



## Foreword

Yu-Sion Live

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## *Foreword*

This issue of KABARO is almost entirely devoted to the question of interethnic and intercultural relations in Mauritius. It contains articles from various disciplinary fields (history, literature, sociology, anthropology, economics). At the end of the issue, there are three articles on Madagascar to complement the theme, addressing the question of interculturality in the educational sector.

Mauritian society is complex, due to its ethnic, cultural, political and religious plurality. The island was peopled by successive waves of Europeans, Malagasy, Africans, Indians, Chinese and others, who were either settlers, slaves, indentured workers or free migrants. Over a period of several decades, Mauritius has embarked upon a continuous process of identity construction.

In his contribution, Jocelyn Chan Low reveals the defining moments in the country's history, when individuals formed into ethnic groups in a process of political mobilization which coincided with periods of major socio-economic or political upheaval. From the colonial period onwards, the coexistence of several cultural systems on the island gave rise to different ethnic groups which today find themselves in competition with one another. According to Bruno Carpooran, this interethnicity is based upon a set of attitudes, behaviours accompanied by non-verbal expressions, taboos, mutual avoidance, tacit consensus and so on. Phenotypic, linguistic, cultural and religious differences, as well as socio-political or institutional issues, are all contributory factors in social differentiation and identity attribution between the various groups.

Mayila Paroomal's article studies the merger of three daily newspapers, each with a different ethnic affiliation. During World War Two, *Le Cernéen* (Franco-Mauritian), *Le Mauricien* (coloured public) and *Advance* (Indo-Mauritian) joined forces in order to survive, as the war had led to a severe shortage of paper. The cohabitation led to a real breaking down of barriers in the ethnic press, which had hitherto relied mainly upon editors or managing directors from the elite classes. The three daily papers came to a convergence as regarded their points of view, on the proviso that each maintained its political independence and the right to express opinion in "exceptional pieces."

Satish Kumar Mahadeo raises the question of linguistic pluralism in Mauritius. According to the author, multilingualism is rarely a source of conflict; on the contrary, it can be a "source of resources" and is by no means an obstacle to national unity. Knowledge of more than one language is an asset in relations amongst different ethnic groups. Historical factors behind the rapprochement or distance between the Hindus of the North and the Tamils of Mauritius are analysed by Sadasivam J. Reddi. In the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, relations between the two groups were harmonious, because they both belonged to the workers' class. However, social mobility and the emergence of a Tamil elite during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led to confrontational relations with the Hindus. The main cause of divisions between the two groups was the political rivalry within the political parties.

Studying the question from a literary point of view, Bruno Cuniah analyses interethnic relations from the metaphorical perspective of *desire*. He attempts to isolate the artificial nature of literary discourse which, he argues, does not reflect the reality of everyday life, but which Mauritian writers exploit in order to *desire* fantastical liaisons, through themes such as the myth of black men and white women, as well as those of mulatto or Creole women. Shakuntala Boolell investigates what she calls "community complexes" within ethnic groups. According to her, an entire lexicon of discord exists, comprising stereotypes and prejudices handed down throughout the history of the settlement and population of Mauritius, which "symbolises a climate of distrust and hostility." External signs identify an individual's ethnicity, either so as to exclude others or to set oneself apart from the rest of the Mauritian "rainbow nation."

Finally, addressing the issue from an economic perspective, Esther Hanoomanjee tries to gain clearer insight into the socio-economic development of the different "communities" of Mauritius during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

To conclude this issue on the theme of interculturality, a first article by one of our Malagasy colleagues analyses the effects of the sacred socialization process known as *ziva*. According to Claude Engel, this is a form of cross-ethnic oath taking which brings together the kinship and the lineage of two contracting ancestors from different Malagasy ethnic groups. In a second article, Fulgence Rasolonjatovo studies the *Green Schools* set up in the early 1970's in the Betsileo region of Madagascar. The project underlying these schools consisted in adapting the content of teaching curricula to local peasant living conditions, so as to better answer the needs of the population. The author raises the question of the modern values generated by an "ageing product portfolio situation." In the final article, Bruno Allain Solofomiarana Rapanoel studies the use made of teaching languages. In the past, Madagascar experienced the intervention of two different foreign languages in the country's schools: English in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and French in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Today, educational authorities are beginning to question the aims of these different languages present (as well as the Malagasy language). Europeans see French and English as a means of allowing the country to open the door to modern civilisation, whereas the Malagasy people view them as a tool for establishing cultural hegemony in order to create a situation of political and economic dependence.

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