

Change, anxiety and exclusion in the post-colonial reconfiguration of Franco-Mauritian elite geographies

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Using the example of Mauritius, this paper seeks to enhance our understanding of how elites reorganise their environs when their position and power are threatened. In 1968 Mauritius became independent and for Franco-Mauritians, the island's former white colonial elite, this meant that a regime favourable to their dominant position ended. This paper outlines ways in which Franco-Mauritians have transformed their everyday geographies in the face of this change. We suggest that feelings of anxiety and the consequent desire to regain some measure of control have influenced Franco-Mauritians' (re)shaping of exclusive cultural, educational, recreational, and residential enclaves to create new patterns of exclusion and segregation. We suggest, moreover, that such enclaves are simultaneously – and paradoxically – a root of both continuing anxiety and the foundation of continued exclusivity.

KEY WORDS: Mauritius, elites, geography, anxiety, post-colonial, exclusion

Introduction

This paper aims to enhance our understanding of how geographies are (re)shaped when an elite, such as Franco-Mauritians, face significant challenges to their dominance. In recent years while geographies of elites, including the super-rich, have gained critical attention (Beaverstock 2002; Beaverstock *et al.* 2004; Hay and Muller 2012; Hay 2013), much of that work has addressed how such groups gain and apply the upper hand in shaping places (e.g. Butler and Lees 2006; Lees 2003; Pinçon and Pinçon Charlot 2007; Pow 2011; Roberts and Schein 2013; Woods 2011 2013). This paper, by contrast, explores dimensions of an elite facing 'decline'.

We first address what a (declining) elite is and why it matters to analyse elite geographies. Next, a brief account of Franco-Mauritians' historical power base helps contextualise the impact of this heritage in Mauritius' post-colonial period. Today Franco-Mauritians have diversified their economic interests and many rely less than before on land for their wealth. The origin of the community's wealth, however, is tied

undeniably to the land (Salverda 2013) which, together with memories of colonial injustices, helps to explain ongoing pressure on Franco-Mauritian spaces. The paper's attention then moves to changes Franco-Mauritians have faced and how feelings of anxiety and the consequent desire to take control of space have influenced the (re)shaping of exclusive enclaves; enclaves that are simultaneously a root of anxiety and foundations for a desire to maintain exclusivity.

The paper is based on historical data and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mauritius, South Africa and France in the period 2005–2007. Over 150 interviews were conducted with Franco-Mauritians and Mauritians in Mauritius, South Africa and France. The research also relies on participant observation, for example at Franco-Mauritian-owned *campements* (seaside bungalows), which offered many insights to Franco-Mauritians' feelings and perceptions. Furthermore, media research, both archival and from contemporary sources, was undertaken. This multi-method approach revealed the many layers of a former colonial elite's position in a post-colonial setting.

Elites and their geographies

From the outset, we must determine whether Franco-Mauritians are indeed an elite, in decline. Generally speaking, an elite is a small group in possession and exercise of the commanding positions in a given society (Scott 2003), sharing a variety of interests arising from similarities of experience, training, public roles or duties, and way of life (Cohen 1981, xvi). As a substantial body of research has pointed out (e.g. Abbink and Salverda 2013; Bourdieu 1984 [1979]; Dahl 1961; Daloz 2010; Dogan and Higley 1998; Mills 2000 [1956]; Pareto 1991 [1901]; Shore and Nugent 2002), elites rely on a variety of elements to sustain their position, such as their control over resources, their networks and symbolic superiority. In this paper we are especially concerned with elites in the face of change.

Dogan and Higley (1998, 8) write, '[o]ne kind of crisis often occurs when territories achieve national independence. Especially after a violent secession struggle, national independence may involve the ascendancy, *ex abrupto*, of a new political elite.' Furthermore, Dogan (2003, 13) notes 'in the case of abrupt regime changes, an analogy has been noticed across countries: the economic and administrative elites resist better the upheaval than the political and military elites'. This illustrates not only that (hegemonic) elites cannot take their position for granted, but also that one elite rarely controls all resources, such as land, financial means, parliamentary control, knowledge and access to force. Hence, distinctions tend to be drawn between, for example, economic elites, political elites, and academic elites (Shore 2002, 4).

Notwithstanding that elites certainly wield a great deal of power and are often able to impress their ideas upon society, Scott (2008) rightly challenges the notion that elites are all-powerful and argues that their power must be seen as open to challenge – a view that resonates with Pareto's aphorism: 'history is a graveyard of aristocracies'. Counter-elites aspiring to increase their power and non-elites aiming to overcome their subordinate position can put an elite group on the defensive, forcing them to act in ways they may not otherwise have chosen (Salverda 2010a). In many cases, especially liberal and democratic societies, then, Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Fontana 1993) is not self-evident as one elite rarely has all power, while its position is often open to challenges.

Research on elites, including the super-rich, indicates that their dominance in the shaping of geographies matters to societies at large (Butler and Lees 2006; Murphy and McGuirk 2013; Paris 2013; Woods 2013). In the face of challenges to this dominance, however, geographies also matter. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, the Boston elite's fear of Irish migrants led them to (not completely successfully) establish their own protected enclave (Domosh 1992). Equally, in post-apartheid South

Africa, white elites' anxieties about socio-spatial change have yielded a tendency to escape unpleasant realities within the confines of secured 'natural' environments (Ballard and Jones 2011).

Our study suggests that in the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period Franco-Mauritians' elite position has been affected substantially, though their decline is more relative than absolute. They were without doubt an elite during Mauritius' colonial period, with power and privileges that far exceeded those of the vast majority of Mauritians. However, the end of the colonial period brought the emancipation and democratisation of the large population of indentured labourers, mainly from India, and led to anxieties amongst Franco-Mauritians about the loss of their superior position, anxieties compounded by substantial demographic shifts and growing numbers of others entering their formerly exclusive enclaves. Today, Franco-Mauritians are estimated to number around 10,000, slightly less than 1% of a total population of about 1.3 million. The largest group in Mauritius are Hindus (52%) and there is a minority group of Muslims (16%); both groups originate in India. Creoles, largely of slave descent, constitute about 27% (including a small group of *gens de couleur*). Then there are the Sino-Mauritians, who make up 3% of the population (Eriksen 1998, 15). In contrast to the colonial period, all Mauritians are today considered equal in their access to the island's public space. In the face of these challenges Franco-Mauritians, reflecting patterns of separation elsewhere (Atkinson and Blandy 2005; Caldeira 1996; Tanulku 2012), have displayed a tendency to try to control the spaces in which they operate, although they do not lead lives completely separated from their compatriots because of work and some friendship relationships (typically limited and generally with those people from similarly wealthy backgrounds).

Despite being overwhelmed numerically and despite the significant diminution of their political power, Franco-Mauritians can still be considered an elite today. They remain the island's dominant economic group. They possess by far the largest number of interlocking directorates, and control about a third of the top 100 companies and five of the largest ten companies. Moreover, they maintain control over large parts of the island's agricultural land (Salverda 2010b). They are characterised by strong markers of economic elite distinction (Salverda 2011) and a sense of group belonging coupled with their economic power that has an impact on the whole community (and vice versa). Notwithstanding their preservation of an elite position and elevated income levels, Franco-Mauritians no longer experience the same status and privileges they enjoyed during colonial times. They are no longer hegemonic, faced instead with significant challenges to their position. To understand Franco-Mauritians' changing geographies and the impact of these on Mauritius more widely, we

have to take into consideration differences – and mutual influences – between this elite's relative and absolute position. Due to a loss of hegemonic power, Franco-Mauritians' anxieties about challenges to their exclusive enclaves have increased, yet many still possess sufficient wealth to confront and respond to these challenges.

In regards to the shift from the colonial to the post-colonial period, our data show that wariness about change was an important driving force among Franco-Mauritians to maintain exclusive enclaves – and was evident among Franco-Mauritians from a variety of backgrounds. Expressing a sentiment felt more broadly among other Franco-Mauritians, the politician Eric Guimbeau said, '[the government] want us out. It's revenge for the past' (interview with first author, 12 October 2007). In reality, Franco-Mauritians did not seem to feel physically threatened, as violence aimed at them is virtually absent, yet such comments articulate their perceptions about their loss of (spatial) control. The ethnographic study of the Franco-Mauritians offers to discern how less tangible aspects, such as a dislike of change and feelings of anxiety, influence the ways in which elites (re)shape their environs. Moreover it helps to disentangle how exclusive enclaves – as well as anxiety about others entering these enclaves – are mutually reinforced by the desire to maintain social and cultural distinctiveness.

Unexplored territory

Mauritius was uninhabited when the first European seafarers set foot on the island in the sixteenth century. The French, who colonised Mauritius after the Dutch, started a permanent settlement in 1721, leading to the commercial development of the island (Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo 1993). These settlers can be considered the ancestors of the present Franco-Mauritian community, although they were not a cohesive group from the start, as the island attracted white people of various social ranks during the French period (Vaughan 2005). The French took the first steps to develop a plantation economy, granting settlers land concessions and importing large numbers of slaves, predominantly from Africa. However, it was not until Mauritius had become part of the British Empire that sugar began to fully dominate the island's economy (Benedict 1965, 15).

In December 1810, the British seized the island to help safeguard their interests in India. They only took control of the island's administration, never making attempts to settle in large numbers or to evict its French citizens. Property was not confiscated and most of the plantations remained in the hands of white French planters. Consequently, direct British cultural influence was minor: the dominant European culture and language remained French (Benedict 1965, 13–14). This, with the sugarcane plantation economy, consolidated Franco-Mauritians as an elite, who

owned large tracts of land and were distinguished from the rest of the population by their white skin-colour and European ancestry¹. Thus, the small Franco-Mauritian community came to dominate economic and political activity in Mauritius (Mozaffar 2005, 270)².

Socio-economic position and ethnicity shaped island inhabitants' use of space. Slaves were restricted to their plantations, while earlier, in the 1770s, the (French) colonial government had mandated residential segregation for the free black and white populations (Allen 2011, 353). With the abolition of slavery in 1835 and the arrival of large numbers of indentured labourers from the Indian peninsula this hardly changed, despite substantial shifts in the island's demographic structure. Within 10 years of the arrival of the first indentured labourers, one-third of the population were Indians, while by 1861 they represented two-thirds (Benedict 1965, 17). Like the slaves who had preceded them, indentured labourers were also spatially restricted, being prohibited from leaving the district in which they were employed (Allen 1999, 55; Truth and Justice Commission 2011, 72). Franco-Mauritians, by contrast, could travel freely.

Like the French elite who chose to holiday in Deauville on the coast of Normandy from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1998, 284–312), Franco-Mauritians became interested in enjoying the pleasures of the seaside, predominantly at second houses (locally called *campements*) because their main residences were on the high plateau in the island's centre, where the climate was cooler. At that time, they were, like Veblen's (1994 [1899]) 'leisure class', virtually the only ones in a position to enjoy leisure time at all. The eradication of malaria (which had affected the coast more than the centre) around 1950, together with improved infrastructure and electricity and the opening of schools in the following decades, made coastal zones progressively more attractive. Many Franco-Mauritians then opted to make their *campements* their primary residences. Those amongst them who did not own *campements* often moved to seaside villages, though they settled on private land not directly bordering the ocean. This movement led to the development of a number of coastal villages, although tourism also fostered this change. At the same time, however, the empowerment of other Mauritians laid foundations for pressure on Franco-Mauritians' exclusive enclaves.

Facing challenges

During the British colonial period, Franco-Mauritians gained wealth and controlled the island's affairs relatively easily. Nevertheless, changes crept in that paved the way for challenges to their elite position. These were prompted initially by developments in world markets in the late nineteenth century more than they

were by resistance to colonial rule: falling sugar prices led Franco-Mauritians to sell some of their land, predominantly to Indo-Mauritians, thereby allowing the latter to become gradually more prominent in the island's economic and political affairs. Nevertheless Franco-Mauritians' power remained largely unchallenged for a number of decades, partly due to their disproportionate political power.

This changed in the 1930s as large numbers of Mauritians previously excluded from the island's affairs began to prosper – some having taken professional roles in, for example, law and medicine (Seekings 2011, 160). They now demanded a say. Under growing pressure from non-white Mauritians, especially Indo-Mauritians, the British drafted a new Constitution in 1947. Franco-Mauritians were furious because the British virtually ignored their suggestions for the new document. They knew that a radical change in suffrage would increase the political power of the Indo-Mauritians, especially the majority Hindus. But the British had reached the opinion that, for the well-being of the colony, the labouring classes and the upcoming (counter-) elites should be given a voice. This changing attitude, which led to the extension of the franchise to all adult literate men and women in 1956 (Seekings 2011, 172), had Mauritian independence in 1968 as its apogee.

Franco-Mauritians lost their political dominance in the transition (Salverda 2010a, 394–6; Seekings 2011, 172), while out of the Hindu majority a new class of political elites emerged. The end of the Franco-Mauritian hegemony prompted anxiety about (economic) prospects under Hindu rule that in turn underpinned emigration, especially to South Africa (Boudet 2004). Overpopulation and grim prospects for the island's future also intensified migration patterns of Mauritians of other backgrounds (especially Creoles): since the 1940s Mauritius had witnessed steep population growth, partly due to the eradication of malaria (Dinan 1985). Indo-Mauritians were less inclined to migrate as they expected their status to rise in the future rather than diminish (Neumann 2004, 8). A Franco-Mauritian retired accountant residing in South Africa said of the Franco-Mauritians, 'the large rich families remained in Mauritius and exported their money [illegally, as the government had introduced exchange control], while the poor migrated physically' (interview with first author, 9 March 2005). While this does seem to have been the trend, some wealthy Franco-Mauritians did indeed leave the island. A member of one of the island's most established business families remembered that many departed, selling their homes, businesses and beautiful *campements* for almost nothing (interview with first author, 25 February 2005). Ultimately, however, Franco-Mauritian economic status was scarcely challenged. Economic dominance could be maintained because the new political elite, predominantly of Hindu background, initially sought political power

only and were able to identify some areas of common interest with Franco-Mauritians (Simmons 1982, 193). The elite position of Franco-Mauritians weakened, though arguably the decline was more relative than absolute. Pressure on Franco-Mauritians' lives and circumstances mounted from the end of the colonial period, and this reinforced anxieties about their maintenance of control over the places they inhabited.

Demise and defence of exclusivity

Anxieties about changing circumstances are not exclusive to elites, though the privileged often have enhanced means (e.g. wealth) to alter their living conditions – and, as such, spatial patterns more generally. Gated communities are one example of secured exclusion that can emerge from anxieties about a loss of spatial control though, paradoxically, this kind of withdrawal by elites often exacerbates 'fear and anxiety about other people entering [their exclusive domain]' (Low 2011, 398). Because perceptions, rather than 'reality', are typically the stuff of which decisions are made, and thus the elite's perceptions are key to the shaping of (new) geographies: whether or not the elite's decline is absolute or relative is of secondary importance. Moreover, and resonating with 'cultural anxiety' (Grillo 2003), the desire by the privileged to control spaces in which they operate tends to be mutually reinforced by social and cultural exclusivity. Inhabiting restricted enclaves may reinforce a sense of cultural homogeneity, shared ways of thinking (Hay and Muller 2012, 77–8), and associated sense of unease. As one Franco-Mauritian female employee of a sugar estate said 'many Franco-Mauritians don't feel at ease outside their own group' (interview with first author, 28 March 2006). In a curious pattern of circular causation, such anxiety is one driver of the desire to maintain spatial exclusivity.

Whilst spatial exclusivity has a long history, the empowerment of colonial subordinates and labouring classes over the last century or so has increased pressure on elite domains. The case of the Portuguese elite in Macau shows that this can have dramatic consequences. Pressure led to a reduction bordering on total disappearance of public spaces available for their more-or-less exclusive use: '[t]he clubs, private beaches, theatre performances, café meetings, religious ceremonies, brotherhoods and kermesses that played such a central role during the first half of the twentieth century progressively vanished' (Pina-Cabral 2000, 213). Though not quite as dramatic, this trend is also evident in the Franco-Mauritian case. This elite's loss of exclusive spaces is evident in leisure, education, land use and (second) residential options.

Leisure activities

Historically, whites-only (sport) clubs found a place in Mauritius because the Franco-Mauritians and British

were virtually the only elite. Changes in social stratification have, however, put pressure on a number of these clubs to reform. For example, the Turf Club, an elite organisation with oversight of horse racing in the capital, Port Louis, was the exclusive domain of Franco-Mauritians and British colonial officials. It was, in fact, founded in 1812 to bring the two groups closer together. But horse racing is very popular among all Mauritians and with the democratisation of Mauritius the Turf Club has been democratised as well. Today it has elite members from across the population, though Franco-Mauritians continue to comprise a substantial section of the club, because it is the only suitable organisation for people interested in horse racing.

In the case of the Mauritius Gymkhana Club, however, Franco-Mauritians have all but withdrawn. Though founded by a British naval officer, this golf club was frequented by Franco-Mauritians and until the late 1960s was a whites-only institution. A retired businessman of Muslim Mauritian origin remembered how he was the first non-Franco-Mauritian/non-Briton at Gymkhana. He said, 'when Gymkhana became too "open" Franco-Mauritians went back to the Dodo Club and opened a golf course there. Very few stayed, and I have lost some friendships because they moved away' (interview with first author, 13 April 2006). Nowadays Gymkhana's members come from a large variety of (ethnic) backgrounds though substantial membership fees support its position as one of the island's most elite clubs. Franco-Mauritians, however, now tend to avoid it. 'I've heard from friends that the club became terrible and a mess, because they accepted everyone' said a Franco-Mauritian (interview with first author, 9 February 2006)³. Feelings of losing control, displacement, and of becoming a minority are also reflected in the Mauritian branch of the Alliance Française, where other Mauritians interested in French culture and language could no longer be excluded from the running of the Alliance's affairs. Franco-Mauritians, disapproving of this diversification, have gradually withdrawn.

Only the (infamous) Dodo Club and a number of the island's yacht and game-fishing clubs have remained almost solely Franco-Mauritian. Membership regulations of these clubs that discriminate against non-whites are not written formally in the clubs' articles, but exclusion occurs via the process of nomination – an inequitable practice Franco-Mauritians do not deny. That these clubs have not been pressed to open up stems largely from the fact that leisure activities such as yachting and hunting are much more strongly associated with the Franco-Mauritian community than with the population at large. For example, hunting has traditionally been a Franco-Mauritian affair. As youngsters, many Franco-Mauritian men joined their fathers hunting and today they take their own children. Exclusivity is also upheld by the expense of hunting and the fact that hunting cannot be practised all over the island. Franco-Mauritian landed property provides an oppor-

tunity and advantage as many sugar estates, for example, have hunting reserves⁴. The restricted character of these activities is maintained because there is little external pressure to open them up. Other Mauritians are not particularly interested because they have never taken part in certain leisure activities favoured by the Franco-Mauritian community. Moreover, in ethnically pluralistic Mauritius other communities also have their own clubs. Challenges to exclusivity appear to come more from changing geographical patterns.

In an interview with this paper's first author (27 June 2006), the then-President of the Dodo Club, a sports club located on the island's high plateau, argued, 'many of the members used to live [on the high plateau], but when the *campements* started to have electricity [in the 1980s] many moved to the seaside'. Franco-Mauritians who relocated cancelled their membership and did not introduce their children to the club because they considered it to be too far away. This prompted discussions about opening club membership to non-Franco-Mauritians, with some attention being given to the question of how to assess someone's eligibility when it is not possible to rely on their Franco-Mauritian identity. According to the President, 'we will decide whether someone is good in terms of behaviour. We want the Dodo to remain a socially decent club and many of the [non-Franco-Mauritian] rich in Mauritius aren't specially decent' (interview with first author, 27 June 2006). The 'opening up', then, appears rather equivocal, driven not so much by the desire to welcome non-Franco-Mauritian members but by the need to ensure the club's continued existence. While part of the ambivalence stems from an unwillingness to change, to understand the Franco-Mauritian elite's changing geographies we have to realise that there is also genuine anxiety about becoming a minority in their own club, as has occurred in other clubs – and in schools.

Education

Franco-Mauritians' desires for exclusivity are also reflected in the establishment of private French-curriculum schools. Franco-Mauritians have now shifted almost completely to private French education, instead of the state system's English curriculum. Initially, Franco-Mauritians, together with the children of British colonial officers and a small number of *gens de couleur*, were typically the only students enrolled in the island's best schools (Allen 1999, 79–80). With the emancipation of the labouring classes in the early twentieth century coupled with the shift to 'free' primary education and away from private and fee-paying secondary education in the years following the Second World War (Johnson 2006, 689) Western education gradually gained prestige and popularity among Mauritians more generally. This was a challenge to the Franco-Mauritian position, whose scholastic lead was threatened by other Mauritians taking

advantage of emerging educational opportunities. Franco-Mauritians faced up to this challenge directly: from the moment better quality schooling became accessible to their compatriots they sought means of safeguarding a high(er) standard of education for their children, much like elites elsewhere in the world (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]; Golden 2006). This saw parents founding private French curriculum schools, although at the onset many were sceptical about (gender) mixed classes according to one of the initiators (interview with first author, 2 May 2006). Eventually, however, most enrolled their children, leaving few Franco-Mauritians in the state educational system⁵. The consequent physical separation is compounded temporally by differences in academic calendars. Unlike state schools, private schools follow the European educational calendar. Thus, Franco-Mauritian students have their long holidays in the winter when most of their local contemporaries are at school. Together, these changes in educational circumstances indicate that for Franco-Mauritians, new forms of spatial and cultural separation are a consequence of challenges to their elite status.

In additional efforts to maintain a competitive edge, Franco-Mauritians have reshaped their educational activities beyond the island's shores. In colonial times, after completing secondary school, Franco-Mauritians typically learned their trade on the work floor. But this trend has been transformed in recent decades, with most now looking overseas for tertiary education opportunities – especially in Europe, South Africa and Australia. Apart from its pedagogic rewards, an overseas education offers an advantage. Local employers, in general, regard overseas education more highly than, for example, a degree from the University of Mauritius. Faced with the challenge of a better-educated local population, study experience abroad helps Franco-Mauritians preserve their stake in the island's richest economic networks.

Land ownership

To a large extent, Franco-Mauritians' successful continuation of economic privileges results from the fact that large parts of the island's agricultural lands remain in their hands⁶. This benefits the Franco-Mauritian community more generally. In the sugar industry, for example, Franco-Mauritians have always constituted the management and have enjoyed privileges such as a nice house on the estate's premises, servants, and cars with drivers paid for by the estates. A Franco-Mauritian sugar estate employee who had grown up on a plantation himself said, 'we are *milliardaires pauvres* [poor millionaires] because we do not possess much but live a life like a king' (interview with first author, 21 December 2005). Moreover, 'poorer' Franco-Mauritians are often supported financially by those who are richer so they do not, for example, have to take public transport or go to state

hospitals. Consequently the perception prevails of a wealthy community inhabiting places separate from most Mauritians.

The colonial origins of the sugarcane industry and concentrated land possessions remain central to the Franco-Mauritians' relatively successful maintenance of an elite position more than 40 years after independence⁷, but the community's wealth is no longer as strongly linked to sugarcane as it once was. For example, Franco-Mauritians are now selling land used previously for sugar production under the Integrated Resort Schemes (IRS), which include luxury villas constructed to allow foreign nationals to reside in Mauritius by investing a minimum of US\$500,000 in local property (Kothari and Wilkinson 2011, 11)⁸. Land thus still contributes both directly and indirectly to the wealth of the Franco-Mauritian community, even though the private sector has gradually become more mixed, with upwardly mobile Mauritians becoming more prominent in the island's economic affairs.

Because of its association with colonial injustices, land understandably remains a prominent issue. According to one Mauritian journalist 'the unequal distribution of land is at the centre of the problem; without a change nothing will happen' (interview with first author, 23 March 2006). Paradoxically, however, because political actions geared at offsetting this inequality give land a prominent place in negotiations with the government, the partial and gradual (re)distribution of land helps Franco-Mauritians to prolong their elite position – even though (re)distribution demands a gradual decline of land ownership.

Traditionally sugar has been the 'country's cash cow' (Handley 2008, 108–9), which has even led to a pattern of applying economic power in the form of financial contributions and donations paid by Franco-Mauritian businesses to government-related projects. For example, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), which promotes (research on) Indo-Mauritian culture and was founded by the Mauritian government in collaboration with the Indian government in 1970, is situated on a plot of land donated to the government by a large Franco-Mauritian business group. Here, land helped to smooth relations with the government. The distribution of land also helped to suppress tensions between the Franco-Mauritian sugar plantations and the government when the sugar industry plunged into a recession in 2005. Reform – which led to tense negotiations with the government – was needed to alter the dire state of the sugar industry. In these negotiations the government demanded land in compensation for laid-off sugar workers. Franco-Mauritians objected, but in the end they had to give in to political pressure: the industry gave 2000 *arpents* (one *arpent*, an old French unit for measuring land, is about half a hectare) of land for social programs and opened up 35% of the shareholding of the sugar mills⁹. In essence, Franco-Mauritian economic power could not compete with the mobilisation of political power by the government.

Ceding land may have helped to appease the government in this instance, but the episode illustrates that Franco-Mauritian maintenance of their elite position, and especially their land ownership, remains contested. Hence, Franco-Mauritian anxiety about their position lingers. Indeed, in the course of this study many Franco-Mauritians made it clear they wished to maintain a low-profile, expressing apprehension that their statements might somehow end up in local newspapers. Franco-Mauritian fears are also reflected in their investment in Paris real estate. One Franco-Mauritian residing in Paris said, 'with the actual situation in Mauritius the number [of investments in real estate] will certainly increase: the Hindus want to eliminate the Franco-Mauritians and, thus, when the situation deteriorates like [with the whites] in Zimbabwe the Franco-Mauritians have some reserves' (interview with first author, 9 October 2006). His comment about the 'elimination of Franco-Mauritians' is perhaps far-fetched, yet it shows that Franco-Mauritians seek security in the face of conditions that might be regarded as deteriorating, a concern felt by elites elsewhere. White Jamaicans, for example, still remember the government's threat to act against their interests during the late 1970s: '[i]t is true that even in today's cooler political climate most upper-class whites still hedge their bets by securing passports and U.S. green cards and by maintaining homes and businesses abroad' (Douglass 1992, 14). In the Franco-Mauritian case, such actions are options of last resort, with most preferring to remain in their secluded Mauritian enclaves. So it was that they were deeply apprehensive when, in 2006, increases in leasehold rents for *campements* jeopardised maintenance of the jewel in their crown of spatial exclusivity.

Campements – the 'last' enclave

The historical geography of *campements* makes them a feature primarily identified with the Franco-Mauritian community, even though there are some individuals from other groups who own them. Their physical character compounds the sense of exclusivity: standing behind the *campements* are big stone walls that make it impossible for most other Mauritians to peek into the Franco-Mauritians' private lives¹⁰, while before them there is nothing but the island's renowned beaches and the Indian Ocean beyond. Many Franco-Mauritians consider these places as one of their last resorts, where there is a relaxed atmosphere and they can retreat from hectic everyday life. Children can swim and enjoy other aquatic activities while adults spend time relaxing, fishing and sunbathing. Put briefly, life is rather carefree here because of the sea, the sun and the beaches and the pampering by nannies and servants who look after the children and take care of a number of daily chores. '[At our home] we do the formal entertainment, dinners with a set table. At the seaside it's more informal with barbecues, bare feet. It is a bit

like a holiday atmosphere, every weekend,' said one Franco-Mauritian (interview with first author, 1 March 2006). Life here revolves around other Franco-Mauritians who know the community's informal codes, and with whom the occupants feel at ease. Exclusive places like a *campement*, it seems, allow elites to forget about 'anxieties' of social change and everyday realities, yet at the same time the exclusivity is often the cause of anxiety. Like land more broadly, a paradox of these enclaves is that while they contribute to successful maintenance of Franco-Mauritians' elite position they also heighten pressure on that position.

In contrast to many other jurisdictions around the world, Mauritius does not have private beaches and, with few exceptions, Franco-Mauritians do not own the land on which their *campements* are set. Instead, they lease the property from the government. This dates back to colonial times, when the strip of land bordering the ocean, the *pas géométriques*, was used for island patrols. The British colonial government did not sell this land after it became irrelevant for military patrols but was eager to lease it to Franco-Mauritians. Over the past 50 years, the numbers of tourists and Mauritians interested in seaside activities have increased but this demand has encountered limited access to the coastline. Public beaches amount to only 12% of the Mauritian shoreline; hotels count for 15.8%; and the *campements* for 16%. The remaining shoreline consists of cliffs, pastures and roads¹¹. This division of the coast fuels disapproving perceptions that the small group of white Franco-Mauritians have access to more prime beaches than the almost 1.3 million other Mauritians. This presents a challenge to Franco-Mauritian privileges, particularly given the terms of the leases for the land on which the *campements* are located. In the 1960s most leases were set with a three times 20-year extension clause, meaning that nearly all will expire around 2020. This has been known from the outset, yet in this final term, tenure has become a major point of insecurity. In 2006, when the government proposed new terms for the leasehold, arguing that rents had not increased in step with the value of the beachfront land, Franco-Mauritians were forced to rethink their associations with *campements*, reinforcing anxiety about their future on the island. This exemplified their diminished influence: Franco-Mauritians had little influence on the political process shaping the government proposal. Leaseholders could opt to either pay a substantial rental increase or keep their rent at current levels. The first of these two alternatives would entitle leaseholders to an extension of 60 years. Those who chose the second option, however, could not expect a renewal when their lease expires around 2020.

Franco-Mauritians were not eager to give up their *campement* privileges, and members of the Franco-Mauritian community were enraged when the government presented its plans for the leases, since these threatened to jeopardise the continuation of one of

their 'last' exclusive enclaves. One Franco-Mauritian woman said, 'it is a racial problem, because they [the "Hindu" government] want to take back the land' (interview with first author, 6 July 2006). The episode is illustrative of how inter-group dynamics work in such a situation. Many Franco-Mauritians argued that they were being exploited. In their view, nobody had wanted the coastal zones before they settled and developed them. They felt that because beachfront areas had become popular the government wanted to cash in on the land's value. Moreover, with tensions between the government and Franco-Mauritians over sugar industry reform occurring more or less simultaneously with the lease reform, Franco-Mauritians shared the view that the government proposal was racially motivated, targeting them as whites¹². A few did support the government's lease proposal, arguing that under the new terms their property would be safeguarded for future generations and that they would no longer have to live with uncertainty around the expiry of their lease *circa* 2020. However, this group constituted only a minority and the matter was a sensitive subject within the Franco-Mauritian community. For example, one wealthy resident who was willing to accept the new conditions said, 'a number of friends, who can easily afford the increase, are of a different opinion to me. But we just do not discuss the matter' (interview with first author, 10 October 2007).

Initially, Franco-Mauritians' resistance to the government's plans proved effective. The Association of Campement Owners and Users (ACOU) brought the matter before the Mauritian Supreme Court, which ruled for a renegotiation of the conditions. However, when the case was taken to court a second time the ACOU lost. *Campement* owners had either to accept the new conditions for the lease or return their lands to the state when the original lease expired. According to Mauritian newspaper *Le Mauricien* (23 May 2008), three-quarters of the leases were renewed while the remaining owners had not decided what to do. Taking this figure to be more or less accurate, it is evident that the wealth of many Franco-Mauritians will allow them to continue their cherished exclusive life at the seaside. This also contributes to maintenance of their social and cultural distinction, while at the same time leaving space for future doubts and disputes about Franco-Mauritians' elite position and exclusive geographies. As the President of the Dodo Club said, 'many are afraid that [the new law on the *campements*] may change again, because there is no continuity in government decisions' (interview with first author, 27 June 2006).

Conclusion

Elites cannot be certain that their places and positions of privilege will remain unchallenged. Not only does the Franco-Mauritian case illustrate this point but it informs our understanding of what may happen when

members of an elite face pressure on those places and positions they occupy. Franco-Mauritians might be tied through land, in its glorious fixity, more closely to their locale than elites elsewhere. Yet, as Pow (2011, 385–386) and Hay and Muller (2012, 79) rightly argue, the world's super-rich and transnational elites do not operate in a frictionless world in which they can move and settle down as they please; instead, elites are often tied emotionally and historically to specific settings in relationships that constrain and enable the emerging architecture of social and spatial relationships. All of these connections are evident in this case of the Franco-Mauritian elite. From their exclusive residential areas to their leisure spaces, this group's pursuit of continued paramount status in response to anxieties about real and imagined threats to that status has shaped and reshaped physical expressions of place as well as the social and physical separation between themselves and others.

In the case of Franco-Mauritians, we have to be cognisant of the relationships between the bases of their power and their relative and absolute positions as an elite. While they still maintain significant economic power, Franco-Mauritians' say in the island's affairs has decreased substantially since the late 1960s. Wealth continues to afford them a level of (indirect) influence but it does not counterbalance intensified levels of anxiety Franco-Mauritians feel about declining status and diminished levels of control. In our understanding of elite geographies, then, it is important to realise that perceptions of decline amongst an elite – as much as its 'reality' – may reinforce anxiety and the desire to maintain control of 'their' spaces. In most cases, an elite's shaping of space may be an outgrowth of that group's social, economic or political dominance and desire to inhabit exclusive enclaves. But, as the Franco-Mauritian case illustrates clearly, when faced with the prospect of decline, apprehension also shapes elite geographies.

Two aspects are critical to an enhanced understanding of how change and anxiety (re)shape elite geographies. First, segregation is shaped through systems of exclusion, which as the Franco-Mauritian case illustrates are not only about residential spaces but also about spaces of education and leisure, for example. While the form of exclusion may differ from one elite to another, an inherent characteristic is that it reinforces a sense of cultural homogeneity. This leads to a cycle in which desires to maintain social and cultural homogeneity empower spatial exclusivity, and this subsequently reinforces the perpetuation of homogeneous environments. Second, and somewhat paradoxically, exclusive, elite spaces themselves may be simultaneously the root of anxiety and a source of strength in the (re)shaping of elite geographies. As the *campement* issue highlights, there may be anxieties over longevity of jurisdiction while at the same time control over space provides a foundation from which to defend and/or reshape exclusivity. Franco-Mauritians

may have lost control of many places and spaces they viewed as 'theirs', but ongoing wealth and the capacity to partially redistribute land has allowed them to maintain key exclusive enclaves for over 40 years in the country's post-colonial era – with *campements* being a prominent example. Notwithstanding the manifest fact that the Franco-Mauritian case has its unique dimensions, elites more generally seek to protect and reshape their exclusive enclaves against encroachments. Success in those endeavours may sustain social and spatial symbols of elite distinction, but they simultaneously yield the potential for renewed pressure on them.

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Notes

- 1 The black population the Franco-Mauritians wanted to distinguish themselves from was a mixed group of slaves and free(d) persons originating from numerous locations in, predominantly, Africa and India.
- 2 Pointing to the remarkable life story of Marie Rozette – a freedwoman of Indian origin – who accumulated wealth, land and slaves in Mauritius in the late 1700s, during the French period, Allen (2011) observes this dominance was not comprehensive – equally there are examples during the British period of non-whites owning large tracts of land and slaves.
- 3 This seems to be something of an overstatement. The Club's website (www.mgc.intnet.mu/index.htm, accessed 11 June 2013) details a process for the scrutiny for all prospective members.
- 4 A number of reserves are also found on land leased from the government, yet contrary to the *campements* sites, these tend not to be located on highly valued (seaside) land.
- 5 Even though the French curriculum schools have students of all ethnic, though wealthy, backgrounds, they are associated with the Franco-Mauritian community, not least because all the schools were initiated by Franco-Mauritians, often with the support of the sugar industry.
- 6 How much of the island's land they actually possess is difficult to establish. A general estimation suggests that Franco-Mauritians own approximately 36% of the total available land, predominantly agricultural land (*L'Express Dimanche* 13 May 2007; *L'Express* 31 May 2007). Only about 10% of the island's land is state owned (*L'Express* 31 May 2007), while another portion of the total land is made up of small plots of residential land (*L'Express Dimanche* 13 May 2007).
- 7 Economic prosperity from the mid-1980s onwards, which was the result of the diversification of the economy, away from an economy solely relying on the mono-crop sugar, has had a positive impact on the population in general, and not only on the (Franco-Mauritian) elite. As a consequence Mauritius is nowadays generally understood to be a middle-income country.
- 8 How the associated influx of wealthy foreigners, such as (white) South Africans, will effect Franco-Mauritian spatial exclusivity is a question that warrants future examination.
- 9 *L'Express*, 6 December 2007.
- 10 Equally, Franco-Mauritian houses elsewhere on the island tend to be shielded from the eye by, for example, big hedges. This mirrors the privacy practices of peers elsewhere in the world (Wijs-Mulkens 1999, 195, 200).
- 11 *Le Mauricien*, 24 May 2007.
- 12 This was part of a wider feeling of being scapegoated, since the government had been elected in a campaign dominated by anti-white rhetoric.

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