents jointly agreed to the place of the wedding, the time, the guest list, and together the costs of this affair.

Traditionally, as among Montagnards, most weddings occur in the months of November, December and January. The break in the agricultural cycle which makes this an opportune time for Montagnards is not given as a rationale, although this period is marked as well by various holidays, like Christmas, New Year's, the Feast of the Epiphany, for which government and school holidays are given.

Virtually all Creole weddings take place at the church in Port Mathurin, Saint Marie de Cœur. A few also take place at the small chapel in La Ferme, but the preference is clear for Saint Marie de Cœur, even for those resident in La Ferme.

All wedding receptions take place in one of the *klub*. There is one *klub* in Anse aux Anglais, and three others in Baie aux Huitres. Of the three in Baie aux Huitres, only one is consistently chosen for wedding receptions. These *klub* are ostensibly year-round

establishments, serving light fare and drinks with recorded music. However, the two primary ones chosen for weddings clearly depend on these affairs for their economic viability — most often they are closed, or frequented regularly only by a few friends of the manager, until an affair is scheduled. In addition to wedding receptions, they are the site for any large formal social gathering, *e.g.* a government cocktail party, a welcoming reception for a newly-arrived functionary, a reception to meet a political figure. On the other hand, the remaining *klub*, perceptibly graded as to clientele, are open on Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons and evenings. Saturdays see mostly men, especially young men, with only a few women, and Sundays are mostly family outings with young children.

The wedding begins with a mass at Saint Marie de Cœur in the late afternoon. Like the Montagnard mass at St. Gabriel, it is the same as a regular Sunday mass, with the exception of the bridal couple attending immediately in front of the altar, and the priest delivering a sermon on some aspect of love or marriage, in addition to the exchange of vows. Unlike a Montagnard wedding mass, the Creole mass is immediately followed by the signing of the civil registry documents, the priest acting as witness.

A Creole bride, dressed in white with veil and bouquet, is attended also by her *fi donèr*, most often her sisters or sometimes cousins, all dressed in long identical gowns. And the groom, dressed in a dark suit, is accompanied by his best man, typically his best friend. But a Creole bride is escorted not by her *parren*, but rather by her father. Both her, and the groom's, parents are present and sit in the first row of the Church, each to their respective sides of the aisle together with their invited guests.

After the wedding mass, just outside the church, a photographer takes pictures of the bridal party: the bride and groom, the best man and bridesmaids, and the respective parents. After that, the entire company, bridal party and guests, board a bus hired for the occasion. Saint Marie de Cœur is situated in Port Mathurin, the one *klub* about a mile away in Anse aux Anglais, the other in Baie aux Huitres, a distance of two miles. However, once the buses arrive in either Anse aux Anglais or Baie aux Huitres, the company disembarks about 500 feet away from the *klub* and forms a procession. Here, it is worth noting that the arrival of the wedding company is awaited by a large crowd — people resident in the area, or passers-by, who have not been invited — who watch and comment on the procession: who has been invited, how people are dressed and so on. Even just to be among the spectators is eagerly anticipated; mothers and their daughters plan for this, and those not allowed to go are bitterly resentful.

The procession is headed by the bridal party, and as they enter the *klub* firecrackers are set off. Once inside, they form a receiving line to greet each guest in turn as they enter the confines of the *klub*. The respective parents are first in the receiving line, then the bridal party, finally the bridal couple. The entrance to the *klub* has been decorated with flowers, bougainvillea and various greenery. After each guest has greeted the bridal party and been welcomed, and offered a wrapped wedding gift to the bridal couple, they are each given a glass of cider, and with glass in hand they stand about and chat. The gifts are put aside and are taken away later and opened in the privacy of the new couple's new home. Once all the guests are inside, the bridal party retires to their designated table, that with the wedding cake. Following this lead, all the guests also sit down. In marked contrast to a Montagnard wedding reception, there is no single long table. Rather the *klub* has been set up with a series of individual tables, each accommodating from four to eight chairs.

Once the guests are settled, the *klub's* waiters begin setting out bottles and glasses at each table. The beverages are already familiar: fruit wine and coca-cola, as well as sweet vermouth, for women and children, beer and cane spirits for men. But there is one noteworthy addition, imported whisky. However, the bottles of whisky are not placed on every table, only on those where the most elite guests are seated: the bridal party's table, as well as any relatively high-status government official (the Commissioner and his wife, the Assistant Commissioner, the Director of Public Works, etc.), the bank and airline executives, any visiting foreigners, the priest, selected Chinese or Creole families, and so on.

There is no period of toasting or song-offerings, rather, after a period of general mingling among tables, the music begins, this most often provided by a live band. The music is invariably modern pop music popular in Mauritius and mostly the young people begin dancing. Interspersed with this modern music, the band will play a couple of local *sega* or *sega akordeon*, the latter precipitating the older couples to dance. The bridal couple will also dance sporadically, they are, however, most occupied by conversation with their immediate party and the various guests who come up to their table.

Throughout this period, the *klub's* waiters will serve the various *gandjak* or *amuse gueule* — peanuts, fried croquettes of various sorts, Chinese fritters, pieces of tinned cheese, pieces of fried meat (beef and pork). These are all finger foods; no meal proper is served.

This generalized dancing and snacking and drinking goes on until around eleven o'clock or midnight. The party usually breaks up when the bridal pair departs, accompanied by the best man, which they do with no particular notice or fanfare.

The next day there may be a small private family gathering with the husband's family to formally greet his new wife. The wedding gifts will be opened — these are primarily decorative household items like platters, glasses, pitchers, vases. But there is no sequestration for the bride, nor a *retour denos* eight days later, nor any cycle of formal visiting by the husband to his parents-in-law initiated at this time.

The adoption of European customs for wedding celebrations, as with Montagnards, is fairly straightforward: the engagement period, the wedding attire of the bridal party, the reception with dancing afterwards, the wedding cake, the bridesmaids and best man, and furthermore, the necessity of the Catholic rites for the bestowal of the sacrament of marriage. In addition, the Chinese custom of firecrackers has been integrated into the whole ensemble of wedding activities.

Other features of Creole weddings indicate further a similarity with Montagnard customs: the *let mariaj*, the *koze dimanch*, the procession to the entrance of the reception.

Most striking though, are those features which are unlike Montagnard ones. Not only are the two sets of Creole parents pivotal in the actual arrangement of a marriage — their approval is necessary, they shoulder the costs, but they also play a public part in the ceremonies themselves. They formally meet each other at the beginning of the engagement period, they are not only present at the Church, but it is the father who “gives away” the bride, and it is they who head the receiving line at the wedding reception and also sit with the bridal couple. At the same time, they are not further involved once the wedding is accomplished: there is no *retour denos* nor affinal visiting.

Distinctly different also, is the Creole unity of the civil marriage and the Church marriage within the context of the religious ceremony, as well as the importance of the Church's pre-nuptial counseling.

These distinctions are notable, for they occur precisely at those points where Montagnards create a distance between themselves and the Church and the State. The entire array of Church customs, including the priest himself, is accepted and integrated into Creole weddings, and all the significant parties are included. There is no meaningful separation of Church-sanctioned and State-sanctioned marriage.

The key participants in a Creole wedding are the bridal couple together, not the bride herself as she moves through the different stages of a Montagnard wedding, from being “given away” by her *parren*, to her *gate* status during the festivities, to her sequestration and the *retour denos*. Almost as important as the Creole bridal couple are their parents — they are not only present at the ceremony, the bride’s father playing a key part, but also front the reception line and sit with the couple at the head table. They never act in concert with their other *fanmi* nor do they actually serve the assembly, a pointed contrast to the pivotal role of the two *fanmi prè* in a Montagnard wedding.

Where a Montagnard wedding can be characterized as “inclusive” by the fact that most of a *fanmi prè*’s associates are invited guests with their respective *pti fanmi* at least, guests are seated at a single table, the fare is identical for all, and all are served by the *fanmi prè* hosts. Creole weddings from the start are “exclusive,” not just in the selected guest list, but in the separation of wedding procession and audience in the street, in the hierarchy implied in the separate tables with differentially served beverages, in the venue of a private *klub*, even in the public prestation of wedding gifts. Not only is the guest list the expression of the “proper” relationships and both aspiration to, and consolidation of, elite associations, it also deliberately eschews *fanmi qua fanmi* by selecting only particular individuals within even nuclear families. It is quite common for only certain adult children to be invited, but not their parents, or just the parents and not the children, or even, in a few cases, just the wife or just the husband.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is the kind and mode of prestation of wedding gifts that indicates the sharp difference in intent of the two ceremonies. Montagnard guests send gifts, food and money, for the festivity itself — by this fact they make the festivity itself the focus and by the same token underline its communality. Creole guests are fêted by the parents only, and the guests in return give gifts to the wedding couple only, notably gifts which embody conspicuous consumption. A Creole wedding is not communal at all, to the contrary, it makes explicit all those social features which indicate high[er] status.

Where a Montagnard wedding emphasizes the *fanmi prè* and the passage of the bride from one *fanmi prè* to another, a Creole wedding emphasizes the respective parents and a new and separate couple. Where a Montagnard wedding emphasizes communality in the provision and the consumption of wedding fare and in those invited, a Creole wedding emphasizes status differentials in both the wedding fare and in those individuals invited. Where a Montagnard wedding signals a separation between its own community

and metropolitan institutions, a Creole wedding signals the separation of those invited from the general “public” and implies an identity with metropolitan institutions.

The social implications of a Creole wedding are doubly significant in that this is the only public celebration among Creoles. The Montagnard *Fèr lanne* with its clear expression of *fanmi* and *pawas* relationships does not occur at all in Creole areas. The New Year is marked only by an occasional New Year’s Eve party almost entirely attended by young people with a few mothers *cum* chaperons.

New Year’s Day, as well as the Feast of the Epiphany on January 8th, Easter, the Feast of the Assumption (August 14th), November 1st (All Soul’s Day), and Christmas are celebrated *en fanmi*. After Mass, a family visit and meal is occasioned on these days. Usually, one or another set of parents is visited by their various married children. This can be a fairly casual gathering, or it can be a more formal meal served with vermouth or beer or even whisky, but it is virtually always just the immediate family. Which parents a particular couple will visit is variable, although here also status considerations appear to operate. Thus, the elderly Lamys, together with both their unmarried and married children (with their young children), always went to Mme. Lamy’s father’s house, a Frenel from Baie aux Huitres. M. Lamy’s mother was also alive and well, but not only did she lack the unequivocal Creole status of M. Frenal, she resided in a Montagnard *pawas*. In the case of Monsieur and Madame Celestin of Baie aux Huitres, second cousins in fact, these visits were invariably to Mme. Celestin’s parents who lived in Anse aux Anglais. Here, there did not appear to be a significant status difference, the family as a whole having well-established Creole standing, but the fact of distance, *i.e.* across *pawas* boundaries, seemed significant. While this recalls the Montagnards’ precedence given to extra-*pawas* relationships, and probably arises from the same concern to keep long-distance relationships active, it was not so common, nor articulated, as to suggest an “institutionalized” principle among Creoles.

These family visits among Creoles are not only occasioned by the Church holidays, but occur also for Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation and birthdays — the only difference being the site of the visit. The family of the child in question then receives.

When a Creole person dies, his or her immediate family receives family and close friends at their house that day. Last respects are paid and prayers are intoned around the *kanape* of the deceased, set out in the receiving room of the house. The next day, the body in its coffin is taken (usually by vehicle) to the Church where the funeral mass is

given, followed by a funeral procession to the Creole cemetery at Anse aux Anglais. This is followed by a gathering at the deceased's house, among family and friends with food and drink provided by the deceased's immediate family.

Not only is there no *pryèr-hwi-jou*, but there is no separation between the family and the deceased and the priest is included. The pall bearers are either siblings or friends. The whole affair is sedate and private in tone and participation.

Although certain elite functionaries may attend the funeral of the deceased, they are not treated in a fashion different from other guests. These official elite, like the Commissioner or the bank executive, only attend if they were personally acquainted with the deceased, and then usually only assist the mass and the funeral cortege. Similarly, official elite, unless they are actually *fanmi*, are not included in the family visits for Church holidays. And only if they are godparents will they be invited to a Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation. There, like the parents of the child in question, they will present a gift (most often money) to the child. Of course, during Baptism, they will directly assist by holding the infant during the ceremonies.

Thus it is only in the context of Creole weddings that the full expression of status concern and display is evident. Pointedly, it is only Creole weddings that are explicitly public events. The concerns for status, while still more or less evident in family celebrations, are secondary to the more important focus within the immediate families. These visits are notable for their private, insular and domestic orientation.

Creole society, then, portrays itself as a collection of individual nuclear families, their interrelationships dictated by those between parents and children. It is only when a new family is created, in a wedding, that Creole celebrations are explicitly public, and it is primarily in this context that the concerns for status affirmation, and negotiation, are clearly articulated. The insertion of a new family in the hierarchy of Creole society implies the realignment of other families in the social ordering. Among Montagnards, this realignment takes place between two *fanmi prè*, not in the society at large. Beyond the occasion of a wedding, Creole society is characterized by the insularity of its constituent families, families in the Creole sense not the Montagnard sense. Thus other celebrations, clearly private and domestic, involve only this restricted family. In the final analysis, Creole society must be seen as an hierarchically ordered collection of nuclear families. The restricted sense of *fanmi*, the nature of their celebrations and the importance of public statements of status preclude any social expressions of communality beyond the immediate family. In the end, each family makes itself.

V

SAVAGES AND MUDMEN

In the previous two chapters, I have been concerned to show the differences between Creoles and Montagnards. In the attempt to delineate these differences, I have in effect reified them through recourse to the diacritica of two distinct, discernible, and self-conscious groups. And yet, in Chapter I, I traced out the outlines of an argument that sought to explain the fluidity of the boundary and the contextual application of identity markers. My argument rested on the concept of what I called *stance*, in order to draw attention to the relational content of what it meant to proclaim oneself, always obliquely, Creole or Montagnard, or Rodriguan.

In an early article (Gardella 1983), I had argued that these two sociocultural groups could be viewed as ethnic groups, in that they each manifest a differential sense of origins, race, language, religion, and so on, in short, two separate cultural identities. Although I maintained that these were ethnic groups as strictly defined in the discipline at the time, I was also at pains to demonstrate that ethnicity, at least in this case, had “a subjective reality always defined and articulated in its very process.” This process could be seen in the rise of yet a third identity, what I called then a nascent ethnic group, a Rodriguan one, which was a specific response to a political relationship, in this case a colonial one with Mauritius, and played out through the machinations of both Gaëtan Duval and Serge Clair in their election campaigns. The existence of a ‘new’ Rodriguan identity, while real, only existed in relation to the outside world — but it fit into an already recognized analytical category through which I could explain the lack of clear divide in actual practice between the two other groups, the essential seamlessness between the two poles represented by Creole and Montagnard, without losing the equally real emic distinction between the two.¹

In retrospect, it is clear that my analysis was simplistic and my focus too much on ethnicity *per se* rather than the realities of the case. However, then, as now, it is equally difficult to portray these same issues in terms of classes. Whether one defines class strictly in terms of its members’ relationships to the means of production, or whether one understands class simply as a set of common cultural concepts, isomorphic with relations of production in some however vague sense, within a larger social formation, both could be applied to Rodrigues. While the factors of production for both Creole and Montagnard are precisely the same — a mix of land, labour, animals, marine resources, fishing gear — their respective relationships to these factors and the economic uses to which they are put are quite different. While both Montagnards and Creoles produce symbolic capital from their respective economic systems, the content and use of that

symbolic capital is very different. Based on the different results of their respective production systems, Creole and Montagnard could be understood as two classes in the same society, but as in the case of ethnicity, this too is simplistic and again reifies the distinctions between the two at the expense of their interconnectedness.

It is not just that the lived-in reality of the distinction between Creole and Montagnard is not conveyed by the notion of class, or ethnicity, whichever way it is defined, it is also that an authentic, analytic, social significance is glossed over.

Whether class identity is assigned on the basis of a discursive cultural classification schema, or from a class structure that is read directly from the ownership of the means of production, it appears simply as an execution of the structure. The practices surrounding the assignment of class identity are tangential because such identity is viewed as a *fait accompli*. That is, the structure of class provides each class member a prior unambiguous identity. Bourdieu has attacked these views, arguing that they are “condemned either to ignore the whole question of the principle underlying the production of regularities . . . or to reify abstractions, by the fallacy of treating the objects constructed by science, whether ‘culture’ or ‘modes of production’ as realities endowed with a social efficacy, capable of acting as agents responsible for historical actions” (1977:26-27). Bourdieu is pointing out that there is immanent regularity, but by no means mechanical determination, between the economic/cultural categories and the practices by which agents are pragmatically categorized. Accordingly, it is necessary to account both for the existence of the objective structure of class that exists prior to, and beyond the ken, of individual members, and also the socially defined *modus operandi* by which the structure is used and reproduced. Insofar, as neither the culture nor production-centered approach can grasp both moments, they cannot offer an account of class identity adequate to the ethnography. (Lipuma and Meltzoff 1989: 322)

Whether we call Creole and Montagnard classes or ethnic groups, or whether we emphasize their current configurations or those evident from the historical record, none of these identities or definitions are “adequate to the ethnography” because they all omit the relational character which obtains between the two and which is palpable in the lived-in reality of this society.² This relational quality, which I have tried to capture with the notion of stance, is where I wish to situate Bourdieu’s “the principle underlying the production of regularities.”

In Chapter I, this relational aspect was described in the context of sociolinguistic patterns (blacks, mulattoes, savages, boiled octopus, tribals, mudmen) and touched upon in the discussion of disagreements about Creole or Montagnard status in prospective marriage partners. It was noted that there was a clearly discernible avoidance of directly proclaiming one’s status as either Montagnard or Creole; rather, identification was claimed obliquely by stating the contrast, only referring to the other and in doing that

implying that distinction from oneself. At the same time, the distinctions between the two are quite marked, to the point of causing certain vehemence and hostility as well as a certain smugness and righteousness.

The preceding historical and ethnographic accounts have demonstrated both actual and self-proclaimed origins of the two groups, their characteristics as seen by outsiders and as self-ascribed. We saw that the self-proclaimed origins of the two groups as the result of continual inheritance, either genetic or socioeconomic, were not, strictly speaking, correct. While the specific substantive features of the two groups differ depending on whether they are being self-proclaimed or whether their features are being drawn from the historical record, this is not so important as the fact that there are two versions and both incorporate a clear difference between themselves. In other words, what is continuous and shared is that there is a difference and that this difference is relational, it is based on the fact of the other.

The existence of a conscious, and consciously maintained, difference between the two groups, it seems to me, forces the analyst "to treat kin relationships as something people *make*, and with which they *do* something" (Bourdieu 1977:35, his emphasis), and following from that, to a consideration of the entire sociocultural formation as the non-static "product of strategies (conscious and unconscious) oriented towards the satisfaction of material and symbolic interests and organized by reference to a determinate set of economic and social conditions." (*Ibid.*:36)

The notion of stance, denoting a position toward something outside of itself, is also meant to locate where the "making" and "doing" occur and in reference to what "set of conditions." Although a particular stance is practiced at the level of the individuals, these result in a regularized series of practices, each series of which incorporates a particular perspective or relationship to a single referent "set" that is Rodriguan history and society. The sociocultural formation itself incorporates the choices, the possibilities, the flexibility, upon which an individual stance can operate. Rodriguan society is in itself a series of possibilities, options, pathways, perspectives all involving one lived-in sociohistorical reality. Its history, its environmental context, its people, all carry the same reality. But that reality does not entail a single set of cultural concepts, rules, perspectives and understandings.

For example, mention was made of a Creole family, that of M. Polynice, wherein the father had two sets of offspring, one by his Creole, Church-married wife and another by his Montagnard mistress or second wife. Not only did this man fulfill his obligations to both spouses and the two sets of offspring, there existed regular and public relations

between the two. This one man conducts his social life from two different stances, he is using two socially defined “modus operandi,” consciously. Here, one agent is creating and reproducing simultaneously both a Creole and a Montagnard family.

Although Creole families purported to be hiring only labour in their domestic servants, they were in fact drawing on extended kinship relations recognized as such by the Montagnards they hired and that the Creoles themselves understood by this very use of kin. One agent reproduces two structures with the same action. The use of kinship labour in this instance, from the perspective of a Montagnard, was inherent in the kinship relationship and implied reciprocity between the two families. The Creole perspective practices the denial of kinship through the creation of a wage relationship. In either perspective the fact is that a particular child works in the household of a specific other.

The notion of a *korom*, manifest among both Creole and Montagnard differed only in their respective doings, rather than the notion *per se* or the membership. Here, one sociocultural relationship, defined by egalitarianism, short-term reciprocity, and denial of kinship, was equally maintained by social agents acting from the two perspective or stances inherent in Creole and Montagnard. It was only in the practices of the *korom* that one could discern its differential placement within other social relationships.

The importance of a man’s father, whether in the Montagnard *fanmi prè* or in the Creole natal family, in “social reproduction” — here marriage, are both crucial despite the difference in which the substance of that relationship resides. The same structurally important position, father/offspring, is highlighted, but the practice of it created two very different results.

A woman is the conduit for a special sort of social essence for Creole status, while for Montagnards she is the conduit to a network of relations with other *fanmi prè* and a diacritica of a man’s relationship with other men. Similarly to the father/offspring one, this crucial relationship expresses, and is expressed by, the very different nature of the relationships between men and between families in Creole and Montagnard *modus operandi*.

All these examples of social relationships demonstrate their crucial difference in how they are used, how they are enacted. The Creole-Montagnard distinction exists through the differential practice, the different mode of enactment, of each relationship.

The

“ . . . uses made of them by agents whose attachments to keeping them in working order and to making them work intensively . . . rises with the degree to which they actually or potentially fulfill functions indispensable to them, or to put it less ambiguously, the extent to which they do or can satisfy vital material and symbolic *interests*.” (*Ibid.*:38, his emphasis)

It should be at least implicitly understood by now that the material and symbolic interests of Creoles and Montagnards are quite different. These material and symbolic interests differ in relation to each other through their different perspectives, their respective relations to something outside of either: the sociohistorical conditions of Rodrigues.

The sociohistorical conditions of Rodrigues from the beginning have revolved around certain facts: slavery and freedom, black and white, European and non-European, metropole and periphery. As it happens, those facts still hold in their modern permutations. The two sets of material and symbolic interests revolved then, and now, around the “sense of” and pursuit of autonomy and independence. The mere pursuit of autonomy and independence indicates the existence of their opposites, subjugation and dependence. In Rodrigues, the agents of subjugation and dependence are from the outside, from the first slaveholders and big traders, to the British colonial authorities, to Mauritians. Creole and Montagnard each embody a different view of, and reaction to, a system of power relations imposed on them both.

. . . the notion of power has no inherent connection with intention or will . . . [nor] logical tie to motivation or wanting. . . Social systems are constituted as regularized practices: power within social systems can thus be treated *as involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction*. (Giddens 1979:92-93, his emphasis)

Any individual within Rodriguan society has essentially a socially constituted choice in what strategy to take toward power stemming from the outside. The entire social structure incorporates the two strategies, both attitudes to the metropole, both attitudes to one’s social fellows, and all the nuances in between. Although where individual choice is manifest is only in such mundane matters as choice of spouse or choice of economic strategy, but those very choices embody a particular perspective to power. The unselfconscious cumulation of these choices, of their precedents, produces a regularity born of a limited sociohistorical context — the society itself.

Creole and Montagnard are two faces of the same coin. This coin is the currency of power on this island. Creoles attempt to usurp that power, while Montagnards reject it, but both practice a sociocultural *marronage*.³ Creoles pursue that power through the

adoption and manipulation of outside institutions to their own ends. Montagnards replace their rejection of this power through creating a separate, solidary network of support among themselves.

How to get from this particular configuration of a society created in reaction to domination, a society neither aberrant nor exceptional, to a more generalized and comparative frame for analysis is the subject of the next and final chapter.

VI CONTEXT AND CONCLUSIONS

By virtue of the identity of the first settlers and the larger sociohistorical processes of the time, Rodrigues falls squarely into that class of societies typically delimited by the rise and expansion of Western imperialism through the enslavement of Africans in the service of plantation, monocrop economies instituted by European nations in newly-discovered and virgin territories. These resultant societies were primarily to be found in the New World, and within that hemisphere especially in the Caribbean with its myriad islands uniquely vulnerable to European expansion. Despite the diversity of the peoples involved, the environments encountered and the particularities of each instance:

Si la constellation des îles créoles était rassemblée dans un même océan, elle s'imposerait par le rayonnement d'une culture et d'une civilisation originales. Mais écartelée entre la Caraïbe, les terres d'Amérique et l'Océan Indien, mêlée de façon ambiguë à bien des entre-croisements de civilisations, soumise à de puissantes forces centrifuges, elle évoque plutôt les restes d'un univers éclaté. ...D'une île à l'autre, d'un océan à l'autre, cette unité se répète, chaque île, chaque archipel étant à l'autre contre-épreuve et vérification de l'existence de régularités significatives.¹

(Benoist 1979a)

Sidney Mintz (1966:915) sketches out some these “significant regularities” for what he terms the Caribbean “ ‘societal area,’ since its component societies probably share many more social-structural features than they do cultural features,” and it is these same features which lead Benoist to unite the Caribbean with the islands of the western Indian Ocean, “creole” societies all. (1979b & 1974).²

The key social and economic factors which form the basis for Caribbean (and with Benoist we include the Mascarenes and the Seychelles) regional commonality flow primarily from the European establishment of agricultural capitalism, utilizing slave labor and the plantation system, in territories without significant presence of indigenous peoples, in many cases due to their swift demise in the face of European incursion. The initial introduction of African slaves, replaced in certain islands by the successive importations of other non-European groups, resulted in social classes being largely defined in terms of phenotypical or ethnic differences, and a long-term political, economic and social domination by elites of typically European origin.

But these initial structural conditions, modified in each and every situation, resulted in a host of different social outcomes: thus from the “plural societies” (M.G. Smith 1974) of Trinidad, Grenada, British Honduras, Suriname, Mauritius and La Réunion, marked by internal ethnic and cultural separation; to those only relatively more homogeneous, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Seychelles, marked by colour and class stratification; to the

small, homogeneous and exceedingly insular societies such as Carriacou, Barbuda, Providencia, the Caymans, Dominica and Rodrigues. Despite this wide spectrum, all of these societies nonetheless retain in some form the social and cultural implications of that early metropolitan domination — ideologically, economically and politically. Even in those societies which violently rejected this European domination, Haiti and the maroon societies of Jamaica, Suriname and Guyana, there remains the effect of those initial imposed conditions.

“Creole” societies all, they were created as outposts of European expansion and mercantilism, and as such, were from the beginning controlled by metropolitan interests until well into the twentieth century, the sole exceptions Haiti and certain of the maroon societies.

They were at the same time created on a fundamental social division, that between masters and slaves, between the free and the enslaved. And that division was based on the separation and distinction of European, white, and African, black.

This initial racial and, by implication, ethnic division was subject to many permutations in the individual social, economic and political histories of each island. In certain islands, emancipation brought in its wake the further importation of “aliens” to meet the labour needs of metropolitan economic interests: thus East Indians, Javanese, Chinese, and yet other Africans were brought in to satisfy the labour requirements of each island, albeit their status no longer cast in the stark contrast of free/slave. In other islands the conditions were such that the formerly enslaved population was liable to continued plantation control through land measures and the institution of various labour laws; in these instances, emancipation merely caused the redefinition of inferior status in terms other than free and slave. In still other places, the failure or gradual disappearance of plantation economies allowed a relatively autonomous society to emerge, in practice more or less freed from direct metropolitan influence.

Thus while certain islands saw the development of *de facto* peasantries on the margins and interstices of on-going plantations, or in the vacuum of failed ones, and others witnessed the elaboration of “plantation proletariats,” in all of the islands the factors of race and colour, ethnicity and origins, as well as the tensions (political, economic) between local and metropolitan, continued to play significant parts in the elaboration and development of each sociocultural formation right up to the present day.

Anthropological studies of these societies have been directed partly by their nature and partly by the discipline’s traditional orientations. Thus their perennial focus on race and/or ethnicity, which in any case would be difficult to ignore, and flowing from that a

concern for acculturation and syncretism in the effort to explain the permutations of the initial "culture contact" and the subsequent paths it took in each case.

At the same time, the discipline's dominant methodology of participant observation and consequent tendency to concentrate on small communities, has canalized research into "population segments" (Comitas 1968) at the local level, with kinship, family organization and socioeconomic parameters providing the major nodes of analysis within each community. The few studies which have taken a "macro level" perspective have tended to depict these societies in the terms of a "plural" society, first utilized by Furnival (1948) in southeast Asia.

In North American anthropology, which with very few exceptions has dominated not just Afro-American studies but virtually all creole studies, the dovetailing of racial division and separate sociocultural traditions was early on articulated in terms of cultural retentions and survivals or their opposite, local adaptations. These studies have focussed on the lower classes, largely those of non-European derivation, and have been concerned to account for the sociocultural patterns found within these groups in terms of the particular expression of some sort of "cultural heritage" preserved, or lost, in the teeth of European hegemony.

These groups, "segments," are treated separately from "mainstream" society, and the sources of their differences are seen in the initial conditions of slavery which first imposed the free/white and slave/black social distinction. The arguments and controversies in the field are not about this division, but rather refer to what the observed differences between contemporary segments and the mainstream imply about the former.

The discussions surrounding the place and nature of African-American society and culture within overall (North) American society typify the polarities which have arisen around this central issue. On the one hand is Frazier: "Probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America" (1966[1939]:15) or, later, Glazer and Moynihan: "The Negro is only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect" (1963:53). This school of thought views the initial imported Africans, and their descendants, as totally disenfranchised and rendered powerless. Through consistent and continuous exploitation and marginalization, these people have never been able to achieve full participation and place in white society. They are the permanent "underclass."

On the other hand are those who see in the black "segments" of society the preservation and triumph of the spirit of those first Africans carried on by their descendants. Herskovits' work focussed on the New World continuities of African

institutions and “the deeper forms of [African] culture that seem to bind together Afro-Americans” (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:9).

These two perspectives, first articulated in the debates between Frazier and Herskovits in the early 1950s, continue to define the crucial issues in African-American studies. They also have resonance in popular culture, expressed in a variety of fora, from the political controversies sparked by The Moynihan Report, the black separatist movements in the 1960s in the United States, to even the idea of *negritude* espoused by Caribbean intellectual elites.

Despite the different implications stemming from these two opposite perspectives, they both rest on the assumption that two cultures, one African and one European, came together in the New World, and the result of this encounter is what is visible in contemporary African-American societies. It is in the effort to refine such an “encounter model,” working from “the African side of the equation” (Mintz and Price 1976:4), that another trend of analysis has arisen, exemplified by Sidney Mintz and various of his students. First explicitly articulated in the programmatic paper of 1976, *An Anthropological Approach, The Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*, this approach proposes a model which utilizes an historical analysis in delineating the origins and contemporary sociocultural patterns found in African-American, creole societies, while at the same time carefully separating social and cultural forces. Mintz and Price argue that it is the black experiences of enslavement and social exclusion that account for African-American sociocultural similarities, their African heritage “pools of available symbolic and material resources” (*op.cit.*). Thus by distinguishing social-relational and cultural perspectives in examining the institution of slavery in these New World societies, they arrive at an “understand[ing] [that] the proliferation of new social institutions under slavery to be the precondition and basis for continuities in culture” (Mintz and Price *op.cit.*:43).

Despite the valuable and fertile perspective proposed by Mintz and Price, especially in its influence in turning studies to greater attention to historical circumstances, it shares with its scholarly precursors and competitors certain biases which prejudice an analysis of Rodriguan society.

The first bias is that in virtually all of these approaches, the subject group is treated as a “segment” of the total society. In so-called “primitive” or traditional societies, the usual subject of anthropology, focussing on a particular group does not in itself pose a problem because the assumption is that these are small-scale societies, relatively unstratified and homogeneous, characterized by some sort of mechanical or organic

solidarity — so that the smaller, local group is only an instance of what is to be found throughout. It is another discourse as to whether or not this perspective is justified, especially in the modern world and in the face of colonialism and imperialism, and indeed much energy has been expended in the discussion of, for example, “tribes” or “ethnic groups and boundaries.” Be that as it may, in the case of African-American or creole societies, the subject group is thus perceived as encapsulated within the larger society, and the relationship between it and the larger society usually depicted as rather unidimensional. Whether the “segment” is viewed as constrained and exploited by the mainstream, engulfed and “stripped” of their heritage, as in the Frazierian view, or triumphing despite all, in the view of Herskovits and Mintz, the relationship between it and the mainstream is univalent. The “segment” is constrained through economic forces and/or through racial prejudice or other forms of cultural dispositions, but within those constraints it is treated as whole.

A second bias, related to the first, is the tendency to homogenization of the erstwhile masters, the European colonists, and their later elite descendants. Mintz and Price set up a contrast “between the relatively homogeneous culture of the Europeans in the initial settlement of any New World colony and the relatively diverse cultural heritage of the Africans in the same setting” (1976:1-2). It is clear that the assumption is that the differences between certain African groups were somehow more profound than the differences between, say, a Frenchman from Normandie and one from Provence, or a Scotsman and one from Devon. A pause to reflect on European society in the 17th through 19th centuries, even from a layman’s view, would reveal that the processes of state formation, nationalization of local and regional interests, and their effect on diverse sociocultural traditions within any one area, only resulted in some kind of relative “homogenization” of European cultures in the twentieth century (See, for example, Wolf 1982). Certainly a homogeneity among Europeans at this epoch is no more apparent than among Africans, and to assert this as a precondition in creole societies, without demonstration, already sets in train a biased perspective on their subsequent interactions.³

These two biases together result in a perspective that makes opaque the processes and dialectics of local political and economic control, both internally and vis-à-vis the metropolitan power. The “segmentation” of the lower class and the homogenization of the upper class ultimately subsumes the issue of power into only the confrontation between Europeans and Africans. Once power is enfolded into the confrontation of two separate social groups, then political issues only get phrased in terms of the diacritica of each group — colour, ethnicity, or class, and are only visible in their institutionalized

forms — laws, regulations and courts, the military and police, and the absolute and formal control of factors of production.

As a corollary of this perspective, the appearance of any European cultural form in these creole societies takes on a negative connotation. By treating European cultural items as belonging to, or originating from, a homogeneous elite, each individual item or aspect of these carries the same symbolic weight. Thus the adoption of a European-derived cultural item by a non-European signals co-optation, while the continuation or maintenance of an African-derived form, or “cognitive principle,” signals the opposite — independence, resistance and integrity.

While the same generalized social and cultural processes delineated for African-American or creole societies are quite evident for Rodrigues, the particularities of Rodrigues also highlight these biases inherent in the theoretical perspectives typically employed for this class of societies.

Thus the initial settlement on the island was characterized by the confrontation of two groups, one with free status and at least quasi-institutionalized power, the other enslaved and with no power. This initial division of society into free-white and enslaved-black was further characterized by the island’s colonial status. From its beginnings to the present day, Rodrigues has been governed, and controlled, from the metropole — even as that metropole contained within it the relations between Mauritius, itself a colony, and first France, then Britain, and in the second half of the twentieth century, Mauritius alone. Here, already, the identity and strategies of the governing elite are neither mutual to all the parties nor could they have been continuous. Furthermore, just considering the elite *in situ*, neither were they of a single nationality nor were their separate presences continuous nor were they even necessarily expatriates of any sort. And the identity of the eventual local elite was compromised by their non-white origins, a fact that returns to haunt the assumption of free-white vs. black-enslaved in their own self-definition.

As a result, Rodrigues presents a sociohistorical situation where these two divisions, free/slave, colony/metropole, in their particulars cannot be considered as simply background to a focus on current social patterns within one particular “segment.” We have discerned in the preceding pages that the initial divisions of this society have undergone changes in their particular associations — moving from free/slave, to black/white, to Montagnard/Creole with colony/metropole adding another dimension to these. But, even if we were to dispense entirely with a historical perspective in our examination of this society, we still could not be justified in treating each of these groups as separate “segments.” We have also seen that the sociocultural meanings of these terms reside in the contrast, the specific substances of each turn on that contrast. Thus to

examine only one segment of this society would be not only arbitrary, but would also precisely omit the social significance residing in this contrast, the socioculturally constructed division in the society. To do so would be to ignore that each side has been and continues to be part of the other's reality.

In most creole studies, the elite group and their particular structures of domination are taken as independent variables. This is partly due to the focus on "segments" and partly due to the interest in acculturation and syncretism. This segregation of the elite and the modalities of the modes of metropolitan dominance in the local society are not afforded by the Rodriguan situation. Quite apart from the particularly Rodriguan terms of the division, are the facts that the elite are themselves descendants of former slaves, and further, Rodriguan culture does not present any obviously "African" traits.

The early departure of "real" Europeans from Rodrigues, together with the even earlier failure of a plantation economy, removes entirely those factors of dominance conventionally taken to be the source of contemporary patterns of stratification in these creole societies. On the one hand, the Rodriguan Creoles had to construct a sociological equivalent to white-European-free in order to assert their dominance, on the other hand, they also had to construct a material basis for that dominance. Because of the lack of continuity between the early masters and the later elite, and a concomitant material, economic disjunction, the processes of creation of a particular status are brought into relief.

This aspect of active creation is further underlined by the repertory of cultural items or motifs which are overwhelmingly ostensibly European. Thus the division of Rodriguan society into Creoles and Montagnards cannot be explained by, or attributed to, differences in their respective "pools of cultural heritage." Both Creoles and Montagnards were the descendants of transplanted Africans, and they both apparently drew from a pool of European "cultural heritage," not African. Dwelling on cultural forms in terms of retentions and survivals would lead us to a statement about Rodrigues analogous to the Benedicts' about the Seychelles:

Customs surrounding rites of passage, such as birth, marriage, and death, seem to be overwhelmingly European. There are no puberty ceremonies apart from first communion, and the holidays celebrated are those of the Catholic calendar. Seychellois culture, as it exists today, is homogeneous except for the few Indians and some of the Chinese. It is a variant of European culture with strong French overtones.

(Benedict & Benedict 1982:146)

This perspective would not only result in the patently absurd conclusion that Rodrigues is European in culture, but would also totally discount the clearly articulated differences between Montagnards and Creoles.

By delving beneath the ostensible form of certain Rodriguan celebrations, we saw that Montagnards and Creoles evidence a differential social meaning to these celebrations — through emphasis, rearrangement, and selection of separate items and mode of participation. So, while on the one hand, both groups apparently drew on the same “pool of cultural resources,” the meaning and uses of those cultural items are hardly uniform.

Even in the more sophisticated terms of Mintz and Price’s “encounter model,” where cultural orientations, or “grammatical principles,”⁴ informed those social “institutions that were created by the slaves to deal with what are at once the most ordinary and the most important aspects of life [and which] took on their characteristic shape within the parameters of the masters’ monopoly of power, but separate from the masters’ institutions” (1976:20), cannot explain the differences between Montagnard and Creole. Both had experienced slavery but each had come up with different organizing principles in their respective social organization. By the parameters of this model, Montagnard society was “forged in the fires of enslavement.”

Thus, when seen from the vantage-point of daily social interaction, slave institutions do appear to assume in some fashion a concentric order, extending from the immediate interpersonal links between two persons, through the domestic and familial ties of larger groupings, and outward to the religious, economic and other institutions that bound slave communities together. The institutions linking slaves and free people constitute a *different order, or dimension, of social action, since the linkages inevitably crossed the chasm between the sectors.*

(Mintz and Price 1976:43, my emphasis)

In the Rodriguan context, the problem here is twofold: first, the Creoles came to Rodrigues with social experiences “forged in the fires of enslavement,” albeit Mauritian enslavement, and, second, the “chasm between the sectors [free and enslaved]” was created, ideologically if you will, on Rodrigues. This chasm was neither based on privileged access to material resources, nor formal or institutionalized power or any other mode of domination, nor on actual provenance or specific cultural heritage of the two groups, although the “chasm” came to be articulated in precisely those terms.

If we focus on the nature of this created chasm between Creole and Montagnard, much as we have already in regard to ostensible European forms of celebration, we can begin to arrive at another perspective on these Rodriguan processes of social formation. In Rodrigues, as much as for Mauritius or any other creole society, the initial settlement was indeed divided into free and enslaved — not just ideologically, but also socially, economically and politically. That strict division began to crumble in its actual legal terms with the apprenticeship period and then the emancipation of the slaves. That division nonetheless continued for most creole societies in actual social, economic and political

conditions: thus restricted access to land, miscegenation laws, labour and vagrancy laws, suffrage limitations, and various accompanying ideological justifications for these restrictions, *e.g.*, supposed ethnic patterns of ignorance, promiscuity, laziness, stupidity and so on.

But in Rodrigues, emancipation occurred in a situation essentially characterized by a vacuum of both official authority and absolute control of any local factors of production. Thus not only were the British colonial authorities only intermittently present on Rodrigues, they had no local means to effect their authority, no police, no courts, until well into the post-emancipation period. At the same time, the economic livelihood of the local elite, the ostensibly French settlers, had already shifted away from plantations to a combination of fishing and associated trading, not just with Mauritius but with all of the Mascarenes, the Seychelles, Madagascar and certain parts of east Africa. Predictably, the clashes between the colonial authorities and these erstwhile masters occurred in matters of trade. Recall the continuous petitions, complaints and accusations between the resident magistrates and the local commercial elite right up to the turn of the century.

This conflict between the colonial authorities and the commercial elite, the big traders, by its focus on the trade, created a kind of political vacuum on the island itself. We have two instances of a conflict between the erstwhile [white] elite and the local inhabitants, each of which resulted with the direction of enforcement away from strictly local affairs. In the first, the freedmen vied for the wild cattle with Lenferma, the former bailiff of the largest plantation on the island. Lenferma's claim to the cattle was in furtherance of his trading interest, his goal was the taking of the cattle, not the consolidation and development (an incursion into production *per se*) of a particular Rodriguan resource to his own benefit. The solution, by claiming the cattle for the Queen, did not impinge directly on Lenferma's primary interest, the trade itself, but it did bestow a kind of *de facto* economic autonomy on the freedmen. Similarly, the investigation and eventual official resolution of the complaints by the contracted fishermen against the master fishermen/fishery owners did not restrict the operation of the trade itself, it only shifted the internal locus of trade from the "company store" to a licensed shop (in effect, creating an opening for the local intrusion of the state's control of trade), but it did, again, bestow a *de facto* economic autonomy on the individual fishermen.

Because of this pivotal importance of the trade, confrontation took place between the colonial authorities and big traders in precisely this sphere of affairs. By the same token, neither had interest, need, nor means, to create or consolidate any kind of strictly

local structure of domination, either political or economic. The necessity for imported goods and the island's geographical remove from other possible trading links ensured an unchallengeable 'bottleneck' of relations with the outside world, thereby negating any necessity for local control of production. Both the colonial authorities and the traders exerted their attempts at control only where local production linked with the trade: the traders in their exploitative control of prices and freight and payment terms, the colonial authorities by the imposition of livestock taxes, which significantly they could only collect, or attempt to collect, at the point of embarkation for Mauritius. Even the government's sale of land in the last half of the nineteenth century was an attempt to raise revenue, rather than control the use of land *per se*, and even that was singularly unsuccessful, to the present day.

This absence of externally imposed local control, both economic and consequently political, created in effect an open social and economic situation on the island itself. With the exception of the few whites, the big traders, the local population had sorted itself out into two groups — probably even before emancipation, but certainly socially visible by the 1850s. One group was largely composed of the emancipated slaves, the freedmen, and the second group was largely composed of the imported contracted fishermen, the core of which was probably already on the island prior to emancipation.

Although these two groups, to an outside observer (*viz.* the magistrates or the priests) looked and essentially acted similarly, their self-proclaimed distinction was articulated in terms of their former status: the ex-slaves vs. those of "*naissance libre*," *i.e.*, those liberated prior to official emancipation. That this was already an ideological distinction, rather than a factual one, seems readily apparent given the situation in Mauritius and the means by which most of the Mauritians were recruited to work in Rodrigues and also given the priests' and magistrates' terms of distinction, drawn from the groups themselves.

Beyond this ideological distinction, the two groups pursued quite different strategies for living on the island. I use the term strategy in order to convey the element of conscious decision that must have been involved. The element of consciousness is apparent, it seems to me, for several reasons. First, there were not enough people in either group to justify these two social "lifeways" as the mere product of tradition, convention or peer pressure. Furthermore, the fishermen were newly arrived and the freedmen had only recently attained independence. Second, there was an absence of local means to either enforce or encourage one or another choice. Third, there is evidence that

at least some of the imported fishermen were joining the freedmen in the mountains, and that certain of the freedmen were present in the activities of the more vocal small traders and fishermen (*viz.* the petition of 1874).

Inasmuch as a certain consciousness at the level of the individual was involved in the differentiation of the two groups, the emergent social organization of each group displayed a differential relation to the metropolitan, or external, axis of economic relations. Thus even when released from the strictures of their individual contracts to fishery owners, the Mauritian fishermen continued to produce for sale to the traders, continuing with fish, subsequently adding livestock and cash crops. Some from among them attempted to engage directly in the trade themselves, at first in alliance with the big traders and later increasingly in competition with them. But the orientation to the export market, intrinsic from the earliest fisheries, continued and expanded within this group right into the twentieth century.

The other group, the freedmen, evidence a completely different orientation to this external market. The mere removal of themselves to areas distant from the center of that external relation, Port Mathurin and environs, already begins to signal a process of distancing from the metropole which appears entrenched also well into the twentieth century. Thus their primary goal appears to have been to produce for their own subsistence and only trading a variable surplus to the export trade when necessary. This failure to completely orient themselves to the export market was a source of frustration to the colonial authorities, and even the traders, who derided it as due to laziness and lack of foresight. It is another instance of “ex-slaves [having] their own conceptions of economy” (Cooper 1989:747).

As in what must have been a conscious decision to pursue one or the other economic orientation, so also must have been a conscious decision, and distinction, to identify with one or the other group. These two different pursuits cannot be attributed to the nature of the factors of production each had access to. Both controlled their own means of production. Just as the fishermen had their own gardens which they cultivated for their immediate needs, so too the freedmen fished for their own needs. In other words, both groups had equal access to land and to the lagoon, and even the wild livestock, and neither was directly constrained by external authorities in their use of those resources. Conflicts that developed later on, as seen in the competition for land for pasturage as opposed to cultivation, are the expression of the collision of these two market orientations in face of increasing population density and decreasing land resources. But even this conflict never became a flashpoint or an overriding issue because the market/metropole orientation of the Creoles combined with their lack of

potential power to even attempt direct control of local factors of production led them to other economic pursuits, but always directed into the mercantile network.

As the historical conditions make clear, we cannot attribute the separation of these two groups to either political and economic conditions imposed by a European elite or colonial authorities, nor to the nature or mode of access to the factors of production. By the fact that Rodrigues was only an outlying node on a much wider trading network, with only a minor resource (essentially only dried fish) as a commercial good and with richer and better positioned competitors, coupled with the fact that land had never been subject to any real control, by either the local elite or the state, the domination by merchant capital established during the course of the nineteenth century continued well into the middle of the twentieth century. The dominance of merchants initially ensured the independence of production within Rodrigues itself — but with that, the development of the local economy (based on virtually free access to land, precluding commodification of that land), thus, in its turn, ensured the stasis of merchant capital on the island. The existence of the external trade, rather than acting as a kind of constraint or mode of internal domination — the means by which separate classes could develop, served more as a kind of reference point. Thus the two orientations implicit in each group's "strategy" refer, in the end, to different attitudes to that external axis — one embraces it, one marginalizes it.

This external trade, of course, is more than a mere nexus of economic relations between Rodrigues and Mauritius and further points. It was the venue for the imposition of economic control by not only the big traders but also the colonial authorities. Both because of the island's geographical disposition and the traders' early establishment of external trading as their primary source of livelihood, it was sufficient to control Rodrigues's external relations for the island itself to be effectively controlled. The island's population was trapped, so to speak, by the bottleneck of the trade monopoly. And so too political control was aligned in the same way. More so than in most creole societies, the contrast between colony and metropole, between local and external, was heightened by Rodrigues' geographical position and consequent economic relations and manifest in the trade. While the early big traders and, later, certain Creole traders, could exercise a limited amount of socioeconomic and political dominance within Rodrigues, as merchants, they were politically as well as economically dependent on the power and interest of other social classes not present on Rodrigues. But within Rodrigues, both Creoles and Montagnards had achieved a *de facto* autonomy, which in practice was virtually independent of the metropole.

Add to this the ideological and social division inherent in the initial settlement: free and enslaved. The association between free, European, white, metropolitan and

external trade, on the one hand, and enslaved, African, black, and local (“native”), on the other, only follows from the first dichotomy. While we have noted that material explanations for the two economic orientations implicit in the two groups’ strategies could not have been determinative of that division, those two orientations do begin to indicate where we must locate an explanation.

Just as the economic orientation suggests either an acceptance of the external trade, or a marginalization of the external trade, so too the two group strategies suggest a similar orientation to the structure of power in the little colony. The Montagnards marginalized the trade, and the local power structure, not only by their physical and economic distancing, but also by erecting a kind of opaque social screen between themselves and the metropole: sociocultural marronage. Despite the sporadic, and admittedly inefficient, attempts by the colonial authorities to control civil and criminal matters within the island, Montagnards established their own means of organizing land holding and transmission, of organizing production and exchange of goods within the island, of defining and regulating civil status among themselves, such as birth, marriage and death, and organizing their own means for dealing with conflict. It is true that all these were erected within the parameters established by the elite or metropolitan authorities, but public obedience to certain required statutes, laws or regulations does not necessarily imply following the spirit of the law. “It is an elementary mistake to suppose that the enactment of a moral obligation necessarily implies a moral commitment to it” (Giddens 1976:109). Subterfuge, dissimulation, playing the fool, as social phenomena, are not confined to the conditions of slavery, exemplified by the “shuck-and-jive” *sambo*, *quashee* or *Uncle Tom* figure whose true significance was only belatedly realized by whites (*vide e.g.* Patterson 1967, Scott 1990).

In contrast, the Creoles, as suggested by their embrace of the external trade, demonstrate an altogether different approach to the structure of power. Their’s was an identification with that power — but as the history of their conflicts with the authorities indicates — it was more in the nature of a competition for that power, rather than a mere subservience to it. In other words, the Creole strategy had as an objective the usurpation of metropolitan power at least on their own island. In order to effect this struggle, this competition, they took on the very “tools” of the metropole — economic control where they could, a particular kind of wealth, Western education, “proper” cultural institutions.⁵ It is important to note two aspects of this strategy. First is that the Creoles were only afforded the opportunity for this kind of strategy because of the particular conditions of Rodrigues. They, like the Montagnards, had to work within the parameters of power set

by the metropolitan authorities. Second, Creoles were not trying to be just like Europeans, they were rather attempting to gain the same kind of power and control as the Europeans already had. Lack of realization of this aspect leads one to portray Creoles, and similar groups in other creole societies, as lackeys, sell-outs, toadies to the metropole. This is a value judgement that merely obscures an actual struggle for power. Perceiving the Creoles in this light clarifies why on the one hand they employ all the institutions of metropolitan domination, from economic strategies to use of the courts to education and “proper” etiquette, on the one hand, and on the other view themselves as different, oftentimes better, and more often than not in conflict with the very class they are supposedly subservient to.

Although the two strategies the Creoles and Montagnards employed are very different by virtue of their respective orientations to the metropole, they are at base animated by the same spirit. If a society is divided into free and by implication white, and enslaved, by implication black, by the very terms of that division, there are only two alternatives to escaping enslavement if one is black. One is by turning oneself into a white, and the other is by rejecting the entire dichotomy, the entire society, and creating another one. On Rodrigues legal emancipation afforded the opportunity to transform “whiteness” into a sociological category, defined by certain cultural and socioeconomic diacritica, not by colour alone. Creoles, in effect, turned themselves sociologically into “whites,” while Montagnards rejected the entire system. Despite these two routes, both groups have, nonetheless, pursued an objective of independence and autonomy denied them in the original society.

Creole society, by virtue of its adoption of metropolitan customs and institutions, by its employment of the same sort of market values and standards of success, is very familiar to the eye of a Western observer. Perhaps by this very familiarity, it is easy to miss how it is different, how it does not necessarily conceive of itself as exactly like Western society. Likewise, Montagnard society, by its constant juxtaposition to Creole society, by its ostensible adoption of Western social forms, seems overly familiar. This ostensible *Western-ness* is not unusual among the class of creole or African-American societies; and, in some measure, it would seem that the preoccupation with African retentions and survivals so evident in Afro-American scholarship is a kind of reaction against this apparent westernization, as if this was in itself an indication of failure to achieve integrity and independence of spirit in the face of the dark forces of European imperialism.

Why some of these facts should seem more exciting than others is, indeed, not difficult to determine. Features of Caribbean life that can be traced to the preslavery African past appear as testaments to the toughness and pride of the human spirit — which, indeed, they are. But survivals from slavery seem to be viewed merely as testimony to cultural defeats and losses.
(Mintz 1974:228)

Even outside of Afro-American studies, the association with European institutions carries the same negative valence. I would argue that this statement, made by Schapera in 1935, is still germane:

If I may refer to my own experience, I found it difficult when actually in the field, not to feel disappointed at having to study the religion of the Kxatla by sitting through an ordinary Dutch Reformed Service, instead of watching a heathen sacrifice to the ancestral spirits; and I remember vividly how eagerly I tried to find traces of a worship that was in fact no longer being performed. And it seems so silly to record the details of Christian wedding or confirmation ceremony with the same fidelity, let alone enthusiasm, with which one would note the “doctoring” of a garden or a hut.
(1935:317)

But it seems to me we are too quickly blinded by the presence of our own Western institutions when we expect, and deeply desire, to find the exotic. Despite anthropology’s intellectual origins in the West’s imperialist expansion, the discipline’s effort has long been to counteract, however haltingly, a cultural arrogance relegating non-Western societies to inferior status, and to at least attempt to consider the non-European on its own terms. But in that effort — which explicitly recognizes the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of subjugation and hegemony inflicted on non-European peoples — we commit the same error of relegating the non-Western to inferiority by failing to recognize the quotidian processes of resistance to hegemony within what *appears* to be European — that is, among the “We” rather than just within the ostensible “Other.”

. . . there is a yet unwritten history of colonialism which concerns the spread of countercultural forms of Western origin, often fed directly on the bastard traditions of our civilization.
(Comaroff 1985:254)

Creole marronage conceals their separate agenda from the metropolitan one. Failing to see that Creoles’ “Europeanness” is only an aspect of their primary pursuit, that of power, wealth and elite status, may appear as relatively minor, or obvious and trivial, within the context of an overall analysis of one society’s particular response to European domination, whatever its form. But it is the same point as that manifest in a society’s forms of resistance as conventionally understood. That is, whether a group of people opt for a strategy of co-optation of the processes of the powers-that-be, or rather opt for a strategy of overt or covert resistance to those same powers, in neither case is European

hegemony received compliantly, uncritically, passively. In the elevation of the exotic to parity with, or even superiority to, the familiar, the European, the danger is not only of Said's reification of "the Other" to a cultural imperative of our own, and the denial of the active reflection and agency of this "Other" toward the powers-that-be, whether European or indigenous. The danger is also, and even more subtly so, that of assuming homogeneity once swallowed by the Western, the European, the "we." Once we see, with Clifford (1988:274), that "collectively constituted *difference* is not necessarily static or positionally dichotomous" then we can appreciate that " 'cultural' difference [is]. . . not simply received from tradition, language, or environment. ..[it is] also *made* in new political-cultural conditions of global relationality." This "making" does not arbitrarily limit itself to the non-European simply by virtue of its opposition to that European.

Conventionally understood forms of resistance — guerilla warfare, terrorist tactics, public demonstrations of disagreement and refusal, literary expressions, and so on — whether read as resistance to the status quo *per se* or as competition for control of that same status quo, all explicitly articulate points of confrontation and conflict. But just as a person's hostility can be read as much from his or her demeanor as from spoken words or unequivocal actions, a society's resistance is also present in the much more mundane activities of daily life. Its currency goes beyond common and daily cultural expressions, like storytelling or modes of personal style or idiomatic expressions, to the very stuff and substance of social relations within the household and community. And none of this has to appear exotic to Westerners to carry its significance. Quite the contrary, the more European-looking a particular item of social behaviour, the more insidious and resilient it can be in its implications of resistance. If we realize that the "hidden forms of resistance" and the "hidden transcripts of the weak" are neither negated by particular sociocultural configurations ('European-looking' or not), nor confined to a perennial and constant "underclass," we can appreciate the fact that "weak" is relative. Rodriguan Creoles, too, are "weak" face-to-face with certain Mauritians and almost all foreigners in certain kinds of situations. While their "Europeanness" is a function of their relationship to a metropole and thus integral to this weakness, at the same time this ostensible weakness, clothed in Europeanness, is the very venue for their local power and authority.

Just as the Creoles' apparent Europeanization carries within it both an aspect of dominance viewed locally, and subservience viewed externally, the Montagnard façade of Europeanness is also clearly a function of their weakness vis-à-vis both the Creoles and the metropole, but it is also the venue for a practically-achieved autonomy.

As I have maintained, Montagnards from emancipation on have demonstrated a distancing, a rejection of the society imposed upon them first by slavery and then by colonialism. And this has been done within the confines of that external domination. Now this may be taken to mean that they only achieved a certain social autonomy within certain areas of social relations, those where they were “allowed” to, like their family life, sexual relations, and religious ceremonies. Those areas where metropolitan control was neither necessary nor expedient. In Mintz and Price’s “encounter model,” it is precisely these areas where slaves were able to achieve a certain degree of autonomy, and through which a “social framework” was thus available to carry forth those cultural materials retained from their African heritage. In Mintz’s view, this “social framework” essentially only concerns the domestic, as “slave populations were effectively isolated from most institutional forces that might have articulated plantation settlements as communities” (n.d.:145). The undiscussed long-term implication of this perspective is that societies issuing from these slave populations have been bereft of social institutions which are community-wide, which engage a collectivity beyond the relations that obtain within individual households.

But I mean to convey a social autonomy much wider than that implied in these kinds of “domestic” institutions. Montagnard society organizes all social relations, not just those supposedly allowed by alien control. Political, not just sexual relations; economic, not just religious concepts; public ethics, not just those concerned with the household. If we take away the metropole and its institutionalized expressions, Montagnard society would not thereby be truncated, left with gaps in its social fabric. If we could suddenly make the overt forms of their society appear exotic, then it would be more than readily apparent that Montagnard society is not only ‘whole’ but also organized by totally different principles than our own. Montagnard marronage does not just reject the outside society, it replaces it.

These principles, as I have attempted to elucidate, concern the continuous balancing of autonomy and reciprocity, of independence and solidarity, and they are articulated through social relations among men, among women, and between men and women. The house provision rule sets in motion the vertical long-term relations of reciprocity between the men in each generation — father to son, elder brother to youngest brother. The notion of solidarity entailed in these “moral prescriptions” is extended to the entire *fanmi*, defined by patrilineal descent. At the same time, each man enters into another vertical relation of reciprocity when he marries. This relation of reciprocity is also a vertical one, father-in-law to son-in-law, but it is only a “middle term” relation, in

that it exists only as long as the parties are alive. While the various *fanmi* are thus all connected to each other through affinal links, they are not so connected as corporate groups in a system of alliance. The individually-activated affinal links create, rather, a shifting network throughout the society, with the *fanmi prè* appearing as nodes in that network.

This system of vertical reciprocity, defined by patrilineality and affinity, is in contrast to the horizontal reciprocity evident in men's *korom*, where the kinship idiom is deliberately set aside. Within the *korom*, relations are conceived of as strictly egalitarian and reciprocity must be continually enacted. *Korom* create male generational groups which cut across both the vertical *fanmi* and the networks of affinal relations.

At the level of an individual, each of these relations provides different social niches of mutual assistance and solidarity. But as the relations between *fanmi* and *korom* and between two *fanmi* in marriage, occur only at the level of the individual, not as groups *qua* groups, a man's autonomy and independence resides precisely in the balance of these separate spheres of reciprocity.

Any man's autonomy and possibility of independent action is further ensured in the very flexibility of kinship relations. That is, although the relations within the *fanmi*, and a man's public persona — his *sinyatur*, are expressed in the kinship idiom, the substance of those relations can be accessed through other means — thus the *nom divizé*, or uxorilocal marriage, or membership in a matrilateral *fanmi prè* if unacknowledged by one's father. I continually stressed the aspect of enactment in this respect: the *fanmi prè* is the expression of the vertical relations of reciprocity entailed in patrilineality, but, enacted vertical relations of reciprocity entail a *fanmi prè*, regardless of actual kinship relations.

Significantly, when a man must come face-to-face with the metropole, he does so as an individual. His various kinship and *korom* relations are either substituted for, as with the role of godparents, or are absented. Even in the use of false names in these "public" or metropole situations he preserves a kind of anonymity. Only in the relatively informal and open situations of a Port Mathurin tavern brawl does a "public" aspect of *fanmi* solidarity surface, and even here the taverns are already segregated in terms of Creole or Montagnard clientele. The very fact that the content of the interface between Montagnard and the outside society takes place only through individuals, while within Montagnard society those same individuals are well integrated into a series of cross-cutting reciprocal and supportive social relations, shows that it is this "individualized"

and only apparently “lone” interaction with the outside itself that forms the “opaque social screen” which allows Montagnard society to keep the “other” at arm’s-length.

A global perspective of the entire Montagnard system of social relations suggests that the ultimate sanction in maintaining its viability is fear of being delivered into the hands of the state, or more generally, the powers-that-be. That is, a man can interact with the ‘outside’ with a kind of impunity because he has an entire, albeit mute and invisible, system of social insurance backing him up. Lacking this, he is defenseless, powerless, dependent and a pawn in the hands of the powers-that-be.

By this token it should not be surprising that Montagnards only appear in court, or in the hands of the police, when the problem involves some interface of Montagnard society with the metropole. The few cases involving Montagnards had to do with Creole cattle doing garden damage or, more often, with public drunken brawling in the streets of Port Mathurin. At the same time, virtually any kind of conflict among Creoles, from embezzlement and beatings to theft of coconuts, or even intimate family matters, *i.e.*, between fathers and their sons, was brought for arbitration to the police or the court.

Predial theft, garden damage by livestock, fights and beatings, gambling arguments, malicious gossip, among Montagnards, were all dealt with in their immediate social contexts. Conflicts between brothers, patrilateral relatives, and co-members of a *fanmi prè*, were dealt with there, the ultimate authority the senior man, and as Ton Numa said, they did not need the court, his ultimate power was the authority to “send them away.” Conflicts beyond any one *fanmi* were mediated by individuals in the respective *korom*, especially in regard to fights and gambling. And various kinds of magical measures could be undertaken in matters of gossip, sexual envy and jealousy, and so on. In all these, the sanction of fear of the state is most palpable — failure of resolution, or too overt conflict, brought in the police, an event to be avoided at all costs.

Throughout this study, Montagnard awareness of the difference between their social practices and those of the Creoles and those implied by state institutions has been noted. This awareness is consistently expressed where the particulars of Montagnard ways of doing things were described. This “we”/“they” distinction is clear in all aspects of social life — from the domestic, to the economic, to the more largely social, to the religious, to even the political. At the same time Montagnards see themselves in terms of *fanmi*, in the articulation of various *défanu* relations, whether couched in kinship, affinity or friendship. Where the “other” consists of the institutions of the metropole, the state and the Church, and hierarchical ordering based on status and wealth through individual competition, the Montagnard “we” consists of decentralized and contextualized

expressions of authority and an egalitarian ordering of persons through relations of reciprocity and *défanu*, organized through kinship, affinity and friendship.

Viewed in this way, Montagnard society is not so much a “segment” of the overall society, as a separate, self-constituted and alternative society. Furthermore, in its principles of organization it recalls those societies which, in an older anthropological discourse, were called “primitive,” tribal or stateless. Reference to these particular terms is not meant to, once again, call up the issues of African retentions and survivals. The point here is that these are societies which do not incorporate notions of a centralized state, but rather organize themselves through on-the-ground, multifunctional groups united by relations of reciprocity and exchange — societies “against the state” as Clastres puts it (1974).

Montagnard society, in its initial rejection of a society based on the distinction free/enslaved, and all its social implications, created in its stead an egalitarian society based on reciprocity and autonomy which harkens “back” to “traditional” society. We see here that “traditional” society is not a precursor to modern, western society, nor is it necessarily destroyed in the face of western society. Rather, where conditions permit, it is not only an alternative but can also be created in response to the perceived strictures of western society.

In his account of peoples “without history”, Wolf’s discussion is of their movement in only one direction, a movement that takes as its departure a given kin-ordered mode which is then subsumed, captured, by either a tributary or capitalist system (Wolf 1982:94-96). But Montagnard society demonstrates an almost precisely opposite movement: thus within the aegis of a mercantile system (falling under Wolf’s rubric “tributary mode of production”), in a situation of open resources, a kin-ordered mode of production developed in response. This response, more precisely a resistance, I would further argue, is animated by a collective desire to achieve an “egalitarian distribution of life chances” (*loc.cit.*) standing in opposition to those “life chances” bestowed by colonial society.

I have suggested that Rodrigues, in the category of creole societies born of a particular conjunction of sociohistorical forces, is not an anomaly. The existence of Creole-like “segments”, elites, in this category of societies is altogether obvious, but Montagnard-like “segments” may not seem so apparent. However, if we treat Montagnard society for the moment as a separate and self-constituted society, omitting the metropole and Creoles, and compare it to others similar in outline at least, we do find some significant parallels.

The closest sociohistorical analogy would be in those societies created by runaway slaves, maroons, where rejection of the initial society and erection of an alternative one could not be more obvious. From the start of slave importation and the establishment of plantation economies in the Americas, straightforward *marronage* has been an integral aspect.⁶ Among these, the Saramaka of Suriname still surviving today are perhaps the best studied. Saramakan society is organized by matrilineal clans, clans which incorporate ownership of land, hunting and fishing rights, and religious/political offices. Although this is a unilineal society, it is one where the kinship relations entailed in the clan bestow “certain mutual advantages, not applicable with non-kinsmen, in the use of the more general contractual model” (Price 1974:157). It is a society where social “norms” have a “practical flexibility” . . . “largely [due to] the fact that interested parties themselves, rather than outside judicial authorities, control their application” (Price 1974:158)⁷

What is evident among the Saramaka is the conscious withdrawal from metropolitan spheres of power, then and now, and the conscious creation of a society which is based on horizontal relations of solidarity, built on kinship and explicitly organizing a concern for egalitarianism through the interplay of independence and reciprocity. It is not the particularities of Saramakan social structure *per se* which are pertinent here, but rather these overall principles of organization — principles fundamentally shared with Montagnard society. Price himself compares the Saramaka to the classic segmentary lineages of the Tallensi and Ndembu. Beyond specific principles of membership, degrees of corporation, routes to leadership, modes of sanction, structures of alliance, and so on, what is most fundamental and shared among all of them, is the more basic idea of how power and social regulation should be constituted.

Glimpses of this opposition to Western domination, which these two societies manifest through their respective principles of social organization, can be seen elsewhere, in circumstances which also allowed a *de facto* autonomy similar to those in Rodrigues. Thus, in the Haitian *lakou* (Bastien 1951, LaRose 1975), in the kinship based organization and conceptualization of the *sevis lwa* (*vodun*) (Lowenthal 1987), Haitian peasants demonstrate clearly:

Quelle que soit son origine (héritage africain, rejet de l'autorité coloniale, déstructuration initiale ou progressive), la culture paysanne semble avoir mis peu à peu en place un système autorégulé, sans Etat, sans institutionnalisation du pouvoir.⁸

(Barthélemy 1989:27)

Haitian peasants, like the Saramaka, quite forcefully rejected slavery and metropolitan forms of domination. And while the whites were replaced by a mulatto social and economic elite, oriented (like the Montagnard Creoles) to a metropolitan-derived, centralized political and economic system, Haitian peasants were successful in creating their own society apart and opposed to that of the mulatto elite. It is precisely in the rejection of that power that Haitian peasants organize themselves, as is succinctly conveyed when any Haitian refers to the countryside and peasant society as *le pays en dehors* [the country outside].

On the tiny island of Carriacou in the southeastern Caribbean, localized patrilineages articulate not only access to economic resources but also a complex ancestor cult. These *bloods* appear to be the most fully realized system of unilineal descent in Afro-America, apart from the Saramaka (*cf.* M.G. Smith 1962). Mintz and Price (1976:37) attribute the forms of this society, and others similar to it, to a “relative stability of personnel” under the plantation regime which presumably allowed the continuity of expression of an African cultural heritage. But we note that Carriacou’s smallness and lack of importance to metropolitan interests created in effect an analogous political and economic vacuum to that on Rodrigues.

The “stability of personnel” under slavery cannot explain the emergence of similarly organized social units on other islands, where a cultural homogeneity was not the case. Given that in the marginal highlands of Martinique a system of patrilocal extended families developed (Murra 1957) and that after emancipation in Jamaica large kinship groups based on land ownership developed in marginal areas of the island (Clarke 1957), and similarly on the open-land situation of Andros Island (Otterbein 1964), we have at least an indication that in conditions where a *de facto* autonomy could prevail, alternative systems of social organization could and did emerge. Just as the Montagnard *fanmi* and Saramakan matrilineages are emblematic of a “society organized against the state,” so Carriacou *bloods*, Haitian *lakou* and associated kin groups, Martiniquan, Andros Islanders and Jamaican land-holding kin groups, also suggest self-regulated social organizations in opposition to, or as alternative to, the dominant centralized metropolitan society.⁹

Although we momentarily took Montagnard society as separate and self-constituted in order to compare it to other similar societies, the Saramaka, Haitian peasant society, Carriacou, Martinique and so on, we needn’t have done so. For in point of fact, all of these societies were born in the expansion of European imperialism and slavery, and thus they all share with the Montagnards an unsevered, even if distanced, relation to

the metropole. Most importantly, they all have developed a “kin ordered mode of production,” whatever the specific cultural content (“African” or “European”) which explicitly organizes a concern for egalitarianism through the interplay of independence and reciprocity, in sharp contrast to the organization of the metropole.

These alternative forms of social organization, created in conditions of a *de facto* autonomy, all integrate a relation with the metropole. This relation is structural, it is not epiphenomenal. In each of these instances, a relation to the metropole, in the persons or places associated with it, is an integral aspect of the overall social organization of these so-called “segments.”¹⁰ This relationship in itself appears contradictory, emblematic as it is of the simultaneous reactive and proactive stance these local societies embody in their perspective of the “outside.” Reactive in that their creation and continuation is a function of their rejection and distancing of the metropole in its various political and economic dimensions, and proactive in the sense that these local societies have achieved an alternative to the principles of the metropole which upholds their own sociocultural principles, a sociocultural *marronage* in fact.

For purposes of exposition, Montagnard social structure has been presented as a self-constituted and alternative society to that of the Creoles, as both reactive and proactive vis-à-vis the metropole, historically and contemporaneously. At the same time, Creole society itself has been presented as separate not just relative to the metropole, but also relative to the Montagnards. This “segmentation” of the two groups is artificial from an analytical point of view, although not from an emic point of view. Recall that the substantive meanings of Montagnard society have resonance only in relation to those of Creole society; that the particularities of each are expressed through the pivotal *relational* quality which holds between the two. And, further, both have meaning in contradistinction to an outside, the metropole. Thus in a certain sense the two are opposite sides of the same coin, each manifestation dependent on the context, on the interaction. But it is a coin of opposition, resistance. Each social action or meaning therefore is in itself *political*, stemming from the fact that it is reactive to an outside power source and proactive toward achieving an alternative.

The entire process of social formation which occurred on Rodrigues did so entirely within and in relation to an outside, more dominant social force, the metropole. The consciousness of this outside power and the desire to create a ‘space’ within it did not take place in an overtly political domain, that is, directly challenging the state or its representatives or its legitimacy in external affairs. The creation of a ‘space’, a limited and personal domain of autonomy, took place in the everyday praxis of living, and so is

only visible in the implications of everyday practices, whether those are concerned with who one marries or what one plants. “Established cultural forms were conveyed largely through participation in everyday practice, and involved a mode of communication which as Bourdieu has pointed out, seldom attains the level of open discourse” (Comaroff 1985:125) is as true of Rodriguans as of the Tshidi.

In Rodrigues, the clearest articulation of differences with Western ideals and at the same time the clearest expression of the substance thought to inhere in Montagnard- or Creole-ness are in the modes of celebration of life’s major events. “Ritual practice, which always aims to facilitate *passages* and/or to authorize encounters between opposed orders, never defines beings or things otherwise than in and through the relationship it establishes practically between them . . .” (Bourdieu 1977:120). The distancing of Western institutions — the state, the Catholic Church — coupled with, at the same time, the incorporation of certain elements of those institutions into a new Montagnard order, and analogously for the Creoles, lays bare precisely an ‘inarticulate’ ideology that eschews the metropole while using it to establish a different, separate and autonomous order.

But it is precisely that this establishment of an alternative order is done in reaction to the metropole, to the Creoles, to the Montagnards, which reveals that the foundation, or the guiding principle of praxis, manifest in this society is political, where “power within social systems can thus be treated as involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction” (Giddens 1979:93). It is not that individuals choose a particular notion of power, but it is rather that the substance of a choice [about power] is entailed as a generative principle for all social relations. Montagnard and Creole social relations are respectively the socio-*logical* expressions of a fundamental stance vis-à-vis the imposed power structure, both historically and continuously up to the present.

If in this way we understand Montagnard and Creole as political principles, each perspective or stance generating a series of notions about how social relations should be ordered, then the apparent ambiguity and contradiction in the relation between the two dissolves. Each iteration of Creole vs. Montagnard only takes place in a specific context in regard to specific issues, and the recourse to Creole or Montagnard signals, for the individual, or for the group that has come together, the particular stance to that issue appropriate for that person, or group, at that particular time. Only from an outside or global perspective, which treats all social contexts or situations as somehow occurring simultaneously and of equal weight, is there contradiction, or a kind of lack of logic to

the fact that the boundary between Montagnard and Creole can be so fluid. For any one individual, these contexts are separate, they are each about different things and as such only refer to specific relations. This is most clear in the political campaigns: early Montagnard support for Duval implicitly recognizes the saliency of metropolitan power within a hierarchical, state-centralized social system, where leverage in that system stems from patron-client relationships; but when Clair severed the tie of dependency between Rodrigues and Mauritius by depicting Rodrigues as separate from, and equal to, Mauritius, he was implicitly drawing on the notion of Rodrigues as solidary, embodying relations of equality and reciprocity in contrast to the metropolitan hierarchy. Likewise, when a particular family celebrates a wedding, they do not make an explicit choice as to whether or not they wish to be *Montagnard* or *Creole* and then “design” the wedding accordingly. Rather, the wedding form derives from what is appropriate, *i.e.* fitting with the way in which they view themselves in society. This “choice” is prior to any expression of it, but at the same time the implications of that “choice” are only apparent in its social forms.

Thus, Creole social relations embody the possibility of reward of success within a metropolitan system felt on Rodrigues but defined in their own terms, while Montagnard social relations offer the possibility of release from the coercive, and demeaning, measures integral to that same metropolitan system and, from their perspective, the Creoles who control it, as well as a practical alternative to it.

I began this study with the presentation of an image, a metaphor, which served to convey a particular perspective and certain assumptions in my approach to this society. That image was a kind of Levi-Straussian *bricoleur*, where *bricolage*, like mythical thought for Lévi-Strauss, “expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited” (1966:17), so that its creations “always really consist of a new arrangement of elements.” (*Ibid.*:21). But where Levi-Strauss’s *bricoleur* searches for a meaning in his continuous rearrangements, the *bricoleur* I mean to present begins with a particular meaning, a particular task, and uses or rejects each item in the repertory available to him toward the articulation of that meaning, the success of that task.

The Rodriguan *bricoleurs* of the mid-nineteenth century all had the same objective, the pursuit of independence and autonomy. But the means to that end, always defined in relation to the metropole and to each other, took two divergent paths. Through competition and accumulation of wealth and status, Creoles sought to usurp metropolitan power on their island, while Montagnards rejected this imposed society and erected an alternative one based on solidary relations of reciprocity and autonomy.

Notes

CHAPTER II. THE ISLAND AND ITS HISTORY

- 1 It is reasonably certain that the island was known to the early Arab seafarers of the Indian Ocean, who by the 10th century were familiar with Madagascar and the islands to the north. One of the earliest Portuguese maps of the area, that of Cantino in 1502, apparently based on Arab charts and knowledge, shows the existence of a group of three islands to the east of Madagascar. North-Coombes further notes that the Rodriguan *Panadanus heterocarpus*, commonly called *vacoa*, is believed to have been brought from Madagascar, where it is apparently called *vakwa* and presumably had been brought to Madagascar from India and Sumatra by early Indonesian and Arab navigators (North-Coombes 1971:15-17 and Dupon 1969:5-6). Throughout the 16th century, various Portuguese maps note the island as Ruiz, Rais, Roiz and Digarois before settling on Diego Rodriguez, Rodriguez, Rodrigues or Rodrigue. In certain Italian maps of the 16th and 17th century it is called Don Galopes, *galopes* referring to tortoises (Dupon, *op.cit.*). North-Coombes is at pains to show that the island was named after Diogo Rodriguez, the experienced pilot of Pero Mascarenhas, the designated Vice Royalty for India. North-Coombes describes Mascarenhas, denied the Vice Royalty by a usurper, as sailing for Portugal in early 1528, taking the most direct route across the Indian Ocean to the Cape, and passing the three Mascarenes. Certainly by 1621, the island was included, as D. Rodrigues, in sailing directions for vessels proceeding from the Cape of Good Hope to the East Indies (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:18-20).
- 2 François Leguat de la Fougère's "*Voyages et aventures de — en deux îles désertes des Indes Orientales*" was published simultaneously in French and English in 1708, a Dutch version was published later that year, and a German translation appeared in 1709. In some quarters it was well received, in others it was regarded as pure fiction or an extravagant fable. Leguat was a French Protestant appointed to lead an expedition to form a Protestant colony in the Mascarenes. With Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the fear of repression against the French Huguenots prompted a certain Henri Duquesne to organize an expedition, with the protection of the Dutch East India Company, to colonize a secret "Isle of Eden." The concealed identity of this Eden was in fact Mascarin, later Bourbon or La Réunion, with Rodrigues the alternative if the former proved inhabited. The frigate, *Hirondelle*, with a crew of ten and Leguat and his seven would-be colonists, set sail from Amsterdam in July 1690 and arrived off Rodrigues in April 1691, Mascarin indeed being already occupied by the French (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:26-34 and 1979). Leguat and his compatriots settled themselves at the mouth of Grande Rivière, just behind the present site of Port Mathurin. For over a year they spent their time cultivating their gardens, hunting and fishing, while waiting for the arrival of fresh supplies and women which had been promised them by Duquesne. After a year of waiting they began to make plans for leaving, i.e. building a boat that could take them to Mauritius. In May of 1693, they left Rodrigues in a precarious craft and after a hazardous voyage of nine days they reached Mauritius. They had no way of knowing that the *Hirondelle* had been captured by the French, still at war with the Dutch (*Ibid.*). In the Dutch colony of Mauritius, Leguat and the others were welcomed and moved about freely. But because of a quarrel over a piece of ambergris found in Rodrigues, to which the Dutch authorities claimed exclusive rights, they were banished for two and a half years to a prison island off the coast. In 1696, they were sent to Batavia and forced to serve as soldiers. Upon their release in 1698, Leguat joined the French

Protestant refugees fleeing to England. In London, Leguat was persuaded to write an account of his travels (*Ibid.*).

Leguat's book attracted so much attention primarily because of his description of a species of apterous bird, the Solitaire (*Pezophaps solitarius*), cousin of the more familiar Dodo bird of Mauritius. A tall, long-necked, long-legged bird, with turkey-like feet and a tail-less rump, it had a smooth head and small wings. It could not fly, but used the bony knob at the wing's extremity and its hooked beak as defence — "when irritated they whirled about twenty or thirty times on the same side for four or five minutes, rattling their wings and making a noise like thunder that could be heard an eighth of a mile away" (Leguat in North-Coombes 1971:259).

But what is very singular, the males will never drive away the females; when a male perceives a female he makes a noise with his wings to call his mate, and she drives the unwelcome stranger away, not leaving it till 'tis without her bounds. The female does the same as to the males, whom she leaves to the male, and he drives them away. We have observed this several times and I affirm it to be true...After these birds have raised their young one, and left it to itself, they do not separate as do all other birds, and though they happen sometimes to mingle with other birds of their species, these two companions remain united. We have often noticed that a few days after the young one had left the nest, a company of thirty or forty other birds brings another young one to it, and the newly fledged bird, with its mother and father joining with the band, march to some secluded spot. As we have frequently followed them we found that then the old ones went their own way, either alone or in couples, and left the young ones together -- and this we called a marriage. There is something a little fabulous in these new facts, but they are nevertheless true and I have seen these things myself several times observing them with care, and with pleasure. (Leguat as cited in North-Coombes *op.cit.*:260)

The island was also inhabited by three species of tortoises, "prodigious big — we have seen some that weighed 500 pounds"...and so numerous "that sometimes you see two or three thousand of them in a flock; so that you may go above a hundred paces on their backs...without setting foot to ground" (Leguat in North-Coombes *op.cit.*:41). After Leguat's book was published, ships going to and from India began calling at Rodrigues regularly to load tortoises.

- 3 A ship with 38 colonists was sent to Rodrigues in August of 1725; due to anchorage problems, only five men disembarked. And then they were abandoned there for nine months while the ship returned to Bourbon for assistance. During this time, the French East India Company chastised the Bourbon council and governor for their attempt at colonization and ordered the five men removed, only leaving marks of French possession. These men were withdrawn in June 1726, and one of them, Tafforet, subsequently wrote "*Relation de l'Isle Rodrigues*" which described the island in similar terms to Leguat's account (North-Coombes *op.cit.*:35- 39).
- 4 Even under Company control, the scope of the exploitation of tortoises on Rodrigues was enormous, as can be glimpsed from this extract from Company reports:
 - 14 December 1759: *L'Oiseau* arrives from Rodrigues with 1035 tortoises and 47 turtles. She had loaded 5,000, but took eight days to reach Isle de France and lost most of the cargo.
 - 15 May 1760: *L'Oiseau* brings 6,000 tortoises
 - 29 September 1760: *L'Oiseau* arrives with 1,600 tortoises, 171 turtles.
 - 12 May 1761: *Le Volant* docks with cargo of 4,000 tortoises.
 - 6 December 1761:*L'Oiseau* brings 3,800 tortoises alive, out of a shipment of 5,000.

(Company records as cited in North-Coombes *op.cit.*:43-44)

The last consignment of 1,215 tortoises was sent to Isle de France in 1768. The last reported sighting of tortoises in Rodrigues was in 1795 (Marragon [1795] in Dupon 1969:29).

- 5 French and Arab merchants continued the slave trade throughout the western Indian Ocean, especially in northern Madagascar, the Comores and the eastern coast of Africa, until the early 1900s (*cf.* Gerbeau 1979).
- 6 “The population is divided into two perfectly distinct classes: the indigenes or cultivators, spread here and there and numbering about 400 throughout the mountains, and the fishermen, mainly coming from Mauritius, working for twenty or so ‘little’ bosses, ‘little’ mulattoes or blacks; these latter are about 300 and live along the beach.”
- 7 Tobacco first began to be cultivated around 1889 when the Mauritian authorities removed the duty formerly levied against it (North-Coombes 1971:124). By 1890, Rodrigues was exporting 600 kilos of unmanufactured tobacco. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, agricultural production began to shift to the La Ferme area. The magistrate at the time, Colin, despite the protestations of cattle owners, decided to grant agricultural leases in the until-then cattlewalk area. Tobacco production went from 3.2 tons in 1893 to 16.8 tons in 1894. Mauritius immediately reimposed an import duty, with the result that tobacco ceased to be exported in 1895. Colin managed to have this import duty rescinded, but a yearly tax of 120 rs/arpent of tobacco cultivated was imposed instead in 1897. Despite these constraints, production continued to increase dramatically:

Tobacco Production 1895-1900

1895	nil	
1896	9.0 tons	
1897	6.4 tons	
1898	39.7 tons	
1899	80.4 tons	
1900	104.3 tons	(North-Coombes 1971:150)

However, Mauritian production of tobacco declined during this period, and soon the government reimposed import duty on Rodriguan tobacco. That duty came into force in January 1902 with the result that Rodriguan tobacco production fell to 12.8 tons in 1902, rose again in 1904 and 1905, and hovered around 30 tons for the next few years (*Ibid.*:152). By 1961, tobacco is not even listed as a commodity in the lists of exports. In addition to the reimposition of stiff Mauritian tariffs, the disappearance of tobacco is no doubt also tied to the fact that Rodriguan tobacco was of a type called *tabac bleu*, appropriate to the early market of consumers who rolled their own cigarettes. By the mid-twentieth century, manufactured cigarettes had replaced the home-rolled ones, and by the 1970s the most common cigarette was manufactured in Mauritius, albeit from imported tobacco.

- 8 The onions, especially, remain the quintessential speculative crop even today. Of a type called *de Madras*, these small, red onions are much appreciated in Mauritius, and Rodriguans, of course, insist they are the best in the world. Their cultivation, however, is very meticulous, involving seeding, transplanting and thinning, a comparatively long period of maturation (4-6 months) and only one crop per year with essential periods of moisture. Consequently, these onions are grown on small irrigated plots in especially rich alluvial soils — a fact which restricts their cultivation to specific areas of the island, *viz.* river valleys and areas contiguous to permanent water sources.

- 9 Contrary to the situation in Rodrigues, the Mauritian planters did exercise the “two jaws of Caribbean plantation discipline, once slavery and apprenticeship had ended,” namely, “the reduction of economic alternatives available to the already existing labour supply, on the one hand, and the mechanical increase of that supply on the other” (Mintz 1979:4).

The termination of the “apprenticeship” system was followed by a massive withdrawal of the ex-slaves from the big sugar estates. On 4 May 1839, Governor Nicolay reported that “a great number of the large sugar estates had been almost wholly abandoned by the former ex-slaves;” he attributed the withdrawal to the ex-slaves’ “predilection for establishing themselves in particular parts” of Mauritius, “owing to their comparative local advantages over others . . .” By July, the governor was not so sanguine about the reasons for the ex-slaves’ withdrawal from the plantations. On the twentieth of that month, he wrote: “I fear that, in too many instances, they have mistaken idleness for freedom and sensual indulgence for a mark of liberty.”

(Nwulia 1978:99)

Not only did Mauritian importation of East Indian indentured labour begin during this period (from some 40 Indian labourers in 1834 to 24,000 in 1838 (Nwulia *loc.cit.*)), but various “vagrancy” laws had been enacted in an effort to keep the ex-apprentices working on the plantations. During the 1830s and 1840s, several local ordinances provided, for example, that all persons 60 years of age or under who were able to work but had no occupation, employment or known means of subsistence could be punished as “vagabonds.” Section 4 of Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 required any person over 21 years of age who wanted to hire himself out for a period of more than one month to register with the police and secure from them a ticket on which was recorded his name, birthplace, marital status, employment and employer’s name (Allen 1983:72).

Although the Colonial Office subsequently disallowed these ordinances due to their repressive nature, the prisons were for a time filled with these “vagabonds.” Apparently a number of these were destined to work in the dependent islands. Thus Lloyd, in a letter to the British Colonial Office received there in 1840, noted the division of the ex-slaves into four categories, the fourth consisting of those ex-slaves emigrating to Rodrigues and Diego Garcia (cited in Baker 1982:237; also noted in Allen 1983).

- 10 Corby cites a total population of 323, of which he reports 240 are descended from the “old slave population,” and 83 others from the “old free” population, with one alien, a Frenchman. Corby’s designation of “old slave” and “old free” groups undoubtedly corresponds to the designations in French in use at the time, where “*ex- apprenti*” is distinguished from the *gens de couleur*, those who were free, or freed, *i.e.*, “*affranchi*”, before 1839. By the use of the term “free” in “old free,” Corby is clearly referring to *gens de couleur*; if he had been referring to whites, that adjective would hardly have been necessary, nor would he have singled out the one alien. Anderson’s report notes a total of 168 apprentices, including children, and then adds 5 more predials attached to Messrs Bégué and Jean Marie, another person of unknown “class” attached to Mr. Gonnet’s fishing establishment where 13 free men are also employed. Thus, the population of Rodrigues in 1838 consisted minimally of 173 or 174 apprentices and another group of approximately 20 persons, comprising the “13 free men” and the seven specifically listed masters or “establishment” owners. It would appear then that the 240 “old slave” population is continuous with the 174 or so apprentices listed three years earlier, but the 83 “old free” is only partly derived from the approximately 20 non-apprentices Anderson

lists. This latter group surely includes the 56 men brought to work in the 8 fisheries (Kelly 1845) as well as “the blacks....who are brought here from Mauritius...” in 1843 (Marshall).

11 *Population by place of birth, 1878-1944*

Year [Total pop]	Americas or Europe	India or East Asia	Madagasc. & Africa	Mauritius Seych. or Reunion	Rodrigues
1878 [1,451]	12	21	103	na	1,315
1880 [1,422]	28	23	41 & 11	196	1,115
1882 [1,546]	27	23	40 & 10	199	1,239
1884 [1,636]	21	26	45 & 8	206	1,337
1886 [1,769]	6	18	41 & 8	225	1,463
1888 [1,924]	8	20	40 & 6	250	1,593
1892 [2,210]	8	21	27 & 6	233	2,012
1894 [2,522]	8	50	49 & 6	286	2,114
1921* [6,584]	15	58	13	263	6,233
1944* [11,585]	17	112	0	2,149	9,603

Annual Reports on Rodrigues 1878-1894

*Kuczynski 1949:894

12 During the early nineteenth century, the free coloured population played an active, but modest role in Mauritius. The *gens de couleur* formed less than ten percent of the total population and a little more than half of the non-slave population; it owned 13 percent of the slaves, 7.1 percent of the agricultural land and 6.2 percent of livestock (Allen 1983:Chapter 4). By 1830 however, the *gens de couleur* in Mauritius, now almost 20 percent of the total population and almost 70 percent of the non-slave population, owned 13.4 percent of the agricultural land and 17.8 percent of the livestock (*Ibid.*:125).

The increasing importance of the *gens de couleur* in the economy of Mauritius can be largely attributed to the white planters' large scale conversion of their plantations to the cultivation of sugar in the wake of the 1825 abolition of the preferential tariff on West Indian sugar entering Britain. Lacking capital or credit to do the same, the *gens de couleur* intensified their production of foodstuffs, increasingly abandoned by the whites. Those among them who had no access to land made their livelihood by practicing trades, engaging in petty commerce, renting out their slaves, and hunting and fishing. This growth was accompanied by an increasing stratification within this segment of Mauritian society. Between 17 and 22 percent of this group owned neither land nor slaves, nor claimed a profession (*Ibid.*:142). In a free coloured section of Port Louis, approximately three-fifths had property of value less than \$500, while one-quarter had more than \$1000.

As in Rodrigues, at the end of the apprenticeship period, the ex-slaves abandoned the plantations en masse, there was an “almost unanimous refusal of the ex-apprentices to return to the sugar estates” (*Ibid.*:10 and Chapter 5; Nwulia 1978, also see fn. 9 above) — a circumstance which precipitated the importation of East Indian labour on a large scale. (The first 75 East Indian labourers were imported in 1834, they were the vanguard of 451,000 men, women and children brought into Mauritius by the end of immigration in 1910 (*Ibid.*:11).) The movement of the ex-apprentice population just after the apprenticeship period, though probably in evidence from 1835, was noted by the census commissioners, thus in 1851:

. . . the phenomena which they exhibit are consistent with the disposition evinced during this period by the Ex-apprentices to migrate from the Town of Port Louis, in which they congregated immediately after emancipation, and from the richer districts in the North of the Island, where they were serving at that period, to the more wooded and less cultivated Districts of the Island, in which they can purchase plots of ground at a cheaper rate, or find it easier to occupy them without purchase. (cited in Allen 1983:163)

In 1852, in Port Louis, an average of 62.5% of all persons in prison were there for reasons of desertion [of contracts] or vagrancy (*Ibid.*:78). These appear to be the people who formed the pool from which the authorities selected “fishermen” for Rodrigues.

The end of the apprenticeship period in Mauritius brought large scale movement off the plantations of the ex-apprentices, all in search of their own land or means of livelihood. Even if some of these, classed as “vagabonds” and imprisoned for vagrancy violations, were tricked into contracting to go to Rodrigues, the prospect could not have been entirely negative. In Rodrigues, access to land was universal due to the laissez-faire attitude to squatting on Crown lands. Furthermore, the stigmas of having been a predial, “à la pioche,” and not freed before general emancipation, which led to a noted preference for fishing and shopkeeping (*Ibid.*:167), would have also brightened the imagined opportunities on Rodrigues.

Once in Rodrigues, despite the complaints against the abuses of the master fishermen, an aversion to join with the cultivators, the Montagnards, would have been bulwarked by these stigma. The obvious continuity between slavery and the Montagnards in Rodrigues also must have heightened a social gulf between these Mauritians and the “*indigènes*.” In Mauritius, a desire to be manumitted between 1834 and 1839 -- “a feeling amongst the apprentices in Port Louis, that it will be a dishonor to them if they do not affect their own emancipation before the general period of freedom arrives” (Finnis in Allen 1983:157) presumably led to the immigrants’ self-classification as “old free” or *de naissance libre* in sharp distinction between themselves and the Montagnards.

- 13 The first of such documents, “*Etablissement d’une Communication Régulière entre l’île Maurice et l’île Rodrigues*,” 1874, gives an indication of the parties and the issues in this struggle. In it, the Mauritian shipping company, Messieurs Alexandre Suzor & Cie, set out the conditions and rates for freight and passenger transfer to and from Mauritius and Rodrigues. There are sixty-six signatures and marks affixed to the document on two separate days, and their names are listed and verified by the magistrate, J.H.R. Bell.

This fourth day of August one thousand eight hundred and seventy four
D.Legoff, E.Avrilland, V.Henriette, P.Jolicoeur, O.Claire, C.Martin,
N.Perrine, V.Casimir, C.Jolicoeur, P.P.Louis, L.Casimir, N.Jones,
G.Agathe, A.Pierre, P.P.Perrine, D.Collet, J.Ravina, S.Victorine,
J.M.Perrine, C.Collet, M.Hopes, J.Monus, J.Larcher, C.J.Louis,
F.F.Adelaide, L.Cendrillon, P.Bernard, J.C.Cupidon, B.Philip,

C.Perrine, Lamy, A.Comet, J.Pitre appeared before me in the Court House at Rodrigues & in my presence signed their names and affixed their marks to the foregoing act.

Signed J.H.R. Bell
Police Magistrate
In and For the Island of Rodrigues.

and, again:

On the fourteenth day of August one thousand eight hundred and seventy four Richard fils, Remilla, Amboula, V.Begué, R.Begué, Imboulla, Illka, Victor Ardor, A.Joseph, K.Grancourt, P.Jolicoeur, C.Ravina, J.A.Victorine, D.Roussety, Jean Velle, R.J.J.Perrine, J.J.Angelique, A.Azie, Fanoria, A.Alexis, Pierre Chevery, P.Perrine fils, Amelien Bernard, F.Ladal appeared before me in the District Court House of Rodrigues and in my presence signed their names and affixed their marks to the foregoing document.

Signed J.H.R. Bell
Police Magistrate
In & For the Island of Rodrigues.

(in Dupon 1969)

As the population of Rodrigues about this time was about 1500 people, we can safely assume that this list probably includes the "leading citizens" of the era. Notably absent are the persons, or their descendants, listed in the official land concessions and other official reports up to the early 1840s, with one exception, *viz.*, Bégué. Also absent is a certain Antoine Chelin, who was cited as the primary defendant in the cases presented to the Magistrate in 1843. Judging from the nature of those complaints, *e.g.*, beatings, non-payment of wages, and garden damage by his livestock, Mr. Chelin must have been a major employer and livestock owner at the time. Of the 23 land concessionees listed in the 1860s, only three appear here: Perrine, Claire and François. (North-Coombes 1971:97 *et seq.*).

While the listed names are no doubt leading citizens, they were clearly not among the powerful elite and even appear to include former slaves, judging from the Malagasy names and certain common slave names, *e.g.* Cendrillon, Cupidon, Lamy. Subsequent events demonstrate this. The magistrate, Bell, "was perhaps the most dishonest magistrate ever to be in charge of Rodrigues" (*Ibid.*:99), engaging in various kinds of embezzlement schemes sufficient to rouse certain inhabitants to send a petition to Mauritius and for W.J. Caldwell to be sent to investigate (Annual Reports 1875). Bell had first contacted Houdette and Co., a firm of merchants in Port Louis, and invited them to participate in the Rodriguan trade, as a challenge to the major Rodriguan trader, Jean Allas. When the Houdette ship was lost, Suzor and Company stepped in with another ship. Just after the above document was signed, Suzor issued bills for agricultural produce shipped on the next voyage, promising to redeem them upon his return, and the traders' salt fish and animals were paid by cheque. Neither the bills nor the cheques were ever honored and the Suzor ship never returned (*Ibid.*:100-101). The elite, allied with Jean Allas and concerned with protecting their own exploitative schemes, did not participate in this event, being in competition with Suzor and Bell in their illicit activities.

What is of eventual significance in the list is that certain of these families will emerge as major players among the elite in the late nineteenth century, especially Roussety and Bégué, and in the twentieth century a large proportion of these are established, respected Creole families: Legoff, Jolicœur, Clair, Perrine, Casimir, Agathe, François, Larcher, Grancourt, as well as Bégué and Roussety. In 1874, these people are part of the newly-arrived Mauritian emigrants, and though sufficiently

“propertied” to have a major interest in the trading vessels, were not powerful enough to challenge an already extant economic elite, personified by Jean Allas and his allies.

- 14 This relative internal autonomy of economic production could prevail because of the lack of strategic importance attributed to control of land or labour, these superseded by control of the trade to the outside.

The independent and predominant development of capital as merchant’s capital is tantamount to the non-subjection of production to capital, and hence to capital developing on the basis of an alien mode of production which is also independent of it. (Marx in Genovese & Genovese, 1983:35)

- 15 The causes of a general movement of Mauritian and Réunionais Creoles to Madagascar and especially to Southern Africa are vague, although Toussaint attributes it to the Creoles’ realization of impending overpopulation and consequent strain on resources (1972:280-281), to which must be added that Réunionais and Francophone Mauritians were being encouraged to emigrate to the newly-acquired French colony of Madagascar as well (Paillard 1979:122). By 1925 Barquissau estimates that three quarters of the French population in Madagascar are Réunionais, and by 1949, Defos du Rau cites 16,198 Réunionais French as compared to 16,092 metropolitan French in Madagascar (Toussaint *op.cit.*). During the same period, Toussaint estimates between 15,000 and 16,000 Mauritians, or descendants of Mauritians, in just Durban (*loc.cit.*). As Toussaint also points out, while this population movement is relatively small, it comprised an already small “*élite*” on the two islands, and consisted in large part of “*entreprenants*.” This “brain drain” (“*l’émigration des cerveaux*”) was accompanied by the loss of a considerable amount of capital. For Toussaint, it evokes the image “*du ‘Vase brisé’ de Sully Prudhomme perdant lentement mais sûrement son eau par une meurtrissure légère en apparence, mais en réalité fatale*” (*Ibid.*:282).

- 16 In 1886, only one native of the Far East is noted, a Siamese (Annual Reports 1886). In 1887, in addition to the Siamese, a couple of Chinese have appeared (Annual Reports 1887), by 1894 there are six (Annual Reports 1894). During this same time period, the eight persons resident whose “calling” is “commerce” in 1886, number eighteen in 1894 (*loc.cit.*). In addition, in 1886, there are noted 40 arrivals, and 35 departures; in 1894, 236 arrivals are listed (197 men, 39 women) and 145 departures (113 men, 22 women). This latter group of arrivals/departures, virtually canceling each other out each year, are in fact small traders arriving and departing with the regular shipping, and so noted in passing in the annual reports.

By the 1910s, the domination of the Rodriguan/Mauritian trade by the Chinese, and East Indians to a lesser extent, is well established. During World War I, A.J. Bertuchi notes: “There are also a few Chinese and Indian traders; the former are the Greeks of the East and are to be found everywhere. They are well versed in the art of extorting money from the simple inhabitants” (1923:70-71). He goes on: “The greater part of the commerce of the island is in the hands of Chinese and Indians, whose system of barter and credit is all one-sided . . . Traders from Mauritius come over with the mail; they bring the goods required by the population, and buy the produce of the island to sell in Mauritius” (*op.cit.*:100).

The emergence of Asian traders at the turn of the century is general for the Mascarenes. From the practical monopoly control of the commerce in “*grains nourriciers et des tissus*” (Toussaint 1972:283) in Mauritius before WWI, the number of “*commerçants indiens*” has risen considerably: “*On les voit partout,*

dans tous les domaines du commerce: toileries, bijouterie, merceries, quincailleries, papeteries, etc." (Beejadhur in Toussaint 1972:283). In Réunion the same phenomenon is underlined by Defos du Rau (in Toussaint *op.cit.*): "*C'est surtout les profits réalisés par les 'Z'Arabes' comme marchands de tissus en 1914-1918 qui les ont définitivement installés dans l'île où ils commencent alors à se répandre dans toutes les directions.*"

In Rodrigues, the early Asian traders, Indians and Chinese, appearing in the 1880s and 1890s, were a minority, dealing precisely in "*grains nourriciers et tissus.*" But their eventual dominance of Rodriguan trade was precipitated not just by the vacuum left by the major traders, but also their entry into the Rodriguan fishing sector through the more extensive network of shops they established.

Fishing regulations introduced in 1882 and 1894, establishing net sizes and prohibiting fishing in certain bays and creeks, had never been enforced due to the lack of a sufficient or effective police force. These regulations also prohibited fishing with nets between December and February, but this only formalized what was already the case since there was no shipping between Rodrigues and Mauritius during this, the cyclone season. In 1906, fish reserves were delineated along the northern coast, legal net sizes were established, and other methods such as poisons and explosives were outlawed. However, a perceptible scarcity of fish, especially in the north, led to a total prohibition of seine nets in 1920, with fishing thus limited to rod, line and *kasir* [bamboo woven fish-traps] (North- Coombes 1971:212).

Net fishing was in the hands of master fishermen, as it had been since the mid-nineteenth century. In the early part of the 1900s, there were about a dozen fishing stations dotted around the island coast, each employing between 12 and 20 men. The fishery owners provided the boats and gear, and during the week, housing and food for the men. Weekends saw the men return to their family homes in Baie aux Huitres and Port Mathurin. The net returns were, apparently, shared on a 50:50 basis, the owner taking half, the other half being apportioned among the men.

The 1920 regulations were much resented by the fishery owners and fishermen alike and they willingly participated in a systematized subversion of the regulations. From among the small-scale Asian traders, one Chinese in particular devised a strategy whereby a series of small shops were established along the coasts. The shops were covers for buying illegally caught fish, although that aim was hardly covert given that initially they were located in areas with very little population. These ostensible shopowners managed to consistently avoid apprehension by the police through a system of signals.

From 1920 to 1939, the Chinese were able to elaborate their small shops from simple covert fish-buying depots to actual retail establishments, with credit given for the purchase of imported goods, and not only fish, but various agricultural produce and livestock bought on consignment. Not coincidentally, population expansion is occurring in the same areas as the shops' placement. Although continuing objections caused the total prohibition of nets to be repealed in 1939, the rural Chinese shops were by then permanent fixtures in the countryside. To this day, Chinese shops are still centers for the purchase of fish and certain produce, and still provide credit for the purchase of imported necessities.

- 17 The Chinese in Rodrigues were and remain a relatively closed group, encapsulated within the larger society. The 1972 census (Ministry 1972:35, Table 35) lists 266 individuals within the Chinese "linguistic group" — defined by the language spoken by the individual's forefathers. The largest part of this Chinese group belonged to the Church of England (211 adherents as opposed to 24,769 Catholics). Not only was this Chinese group largely endogamous, albeit encompassing marriage partners from

among Chinese communities in the Mascarenes and Seychelles, as well as those recently coming from China itself, secondary employees in the Chinese-owned shops were in every case encountered both close and distant relatives brought in from, again, either the other Mascarenes or China itself.

Although the core group of Chinese was easily delimited according to language and origins, occupation, religion and marriage preferences, it also comprised certain Chinese individuals, marginalized and virtually all men, who had intermarried with Rodriguan women or who maintained permanent households with Rodriguan mistresses. These families were usually Catholic and not necessarily engaged in commerce. This latter group in fact constituted the blurring of a Chinese identity into a more generalized Creole one. "In fact there is more social affinity now between Rodriguans and Chinese than there is between white and black Rodriguans" (North-Coombes 1972:272).

- 18 In as much as the Suzor et Cie. contract lists a series of family names that are recognizably Creole in the 20th century, the shipping records in the 1800s also indicate the arrival of other Creole family founders. Charles Werther arrived prior to 1827, Mathieu and Auguste Roussety, master fishermen and traders and founders of one of the largest Creole families on the island arrived in 1832 and 1844. Other Creole notables were Jean- Marie Meunier arriving in 1840, Zéline Labour in 1842, Betsy Labour in 1845, Désiré Calamel in 1845, and in 1846, two Perrines, Marie Jeanne Geneviève, Ferdinand Bonelle, and Clodimir and Emilien Jean. By the 1850s, the François, Raffaut, Legoff, Lévêque, Ithier, Castel and Allas families were well-established (*Ibid.*:271).
- 19 By 1857, "there are several small droves of cattle, the principal one belonging to a Mr. Martin, an absentee landlord" (Duncan 1857). Mr. James Martin eventually became resident on the island: upon the Mauritian governor's visit in 1881, "a reception committee presented an address which was read by James Martin, owner of the largest herd of cattle" (North-Coombes 1871:110). Martin grazed his animals over most of the cattlwalk area, together with other owners of smaller herds (3-4 head). Sir Hubert Jerningham, governor of Mauritius, found that in 1893, the whole island was "given over to the deer in the forests...and to the herds of cattle which were practically wild and roamed all over the little colony without control" (Jerningham 1893).
Although Martin's presence is evident from at least 1857 to the 1890s, there was a period when virtually the entire island was leased to a Mauritian firm, Wilson Swale and Company, for cattle pasturage. In 1881 alone, 2188 head of cattle, mostly Wilson Swale's, were exported to Mauritius. Shortly thereafter their lease was revoked, and after the bulk of their cattle had been removed, only 138 head of cattle were exported in 1889 (North-Coombes 1971:124).
- 20 The population of Mauritius, in 1972 — 826,000, was divided into Franco-Mauritians and Creoles (who are of mixed European and African ancestry), together making up 28.7% of the total population; 68.4% were Indo-Mauritians, comprising Hindu — 51.8%, and Muslim — 16.6%; and Chinese 2.9%. Today more than three quarters of the population is Indo-Mauritian (Simmons 1986:26).
- 21 A similar situation, with different parties, recurred in the 1982 elections: "A coalition of the Marxist-leaning Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM), the largest single party, and the smaller Social Democratic Party (SDP) gained 60 to 62 elected seats in parliament. The other two seats were won by a local party from an island dependency [Rodrigues] . . ." (The Guardian 1982:14).

- 22 “We have suffered the colonial power.”
- 23 “We are a part of the Mauritian state without our total dissolution in its personality.”
- 24 “While publicly cited reasons and circumstances were vague, in 1978 an expatriate linguist researching Mauritian creole was expelled from the country — an official act which most observers directly attributed to the subject of his work.
- 25 “All that is precious to us comes from afar. This causes a certain neurosis, a deaf fearfulness that this umbilical cord might be cut and the Rodriguans left on their own. This neurosis is a key factor in a certain political ploy in which the victim is nothing other than the dignity of Rodriguans.”
- 26 “[the Rodriguans] want to leave behind this mentality of an assisted people and to discourage the ‘benevolent [read: paternalistic, ‘sugar daddies’] fathers’ of their politics.”
- 27 “counts among the poorest territories in the world.”
- 28 “in this island . . . the standard of living is twice as high as that for Mauritius.”
- 29 The number 8, and occasionally 9, are auspicious numbers in Rodrigues and mark all important ritual occasions.

CHAPTER III. THE QUOTIDIAN

- 1 *Montvue* is a fictitious name. Except for the name of the Creole community discussed further on, *Creovista*, all other place names referred to are actual names.
- 2 At the time of fieldwork, there were approximately 15 jeeps, 1 bus, a couple of trucks and well over 300 motorcycles, none larger than 250cc.
- 3 “. . .it is the significance of sexual access for the establishment of both male autonomy and adult cooperative relations that turns wives into valuables to be exchanged and guarded — rather than the reverse.” (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:292)

4 *Population by sex, Rodrigues 1851-1944*

Year	Males	Females	Total Population
1851	327	168	495
1861	464	229	693
1871	693	415	1,108
1881	812	619	1,431
1891	1,154	914	2,068
1901	1,685	1,477	3,162
1911	2,361	2,306	4,667
1921	3,193	3,211	*6,404
1931	3,880	4,069	*7,949
1944	5,549	5,998	*11,547

*excluding Chinese population

(Kuczynski 1949:886-899)

- 5 *Creovista* is a fictitious name. Except for the name of the Montagnard community discussed earlier, *Montvue*, all other place names referred to are actual names.
- 6 Given the nature of the division between Creole and Montagnard, providing actual numbers of Creoles or Montagnards is virtually impossible. However, a relative proportion of Creoles in the general population can be gleaned by counting residents in parishes considered Creole, or alternately, by those occupations considered Creole.

Creole Parishes, 1972 Census

Grand Baie	382
Anse aux Anglais	240
Cavern Provert	51
Port Mathurin	724
Pointe Monnier	257
Baie aux Huitres	1,215
La Ferme	473
TOTAL	3,341
out of a total of 24,769 or 13.4%	

Out of 7,321 individuals listed by occupations in the 1972 Census, approximately 1,020 fall into what would be considered a Creole profession, about 13.9%.

CHAPTER IV. THE CELEBRATED

- 1 *Lham trainé* literally means wandering soul. These are the souls of people who have died before their time or of unnatural means, and wander the earth until their proper time of death arrives. *Lham trainé* are thought to be the tools of malignant forces, especially of the *longanist*, through which sickness, spells and even death can be wreaked. Also adrift at night are the *miniprins*, a malignant Satanic figure, apparently deriving from Hindu tradition, and the *lougarou*, a malignant werewolf-like figure who appears in various animal guises. These latter two spirits appear to be independent of the manipulations of a *longanist*, although he can provide protection from them.
- 2 A house appears to be a sort of safe haven from *lham trainé*, they cannot enter except via the passage of a living person. That is, *lham trainé* closely follows a person, but will avoid encountering that person face-to-face, so that each time a person enters a house, he or she must quickly turn and face away from the house and back in the door and so denying *lham trainé* means of entering. Other mundane situations also put persons at risk to *lham trainé*, e.g. being outside at night, especially after midnight, or traversing crossroads. Protection in these situations is provided by pockets turned inside out, salt in one's pockets, or matches stuck in one's hair.
- 3 An exact translation of *kopèr* here is difficult. Literally it means co-father, and in other French creoles, Haitian for example, it and *komèr* [co-mother] are used as terms of address for the relationship between the godparents of the same child. It does not have that same significance in Rodrigues, but it does suggest a relationship based on sharing. I have chosen Comrade simply to indicate a shared interest, without specifying what that shared interest is.

- 4 Rodriguan, as well as Seychellois and Réunionais, share many of the same characters, notably Petit Jean. All, to different degrees, further show the syncretization of Bantu, Malagasy and European folk tale narrative devices and motifs. See, for example, Carayol and Chaudenson 1978, Ottino 1979 and Barat et al 1977.
- 5 Similarly, Haitian *vodun* prayers are often “peppered with puzzling snatches of locally unintelligible phrases preserved almost intact from African chants of another age” (Murray n.d.:24).
- 6 In this respect, much sexual play goes on which is excused by the participants themselves as not really intercourse. It was explained to me, by the young people themselves, that sometimes young women could get pregnant, but this was termed *ensent vyerj* [lit: virgin pregnancy], because insemination occurred without actual penetration.

CHAPTER V. SAVAGES AND MUDMEN

- 1 Unfortunately, I came across the work of the Comaroffs on this topic (1992:49-68) after this discussion was written. Their first proposition, “. . . ethnicity always has its genesis in specific historical forces, forces which are simultaneously structural and cultural;” their second, “ethnicity, far from being a unitary “thing,” describes both a set of relations and a mode of consciousness; moreover, its meaning and practical salience varies for different social groupings according to their positions in the social order; and, their third, “. . . ethnicity has its origins in the asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy;” all articulate more succinctly and clearly some of the points which emerge from the Rodriguan situation.
The history of Rodrigues since 1968 indeed illustrates quite nicely the Comaroffs’ final proposition: “Where it becomes an objectified “principle” in the collective consciousness of a society, ethnicity may be perpetuated by factors quite different from those that caused its emergence, and may have a direct and independent impact on the context in which it arose.”
- 2 I am not sure if this relational quality is characteristic of other conventionally identified classes or ethnic groups. Although I suspect it is given various discussions in relation to group boundaries and the ‘skewing’ that occurs when people are asked to place themselves on any given class ordering. I am equally unsure whether this aspect is largely ignored, to my knowledge, because it is considered of little import or because it has not been noticed because of focus on one group to the exclusion of others — naturally, my suspicion is the latter.
- 3 I first used the term “sociocultural marronage” in an early paper thus: “Montagnard social and cultural life shows a multifaceted process of creativity in the service of autonomy and an active element of subversion where outside institutions impinge on their lives. But Montagnard society is above all an act of sociocultural marronage. Like the Saramaka maroons, Montagnards retreated from the masters to preserve their dignity and integrity, but unlike the Saramaka they had no possibility of distancing themselves physically on such a small island. Instead they created an entire culture and society to the same end and right under the noses of those who would denigrate and despoil them.” (Gardella 1984:21)
The term *marron* comes from the Spanish word *cimarron*, or semi-feral cattle, domesticated cattle that too readily returns to the wild. The word maroon came to be

used to refer to an escaped slave, and *marronnage* signifies being in the state of a maroon, that is having escaped, living in hiding. The meaning intended by sociocultural marronnage then is that of a society and culture hidden within a larger or dominant system, in contradistinction to a maroon society which has removed itself physically from that larger system.

Significantly, in Haiti, *marronnage* is frequently used in its conventional sense of being in hiding. It was very commonly used to describe the situation of people in hiding from being terrorized by the *de facto* authorities after the 1991 *coup d'état*. However, it also came to be used to describe the putschists in their dealings with the international community seeking a compromise. In this sense, it meant that the putschists had their own, hidden, agenda even while they apparently engaged in all the requisite steps of an international negotiation.

CHAPTER VI. CONTEXT AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1 “If the constellation of creole islands were to be reassembled in one ocean, it would seem the diffusion of a single original culture and civilization. But spread among the Caribbean, the Americas and the Indian Ocean, an ambiguous mix at the intersections of civilizations, pulled by powerful centrifugal forces, it evokes more the remains of an exploded universe...From one island to the other, from one ocean to the other, this unity repeats itself, each island, each archipelago the counterpoint and proof to the other of the existence of significant regularities.” (Benoist 1979a)
- 2 One must look elsewhere than the substantive nature, or the theoretical concerns, of the definition of a Pan-Caribbean area for an explanation of the exclusion of all mention of the islands of the western Indian Ocean in anthropological studies in North America. This omission is all the more marked when one notes the “striking similarities” between Haitian Creole and Mauritian Creole, two islands with no discernible direct historical contact, this alongside the marked distinction between Mauritian Creole and Réunionais Creole, two islands barely 80 miles apart and with a long common history (*e.g.*, Baker and Corne 1982) Given various French scholars’ (especially at the Centre Universitaire of La Réunion and Aix-en-Provence) attention to the qualitative connections between the Caribbean and the western Indian Ocean, it is difficult not to attribute the North American omission to some kind of Americo-centric tendency and/or academic insularity.
- 3 Note that even on one of the more homogeneous islands, Martinique, the diversity within the early population is striking:

<u>Provinces d'Origine</u>	<u>1640-60</u>	<u>1670-1700</u>
Normandie	38%	17%
Bretagne	9.3%	9.7%
Ile-de-France	9.3%	9.7%
Saintonge	4.3%	9%
Guyenne-Gascogne	2.7%	9.6%
Provence	0.9%	2.9%
Autres	35%	42%

(from David 1973:14-24)

More recent studies, predominantly those concerned with European imperialism and colonialism have begun to redress this particular bias. Among these scholars, it has come to be understood that European states “came to have national identities, national treasures, and national policies in relation to the colonial venture, in Ireland, the Americas and elsewhere” (Cooper and Stoler 1989:615). A realization and

understanding of this facet of European imperialism is essential to any analysis of societies born from these encounters: “In most places, at most times, colonialism did (and does) not exist in the singular, but in a plurality of forms and forces — its particular character being shaped as much by political, social and ideological contests among the colonizers as by the encounter with the colonized . . . colonialism simply does not have a single, transhistorical “essence,” neither political nor material, social or cultural. Rather, its form and substance are decided in the context of its making” (Comaroff 1989:681).

- 4 In at least a tacit realization of the problem with a concept of an African “pool of cultural heritage” in the many instances in Caribbean societies where things African are not readily visible, Mintz and Price appealed to “grammatical principles:”

[where a West African cultural heritage] will have to be defined in less concrete terms, by focusing more on values, and less on socio-cultural forms, and even by attempting to identify unconscious, “grammatical” principles, which may underlie and shape behavioral response. . . [for example] on the one hand, basic assumptions about social relations (what values motivate individuals, how one deals with others in social situations, and matters of interpersonal style); and, on the other, basic assumptions and expectations about the way the world functions phenomenologically. (1976: 5)

It seems to me that recourse to “grammatical principles” merely continues the same argument in more abstract terms. Their example of a common phenomenological understanding of how the world functions has to do with the supernatural significance of unusual births — the Yoruba “deify” twins, while the nearby Igbo summarily destroy twins at birth. But the principle, “the supernatural significance of unusual births,” is so general across a variety of cultures that it has lost any particularity to a West African context. Their other instance of an arena for the operation of grammatical principles, “basic assumptions about social relations,” is perilously close to collapsing any distinction, their own included, between social and cultural phenomena, and upon which rests the tenets of their encounter model.

- 5 “We laugh now at the image of Englishmen and Dutchmen in the jungle or bush, dressing up for formal dinners in the heat. But there was a real purpose to this. For the stiff suit was one of the necessary caste marks to impress their subjects, as well as themselves, of the Europeans’ natural right to rule. Letting go of European proprieties, or “principles,” was a step toward letting go of power.” (Buruma 1994:31) Or, as in this case, its opposite, a step toward achieving power.

- 6 These maroon societies ranged from “tiny bands that survived less than a year to powerful states encompassing thousands of members and surviving for generations or even centuries” (Price 1973:1). The earliest maroon communities were perforce organized for defense, against the plantation owners and colonial authorities, and their early organization clearly reflected this in its emphasis on centralized military authority and strict, and often brutal, maintenance of discipline (*Ibid*). But for those maroon societies that survived European aggression and outlived slavery, a different form of society emerged which can be discerned from historical accounts and contemporary ethnography.

The information on many of these remains scanty, but for others, especially the Jamaican Maroons and the “Bush Negroes” of Suriname, we can begin to delineate the society that emerged. The most studied among these are the Saramaka of Suriname, the subject of Richard and Sally Price’s work for over twenty years. Price notes that by the eighteenth century, “the power and authority of the early wartime leaders was gradually diffused into a number of developing institutions” such as:

. . . kinship networks, which had existed in only attenuated forms during the earliest years of the society, were playing a major organizational role and determining to a large extent the distribution of authority; legal institutions, including "councils," ordeals, and other standardized judicial mechanisms, were operating smoothly; a complex but integrated system of ritual and belief held an important place in social and political control; and the harsh sanctions that typified early maroon societies were at least beginning to give way to more subtle pressures against deviance -- the moral force of the community as a group and the threat of supernatural sanctions. . .(1973:21)

- 7 Saramakan society came to be, and is, organized by matrilineal clans: "the members of a clan, from several hundred to several thousand people, never convene, yet they constitute a 'corporation' " (Price 1983:27 fn.8). Ownership of land, hunting and fishing rights, religious-political offices are all vested in the clan. A generalized clan solidarity beyond home territory obtains, as when a stranger is entitled to hospitality and permitted to eat freely from the fruit trees of any village controlled by his clan (*op.cit.*). "Relationships of 'clientship,' what Foster has called 'dyadic contracts,' and Wolf 'dyadic coalitions,' play a cardinal role in Saramaka social organization, even though this is a 'unilineal society,' otherwise quite different from those in which such relationships have usually been found to be pervasive" (Price 1974:157). "For in this society, the fact of close kinship implies less a well-defined web of mutual rights and duties which somehow 'program' behavior than certain mutual advantages, not applicable with non-kinsmen, in the use of the more general contractual model" (*loc.cit.*). "Even uterine siblings, who have the strongest kind of jural lien on each other's services, a contractual mode typically marks transactions" (*loc.cit.*). ". . . I have stressed that Saramaka morality is contextual . . [it is] in the moral evaluation of particular acts that the importance of total context emerges, that one sees how Saramakas characteristically bargain about norms in their own self-interest. What gives norms their practical flexibility in Saramaka . . . is largely the fact that the interested parties themselves, rather than outside judicial authorities, control their application" (*op.cit.*:158).

It should be clear that in Saramaka, the distribution of power is relatively uncentralized and the formal political structure relatively weak....Egalitarianism is an important value in all Bush Negro societies, and Saramakas seem even less willing than Djukas to recognize organized authority . . . never a proliferation of hierarchically organized offices . . . nor is corporal punishment a possible outcome of formal judicial proceedings . . . compliance is gained far more frequently by the technique of 'persuasion' than by 'consensual power' or by 'force and coercion'. . . If lineages in the classic segmentary system of the Tallensi may be seen as "the skeleton of their social structure" (Fortes 1945:30) and those of the mobile Ndembu rather as "the end-product of a number of social tendencies" (Turner 1957:84), the Saramaka lineage, at least in the present context, might be seen as a secure anchor in a world of shifting and uncertain alliances. (Price 1974:159)

- 8 "Whatever its origin (African heritage, rejection of colonial authority, an initial or progressive de-structuration), peasant culture appears to have put into place, bit by bit, a self-regulated system, without the State, without the institutionalization of power."

- 9 These same Caribbean societies have also been, at least implicitly, considered anomalous to the more general social organizational patterns found in the Caribbean, *viz.* dyadic, matrifocal, and so on. Davenport, for example, classed the Jamaican land-holding group, the Haitian *lakou*, and the Carriacou *blood* as “joint-families”, and concluded only that they could not be considered fully corporate or termed lineages because they lacked structural continuity, rather than engaging in an analysis concerned with exploring what made them unique. (Davenport 1961:384)
- 10 Even in the case of the isolated Saramaka — where “the concept of men periodically going to *bakáa* (the outside world) to bring back western goods has always held a central position in the cultural system” (Price 1974:65) and where “particular groups of Saramakas commonly visit, worship, and exchange ritual information with certain non-Bush Negroes — in each case, precisely those who are the descendants of the slaves who lived on the same plantation from which the ancestors of that particular group of Saramakas fled over two and a half centuries ago” (Price 1973:27).

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