Learning with Peaceful, Heterogeneous Communities: Lessons on Sustaining Peace in Mauritius

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Abstract

Our scientific understanding of peaceful societies – and of the conditions and processes conducive to sustaining peace in multicultural societies in general – is fragmented at best. This paper addresses this gap, presenting a case study of a multicultural society often hailed for its high levels of peacefulness–Mauritius. Through a systematic review of the literature on Mauritius and qualitative interviews and focus groups with a wide range of Mauritian stakeholder groups, the study focused on gleaning insights from the lived experiences of a broad swath of Mauritian society around what it takes to maintain peace in a multicultural context. The study is one component of a comprehensive, multi-method project on sustaining peace, which combines theory development, empirical validation, complexity visualization and mathematical modeling with grounded insights of citizens living in peace in resilient communities and societies around the globe. Findings from this study provide support for the necessity of employing a complexity lens in understanding peace, and offers a nuanced understanding some of the contradictions evident in how everyday peace is often maintained in these societies.

Author Bio(s)

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How is it that some multicultural societies manage to sustain peace? This is a question that has perplexed societies across history, and which the international community has grown particularly interested in as it attempts to steer the United Nations away from crisis management and conflict mitigation toward sustaining peace (United Nations, 2015, 2018). This shift reflects broader changes in understandings of what it means to "sustain peace," moving from a focus on negative peace, or the absence of conflict, violence, and war (Diehl, 2019), to a more holistic understanding which includes positive peace, or the removal of structural violence and cultural violence to include the integration of human society (Galtung 1969, 1975, 1990), and the building of cooperative relations (Wagner, 1988). We define sustainable peace as a stable state where the probability of using destructive conflict and violence to solve problems is so low that it does not enter any group's strategy, while the probability of using cooperation and dialogue to promote social justice and well-being is so high that it governs social organization and life (Boulding, 1978; Coleman et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, our scientific understanding of peaceful societies – and of the conditions and processes conducive to sustaining peace in multicultural societies in general – is fragmented at best. This is because a) societal peacefulness is rarely studied (Goertz et al., 2016), and when it is studied it is b) typically approached in terms of negative peace or the absence of direct violence (Gleditsch et al., 2014) and c) situated in narrow disciplinary assumptions that silo our understanding and constrain the generalizability of findings (Coleman et al., 2019). These limits to our understanding impede the design of effective policies and programs for sustaining peace (Coleman, 2018; Mahmoud & Makoond, 2017; United Nations, 2015).

In response to this gap, it is essential to learn from the lived experience of peaceful societies, operationalized for this project as those that have been internally and/or externally nonviolent and predominantly pacific for a period of 50 years or more, as evidence suggests such societies are less likely to relapse into violence (Goertz et al., 2016). We decided to conduct research with citizens of Mauritius, often hailed as a peaceful, multicultural nation (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019, 2020; Fund for Peace, 2020). In this paper, we explore the question, what does it take to sustain peace in a multicultural context? What are the primary drivers of

peace in Mauritius? What are the main challenges, and what sources of resilience do Mauritians draw upon in response to these challenges to promote peace?

This project is part of a broader initiative, the [Sustaining Peace Project](...) (SPP), which uses complexity science to synthesize knowledge across disciplines and sectors in an effort to learn what it takes to promote and sustain peace within and between communities (Coleman et al., 2020; Coleman et al., 2019; Coleman, 2016; Fry et al., 2021; Liebovitch et al., 2020; Liebovitch, et al., 2019).

Mauritius

Mauritius was selected as a case study for its comparatively high levels of peacefulness and multiculturalism. It is one of just four countries in the world free from both domestic and international conflict (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). It is ranked as highly peaceful on several peace and stability indices such as the Global Peace Index, the Positive Peace Index, and the Fragile States Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020, 2019; The Fund for Peace, 2020).

Mauritius has a full democracy and is also highly ranked for both economic development and political freedom (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019; Freedom House, 2020). The constitution has an independent judiciary, and respects freedoms of expression, religion, and assembly, and the press (Freedom House, 2020; Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2010). Mauritius ranks as one of the first countries globally for women's health in the Gender Gap Report, and has near gender parity in education, but scores more poorly in women's political empowerment and economic participation (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Mauritius is the most densely populated country in Africa (World Bank, 2021), situated in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. It was uninhabited until colonized successively by the Dutch, French, and British to grow sugar, for which it depended on slaves brought from East Africa and Madagascar (Allen, 1999; Vaughan, 2005). After the abolition of slavery, half-a million indentured laborers were brought over from India to work in the sugar cane fields (Allen, 1999; Vaughan, 2005). Following independence in 1968, Mauritius was torn by bitter divides and deadly ethnic riots (Carroll & Carroll, 2000). Leaders from different ethnic groups formed Le Grand Bond, or the national unity government, to help quell tensions (Brautigam & Diolle, 2009). This coalition set the foundation for a pluralistic society with constitutional provisions known as the Best Losers' System, ensuring minority representation in Parliament (Brautigam &

Diolle, 2009). Though Mauritius gained independence from the British, it is still involved in a territorial dispute with the United Kingdom over the Chagos Islands, where the British evicted residents to make way for a United States military base (Allen, 2014; Vine, 2011).

Mauritius is now a secular Republic, with a diverse population composed of the descendants of slaves (known locally as Creoles); French settlers; Indian and Chinese traders and indentured laborers, with more recent migrations of guest workers (many from China and Bangladesh) as well as more affluent newcomers, mostly from South Africa (Erikson, 2004; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkyuten, 2015; Ravi, 2016). In the 1990s, a particular term, "Malaise Creole," was coined to capture some Creoles' growing dissatisfaction with the Church's and the State's treatment of slave descendants, leading to social and economic fractures (Police, 2000). The February 1999 riots, following the death of popular Rastafarian singer Kaya while in police custody, rippled the modus vivendi around ethnic relations in Mauritius (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Lallmohamed-Aumeerally, 2017). The country has, however, remained relatively free from ethnic violence since then.

There have been consistent submissions by Creole associations for some form of compensation to be allocated to the Creole community, and in 2011, the Truth and Justice Commission took shape to investigate the legacies of slavery, indenture, and colonization (Lallmohamed-Aumeerally, 2017). Such a commission is unique in the world to address the lasting impacts of slavery and indenture (Boswell, 2014). It made several proposals to promote a less racist and elitist society, most of which have not been implemented to date (Croucher et al., 2017).

Methods

From November 2019 to March 2020, interviews and focus groups were conducted to learn from community stakeholders what they believe sustains peace in Mauritius. All participants were de-identified to protect their anonymity. Insights from this project have also been compiled for a publicly accessible report to share project findings locally.

Nine approximately two-hour focus groups were held with members of different communities within Mauritius (i.e., Chagos refugees; Chinese; Creole; Franco-Mauritian; Hindu and Muslim communities; LGBTQ groups; Mauritian women; and University of Mauritius

students.)[1] Each group consisted of between 7 and 11 participants, with a total of 74 people participating. Participants were recruited to represent different identity groups within Mauritius, and snowball sampling techniques were used. Focus groups were structured to ensure participants shared similar identities, which can promote comfort and candor, and can be particularly important when including minority or marginalized groups (Fallon & Brown, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2011). These groups were led by 14 facilitators who were members of the represented communities which can allow for more honest conversation (Fallon & Brown, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2011). After the focus groups, all facilitators participated in a workshop where findings were shared and debriefed. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, as well as translated into English.

Data was also collected from 15 interviews. Interviewees were selected based on experience working in relevant fields such as conflict resolution, journalism, and government (see Table 1). Several were chosen because they are well-known in Mauritius for contributions in their respective fields. Interviews were conducted in a place of the interviewees choosing; two were over Zoom, and one over email, as these three participants were unable to meet in person. As English is the official language of Mauritius, and all selected stakeholders spoke English, these interviews were conducted in English by American researchers. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewee	Position
Interviewee 1	Writer/ Public Figure
Interviewee 2	Journalist
Interviewee 3	Business Leader
Interviewee 4	Historian
Interviewee 5	Creole Activist

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[1] A portion of the Chagos islanders' session and the Creole community session overlapped due to unforeseen constraints which occurred as sessions were held.

Interviewee 6	Academic, Gender Activist
Interviewee 7	Trade Unionist
Interviewee 8	Leader of NGO
Interviewee 9	Mediator
Interviewee 10	Creole Activist
Interviewee 11	Foreign Resident Lawyer
Interviewee 12	Government Official
Interviewee 13	Environmental Activist
Interviewee 14	Disaster/Resilience Researcher
Interviewee 15	Youth Environmental Activist

Transcripts from interviews and focus groups were analyzed and coded using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017) which involves identifying ideas within the data, i.e., themes, rather than counting words or phrases, offering a way to capture complexities present within textual data (Guest et al., 2012). Coding was an iterative process where we reviewed the transcripts, classifying and sorting the data into four overarching categories: descriptions of peace; drivers of peace; challenges to peace; and sources of resilience. Salient patterns that emerged within these categories were then identified, proposed, discussed, and used to form codes. Coding is an interpretive, heuristic, and ultimately subjective process (Saldaña, 2021). Coding of this data was completed by the authors of this paper (one Muslim Mauritian woman; one bi-racial Chinese-White American woman; and one White American man) and our identities, perspectives, and familiarity with the context likely influenced this process. To enhance reliability, we independently coded some data, and met to review the degree of overlap, and resolve discrepancies. There was a high degree of agreement throughout the process of defining and identifying codes. Frequencies of each code were calculated using

NVivo 12, though these frequencies are not meant to suggest the relative importance of a given theme (Maxwell, 2010).

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

The nature of peace in Mauritius

When asked to describe peace in Mauritius, the responses were complex and often replete with contradictions. As one interviewee said, "Mauritius is highly complicated but peaceful" (Interviewee 11). Themes from our findings are presented here in order of their frequency of reference (see Table 2), with a percentage which refers to the percent of interviews and focus groups where the theme was mentioned (e.g., "Everyday peace (79%)" signals that it was mentioned when describing the nature of peace in Mauritius in 79% of interviews and focus groups).

An everyday peace (79%). Most participants described an everyday peace, a peace exemplified by friendly and positive interactions with neighbors, with shopkeepers, at the bus station, or at the hospital. One story showed how people quickly mobilize to look out for one another:

> I saw a woman had lost the key to her scooter in a hole in the pavement, and there was a man that was trying to help her. I was speaking with her about what I could do, perhaps go to the municipal county and ask the laborers to get it out. At the same time, on the right, there was a Chinese Mauritian, a shopkeeper there who had witnessed the scene. He went in the shop, and came back with a long thing with a hook at the end, and came back, and we all, even at my age, worked together to solve that. This is, I think, symbolic of all of the country. (Interviewee 8)

Participants described harmony and common kindness extended to both friends and strangers exemplified by good relations with neighbors where people help one another, share cakes during religious holidays, and attend each other's weddings.

A tentative peace (79%). While most participants agreed that there is peace in Mauritius, it was often qualified as "fragile" (Interviewees 2, 7, 8, 11, & 12; Creole, Chagos, and student focus groups), a "negative peace" (Interviewee 9), "a veneer of peace" (Interviewee 6), a "cold peace" (Interviewee 4), "a visible peace" (Interviewee 9), and even as "an oppressive

Table 2: Coding results, frequency analysis

Themes	Focus Groups- # of references	Interviews- # of references	Total- # of references
Descriptions of Peace	*95*	*45*	*140*
Everyday Peace	41	19	60
Tentative Peace	14	25	39
Negative Peace	8	3	11
Drivers of Peace	*136*	*135*	*271*
Socialization	49	26	75
Multiculturalism	35	36	71
Non-confrontational Values	41	26	67
Cross-Cutting Ties	30	17	47
Overarching Identity	23	10	33
Safety and Security	13	17	30
Peace Mindset	23	4	27
Equity	9	15	24
Basic Human Needs	5	17	22
Prevention Orientation	6	11	17
Challenges to Peace	*244*	*196*	*440*
Hunkering Down	72	48	120
Inequality	45	59	104
Politics	51	32	83
Precarity	28	50	78
Cleavages	51	19	70
Inaction	40	20	60
Lack of Awareness	25	25	50
Legacy of Colonialism	16	22	38

Scarcity	8	19	27
Conflict Mindset	21	4	25
Sources of Resilience	*104*	*39*	*143*
Active Civil Society	9	24	33
Awareness or Education	15	12	27
Keepers of the Peace	18	6	24
Conflict Resolution Strategies	21	2	23
Empathetic Mindset	16	0	16

peace" (Interviewees 5 & 10). Some participants described how Mauritius is missing aspects of justice and equity, a subjective sense of fair distribution of resources. The majority of participants also expressed concerns over its fragility, and the need to more openly address underlying tensions: "Indeed we live peacefully, we live well, we can go out of our house but— you're in an inferno, in quicksand […] We're still on tenterhooks" (Franco-Mauritian focus group participant).

Many interviewees noted inequality and covert racism, particularly towards the Creole population, as threats to peace:

> Deep down underneath we still have challenges because of this sort of ethnical problem, racism, what you call here, communalism, and following this, a lot of exclusion, discrimination, and of course, poverty and the social ends associated with it. (Interviewee 9).

Other Mauritians discussed the structural ethnic and religious divides that played out in the macro-political; public and private sectors; and in policy making. Hindus run the public sector, while Franco-Mauritians, Chinese-Mauritians, and educated, wealthy, foreign workers,[2] run the private sector (Eisenlohr, 2004; Salverda, 2016). Some described the "Creolization" of Mauritius as promising – Creole is the shared language of the nation and the Creole people are the group most open to inter-marriage and the integration of outside ethnicities and religions into their fold.

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[2] Mauritius offers occupation permits to those who have high incomes or invest significantly in the country leading to an influx of foreign residents from South Africa and France. This group is subject to different regulations than guest workers without these financial means.

On the other hand, Hindus, Muslims, wealthy foreign workers, and Franco-Mauritians, expressed an exclusionary mentality when it came to inter-marriage and deeper social integration. Additionally, LGBTQ individuals described severe consequences for coming out. This tentative peace suggests that elements of structural violence continue in Mauritius.

A negative peace (20%). Around one fifth of focus groups and interviews mentioned a negative peace, or absence of destructive conflict and violence. The last large swell of ethnic tension during the 1999 Kaya riots lasted only four days, and some suggest it was because of the peaceful orientation of the society that it subsided so soon. Focus groups and interviewees often seemed to take a lack of outright violence as a given.

Although many Mauritians take pride in the fact that they are seen as peaceful, and strive to sustain this peace and address injustice, many also seem oriented toward avoiding past actions which led to intergroup violence in 1968 and unrest in 1999 (Carroll & Carroll, 2000). Participants demonstrated high awareness of underlying challenges and fissures, and a pervasive concern that Mauritius could slip into a period of hostility and violence, though this concern also operated as motivation to maintain peace.

Primary drivers of peace in Mauritius

Several individual, community, and societal-level peace factors were identified through interviews and focus groups:

Socialization (75%). The importance of transmitting knowledge, values, and stories which promote peacefulness was highlighted. Learning from elders has long served as a way of transmitting traditional forms of knowledge related to peace, justice, and resistance to oppression in many cultures (Lafleur, 2013; Simpson, 2004). In Mauritius, this transmission was often referred to by participants as passing along wisdom and values across generations, for example, through "oral tradition and sharing stories with children" (Chinese focus group participant). Other forms of socialization intended to inculcate open-mindedness and combat prejudice were also described, such as through education, the media, the internet, and museums. Often people expressed hopes for steps toward sharing knowledge around historical and present-day harms as key towards achieving a more just and equitable future. As a mediator explained:

> An example is about a slavery museum […] No, it will not change the life of a lot
> of people immediately, but it's part of this history and this reconciliation with our

history. It's about acknowledging what happened, you know, so that it helps in education and training. (Interviewee 9).

Multiculturalism (83%). Many described how Mauritians are instilled with values of tolerance, respect for difference, and multiculturalism. One study found that when asked "what makes a person Mauritian," a third of respondents referenced the idea of "respect for other religious and cultural groups, tolerance for all communities, [and] unity in diversity" (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkyuten, 2015). Our data revealed a deep pride in the diversity of the country, and a set of norms and policies that help support it. Participants described how growing up in a diverse society develops values and skills needed to live together, and how respect for others is enforced through education and law. One participant observed:

> In our daily lives, there are many ways in which we can maintain peace with other religions. For instance, in the workplace where there are colleagues from different religious communities, we tolerate them as long as they do not oppose or attack our beliefs… In primary school, children are taught about different religions, different religious festivities, sharing, commonalities and *le vivre ensemble* [living together]. (Muslim focus group participant)

Non-confrontational values (58%). Participants pointed to strong norms privileging peace and interpersonal harmony over discussing controversial issues. As a member of the Hindu focus group noted, "Conflicts in Mauritius are swept under the carpet." A prominent journalist noted how these norms are often institutionalized with for example, certain newspapers having policies expressly prohibiting printing anything which may incite ethnic or religious divides. This aligns with research which suggests peaceful societies tend to evidence strong social norms and taboos which prohibit the use of violence in many forms (Bonta, 2013; Fry, 2006), and encourage avoidance, generally favoring responses to conflict that involve self-control or restraint (Fry, 2004). Some participants discussed how religion also inspires these non-violent values.

Cross-cutting ties (67%). Cross-cutting ties (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Varshney, 2002) are connections individuals have to members of different identity groups that pull one's loyalties or allegiances in more than one direction. These ties help form networks of social support that connect different communities and are important for respect and solidarity across groups (Putnam, 2000; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Participants described how integrated

workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods allow people to build bonds that bridge differences. One member of the Creole focus group said, "I live close to my neighbor, he is a Tamil. We live well together. One day he referred to me like this, 'She is not my neighbor, but a relative!' I was happy to hear him say that." These connections often lead to friendships and intermarriage even though it is still not completely accepted by all Mauritians. Several researchers have described how although workspaces and public areas are integrated and ethnically mixed, the private lives of Mauritians tend to be ethnically segregated (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Eriksen, 1988, 1998; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkyuten, 2015).

Overarching identity (67%). Despite the diversity in Mauritius, participants pointed out that a strong overarching identity as Mauritians also contributes to peace. One historian (Interviewee 4) asserted, "In the context of peace, this is very important. This recognition of whatever may be our ethnic origin, or color of skin, we are all Mauritians." Research suggests that when ethnic group identities are complemented by a meaningful superordinate identity, intergroup threat decreases, positive outgroup attitudes increase, and intergroup forgiveness is more likely (Cehajic et al., 2008; Gaertner et al., 2000; Noor & Brown, 2006). A common identity was noted to be particularly strong when Mauritians were faced with outsiders (i.e., when a Mauritian is abroad), and during certain key events (e.g., Indian Ocean Games, the Pope's visit). Some interviewees and members of focus groups discussed the Creole Mauritian language as a way to bridge divides and build common identity.

Safety and security (50%) The idea of safety and security was often taken by participants as a given, with one student from the University of Mauritius saying, "We don't fear going out onto the street. We don't need to fear an attack from anybody or that someone will kidnap us." While this may be the reality for many, it is not necessarily true for all groups. LGBTQ focus group participants in particular noted that often it is not safe to openly express aspects of their identity in public spaces.

Several people also observed how the absence of guns and an army, as well as the country's relatively strong rule of law, contribute to increasing the probability of peace. As one participant explained,

> Mauritius, until proven to the contrary, neither manufactures bombs nor does it
> import them. Countries that constantly face wars have bombs and are tempted to

use them. Peace in Mauritius can be accounted for by the absence of weapons.

(Creole focus group participant)

Peace mindset (50%) While many drivers of peace which arose from the data were more structural, individual qualities such as respect, trust, faith, compassion, and benevolence, were also viewed as key to peace. As a member of the Creole focus group reflected, "I think that you need first to have inner peace. Then you can make peace with others." This reflects research suggesting individual factors such as trust (Ferrin et al., 2008), and hope (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015) can promote positive intergroup relationships and peace.

Equity (58%). Equality, equity, representation, and power balanced across groups were also cited as important factors for peace. These were often mentioned as goals, however, rather than reality. Some participants praised specific policies and recommendations intended to advance equity and representation such as the UN Affirmative Action report, and the Equal Opportunity Commission. Economic, social, political, or status inequalities along clearly defined group lines have been linked to increased intergroup animosity (Cederman et al., 2015; Stewart, 2000; 2016; Østby, 2008), highlighting the importance of equitable opportunity structures for building and maintaining peace.

Basic human needs (50%). Several interviewees noted the importance of Mauritius's strong welfare state, ensuring the majority of people have access to basic services such as healthcare, housing, and education. The universal and free health coverage in Mauritius has been particularly helpful in navigating the coronavirus crisis, allowing for minimal death and hospitalization (Blin, 2020). Research from across the globe suggests that satisfaction of basic needs such as shelter and food, is strongly linked to wellbeing and the ability to thrive (Tay & Diener, 2011). Additionally, states which meet the basic needs of their citizens are more likely to avoid internal conflict: One analysis found an increase in social welfare spending decreased the probability of civil conflict onset (Taydas & Peksen, 2012).

Prevention orientation (46%). Participants also described how knowledge of past tensions and violence inspires a fear of future conflict, in turn promoting peace. While there is a wide body of research examining the negative implications of trauma and fear for future generations (Hobfoll, 2007; Widom, 1989), in Mauritius, our data suggests past traumas actually serve to drive peace. For participants familiar with past intergroup violence, the fragility of peace

was salient, serving as a motivation to avoid escalating any tensions. The experiences of those who lived through past conflict may contribute to "altruism born of suffering" or a "survivor mission," where victimization is translated into a deep commitment to preventing pain, and a belief in protecting others' welfare (Lifton, 2012; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008).

Challenges to peace in Mauritius

Challenges to peace loomed large in the focus groups and interviews (see Table 1 for coded themes). This emphasis is common in peace and conflict research, as when it is safe to speak out, people are more inclined to recall and speak about community problems than strengths (see Baumeister et al., 2001). Participants expressed their commitment to the preservation of a stable and durable peace, while also acknowledging the need to re-think and adjust existing processes in response to some festering issues stemming often from residual colonial structures.

Hunkering down (83%). The practice of hunkering down, locally referred to as communalism, is one example of the experience of the "violence of non-violence" (Creole focus group participant). The data illustrated how the primacy of in-group allegiances can undercut the elaboration of common civic objectives. A member of the Hindu focus group shared, "What we hypocritically hide in Mauritius is that we have communalism to a large extent. I will support my religion in order to sideline you." Some feared that promoting essentialist identities may nurture extremist leanings, as demonstrated by sporadic confrontations, for instance, when a group of Muslim radicals demonstrated against an LGBTQ parade in June 2018, leading to the cancellation of the march, following police intervention. As one participant mentioned:

> The question to be asked though is how the new generation will maintain peace
> and the cultural richness of the island considering that there is a rise in Islamic
> radicalization. Radicalization not only takes place in the Muslim community but
> also among Christians and Hindus. (Muslim focus group participant)

A narrow focus on ethnicity has also deflected attention from growing inequality and the need for a social justice agenda, which the bulk of participants consider as the foundation for effective peacebuilding.

Inequality (83%). While Human Development Index measures were all on the rise for Mauritius in 2019 (United Nations Development Programme, 2019), the increasing gap between the rich and the poor was identified as a growing form of structural inequality. One historian

noted: "There is an underlying unhappiness with the sort of concentration of wealth" (Interviewee 4). The discrepant development process has bred disparities in wealth, access to education, political representation, and opportunity among different groups, with members of the Creole group being more severely disadvantaged, according to a number of stakeholders:

> [With] the rapid evolution of the society, economy and so on … the Creole are marginalized while remaining excluded. They are being left behind more quickly because all they suffer is harsher than the others. (Interviewee 4)

According to a foreign-resident lawyer, the status quo is in the interest of some people:

> In fact, about 10 years ago, there was a proposition for the Mauritian stock market to merge with the JSE [Johannesburg Stock Exchange] in South Africa. And from my point of view, it would have been fantastic, money flowing and business, and the locals, the Franco-Whites, didn't want that. They have got things their own way at the moment, sitting at the top of empires, and they don't want that to be disturbed. (Interviewee 11)

Politics (83%). Mauritius, like some other post-colonial societies, has adopted a political system known as consociationalism to minimize conflicts between political elites from the different ethnic groups and ensure majority-minority balance (Lijphart, 1977; Means, 1996). Participants regretted that the cultivation of ethnic or religious distinctiveness has been heightened by political maneuvering especially at election time, expressing the need for a crackdown on corrupt practices and cronyism in local political culture. The call for electoral reform to tackle gerrymandering by some Creole focus group participants is a plea for greater inclusion in the political process and institutions:

> My request is more political. I demand electoral reform. If you analyze elections, you observe that Creole vote, but they are not represented. I live in Moka, I voted but my vote did not count for much. I deem it is important to have an electoral reform, after which the assembly will truly represent all communities. (Interviewee 10)

This demand locates political representation as an issue which has not been adequately addressed within peacebuilding efforts.

Precarity (88%). Interviewees highlighted the ways in which recurrent extreme climatic conditions exacerbate the economic precarity of those who already live in densely populated areas and who rely on benefits to survive. Some regions on the island have suffered recurrent

flooding because of a defective rain evacuation system. Scuffles have taken place as inhabitants queued for hours at police stations to collect benefits. They have also denounced local MPs who pay attention to their grievances during election time and thereafter ignore their plights. As one environmental activist noted:

> It's become an annual exercise in January of, you will see in […] the townships,
> on the outskirts of port base, get flooded and the poor people will go down to the
> police stations and then you have mini riots. (Interviewee 13)

The whole population is at risk in a small island-state with limited resources and which faces precarious climatic conditions (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, 2017). According to a Creole activist (Interviewee 10), "'[The] real threat is environmental, is climate change, and there is a real unconsciousness of the population about the environment. This is the main challenge of our society." While climate change was characterized in our data as a challenge which endangers underprivileged communities more directly, participants also noted how ecological insecurity concerns all communities. The recent oil spill off the coast highlights how there is collective mobilization around the environment. A wide cross-section of civil society came together to take the lead in the clean-up initiative, culminating in a protest march on August 28, 2020 calling upon the government to take decisive action (BBC News, 2021). Additionally, stakeholders predicted that the unsustainability of high levels of consumption and the prospect of an economic downturn (which has eventuated with COVID-19), could result in increasing precarity.

Cleavages (83%). Numerous participants suggested that the implementation of a multicultural model grounded in the homogenization of ethnic communities mutes social discrepancies within these groups as well as intersectional inequality. Gender inequality is an area of concern, with women under-represented in decision-making positions (United Nations Development Programme, 2019), and cases of domestic violence (Neeliah & Peedoly, 2013). Scholars point to ways in which tolerance often functions as a substitute for equality and parity, concealing extant power hierarchies (Verkuyten et al., 2019). Focus group members pointed out that the manicured image of Mauritius as a "rainbow" nation, defined in terms of distinct ethno-cultural groups, deters people from voicing the deepening cleavages between as well as within communities, as exemplified by this statement by a member of the Hindu group:

> I think that in today's society, conflicts are mostly situated within the group. If we
> have to stand together, fight against another group, you will see everyone

together. It's within the group that we have more conflicts. When a group is

against other groups, there is solidarity.

Unequal land distribution, particularly on an island subjected to climatic hazards, was cited by an environmental activist as another widening cleavage:

I'm not saying that the rest of the 80% of land is controlled by the Franco

Mauritians, but a sizable portion of the remaining private land is controlled by a

handful of families[...] So land is going to be, I think, another burning issue

coming up.

The smooth resolution of colonial rule preserved the status quo around land ownership in Mauritius (Salverda, 2016). It has been suggested that the setting up of "inclusive and just cultural, economic, and political structures, processes, and practices can address many of these past injustices" (Figueiredo et al., 2017, p. 696–697).

Inaction (67%). Mauritian multicultural ethos was described in terms of inaction or passivity, and a politics of compromise. Participants discussed expectations to embrace non-confrontational attitudes and avoid potential conflict. In the words of a journalist interviewed:

If it disturbs us, we don't talk about it. We just wait until people forget about it.

You won't see people even arguing about things […] They would just listen, if

they don't agree with it, then keep quiet. […] It's not a cultural trait to challenge

[…] And this system of not talking about things has worked, so people are not

ready to challenge it. It does work. We have peace. So let's get on, or we can talk

about, for example, about communities living separately from each other, but we

don't talk about it. (Interviewee 2)

However, Muslim and Chagossian minorities shared their experiences of having been stigmatized, thus uncovering the "hidden transcript" (Mac Ginty, 2014) of intergroup bias. Interlocutors were furthermore concerned that people had been anonymously channeling their frustrations on social media, thereby endangering multicultural harmony. The unchecked anger and incivility on social media were partly attributed to the fact that there are no alternative public platforms where frank discussions of discrimination and prejudices can be aired.

Lack of awareness (71%). An egalitarian education system which would not only provide instruction but also foster global critical awareness and engagement, was seen as lacking, but vital for a more dynamic and viably peaceful society. A trade union leader

(Interviewee 7) remarked, "You know, the worst is that people are not much educated in Mauritius. They know how to read and write. Definitely, they can read and write, but to be educated is something else." A prominent mediator also noted that a breakdown in communication between different actors undermines the formulation of a coherent and cohesive agenda addressing social injustices:

> I think the problem is […] the lack of continuous dialogue between state, public, and private sectors. Because around economic development, for example, there are dialogues and meetings and mechanisms, but over what we call social issues […], maybe they lack something. (Interviewee 9)

Legacy of colonialism (58%). While colonialism has been identified as a form of direct violence (Galtung, 1990), the pervasive cultural and structural violence attached to its legacy in postcolonial nations has not received significant attention (Byrne et al., 2018). The marginalization of the Creole population appears to have multiple intersecting dimensions, namely the differential power structure inherited from colonialism; asymmetrical access to resources and employment; uneven memorializing processes; and unequal status within Mauritian society (Lallmahomed-Aumeerally, 2017). The incumbent government is in the process of implementing a land tribunal and a slavery museum, two recommendations from the Truth and Justice Commission. A Creole focus group participant pointed to the paradox of the "violence of non-violence" which resulted from a lack of sustainable engagement with corrosive colonial injustices and lingering antagonisms between the different groups. One of the members of the Truth and Justice Commission indicated that the present exclusion of the Creoles from full economic rights is a consequence of slavery:

> One of the recommendations, one of the points we made, is that the Creole community has been left out […] At the end of the day, it is the structural constraints [...] made to always exclude, in the main path of the economic level, that explains the situation of today. (Interviewee 4)

Decades after independence, the structural violence of colonial powers continues to have a negative impact on some groups, highlighting the fragmented nature of decolonization and the urgency for peacebuilding processes to take stock of and attend to lasting historical social, economic, and cultural injustices.

Scarcity (46%). Despite high levels of development, access to and quality of services are not necessarily equivalent (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). Around half of participants noted how poor people struggle due to scarce resources. One trade union leader highlighted the burden of debt for low-income individuals (Interviewee 7). In the words of an environmental activist:

> I would say the little people, the common people …, are those who are really struggling [...] Public education is in crisis […] The welfare state is in crisis whereas it has been a key driver for our economic success following independence. In our hospitals, clashes break out regularly […] There are not enough doctors, there is not even enough equipment. (Interviewee 13)

Conflict mindset (38%). Some participants described fierce competition to access resources and opportunities in a densely populated island. Some lamented that while strong economic indicators have bolstered Mauritius's standing in the African continent, they have also given rise to a more competitive and stressful environment which significantly affects the well-being of individuals. Decades of research show that more cooperative group task, goal, and reward structures promote more positive forms of perception, attitudes, conflict resolution, communication, learning, liking, and psychological health, while more competitive approaches can undermine these outcomes (Deutsch, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). A participant in the women's focus group said, "I also think that people who are facing many problems in life will not be able to transmit peace. If you are not feeling well, you will not be able to make another person feel well."

Sources of Resilience

In response to these challenges, participants also pointed to many sources of resilience:

Civil society (46%). Civil society actors and activism, participants noted, have played a critical role in spurring change and progress. In the words of one of the members of the women's focus group, "All these NGOs in Mauritius … are working tirelessly for this society." While this was seen by participants as a positive route to social and environmental justice, collective action on its own may re-ignite dormant intergroup frictions especially in societies where identities have been defined in essentialist terms (Haslam, 2012; Dixon et al., 2012).

Awareness or education (46%). Participants were attuned to immediate and extended surroundings, at micro and meso scales. Such awareness helped to suppress and resist challenges

which might be encountered in a multi-ethnic and rapidly changing society. The internet and the education system, while being identified as potential threats to peaceful coexistence, were also viewed as platforms nurturing consciousness of local-global events and attitudes which might trigger frictions between communities. Scholars have suggested that in societies in which children are socialized and guided to value "mutual care and nurturance," we see a higher propensity for social cohesion (Juncos & Joseph, 2020; Shah et al., 2020; Vallacher et al., 2013). One interviewee recognized the importance of re-calibrating cultural awareness so conversations around challenges can be initiated:

> We have a mindset that culture is about dances, about cakes, you know, for the national days we will share cakes. We tend to integrate this and that's all. I am sorry, there are profound issues that need to be addressed, and then we will liberate ourselves from seeing negative peace and we will march towards peace to its fullest. (Interviewee 9)

Keepers of the peace (46%). Scholarship on peacebuilding illuminates the "infrapolitics" (Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018) of subordinate groups who demonstrate quiet resistance when in situations of conflict (Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2014). Our study found that women emerged as particularly active in addressing challenging situations. One woman described her own experience:

> I discovered my true self the day when I made my first visit to Chagos […] After landing, I felt emotional. I visited the cemetery, where my relatives are buried, and I felt something deep inside […] I have a strong personality; not to get into conflict but to defend just causes. (Chagossian focus group participant)

Our study also illustrated the critical role moral leaders play in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. During and after the 1999 Kaya riots, former President Cassam Uteem emerged as one of the principal architects of peace restoration, assuaging demonstrators, instilling "feelings of security" and "building positive relationships" (Porter, 2007, p. 34). Some religious and political leaders were singled out by participants for having taken the step of breaking the destructive cycle of violence by reminding antagonistic parties of their shared commitment to core values (Lederach, 2005). As one NGO leader stated:

> We have our former president, Cassam Uteem, … very good man, good judgment. When we had that problem of the riots, civil unrest, in 1999, Kaya, but the president was a Muslim, a practicing Muslim, and the way Uteem got backing, the support of the whole

population, and now people appreciate him. So we have a few of these strong people who

want to intervene, and they are respected and they can calm down the situation.

(Interviewee 8)

Conflict resolution strategies (33%). Accessible constructive platforms for people to

seek redress to potential injustices are key to the maintenance of sustainable peace (Coleman &

Deutsch, 2012; Vallacher et al., 2013). The data demonstrated that Mauritians in the study are

invested in upholding peace and respect through dialogue. Mauritians appear to privilege

healing, openness, and reciprocity:

> Above all, dialogue is important […] Dialogue in the family, society, in a group, where
>
> we work. If we feel frustrated or feel that you need to talk about something that we didn't
>
> like, we should express ourselves [...] for peace to return. (Creole focus group participant)

According to an interfaith mediator, people generally respect and trust procedural justice

processes and turn towards institutions to fulfill aspirations for distributive justice.

Empathetic mindset (20%). Participants described how empathy, forgiveness, wisdom,

and grit are harnessed by locals to address potential interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. These

individual level factors have been shown to have an effect in conflict mitigation (Stephan &

Finlay, 1999). Women in particular, cultivated empathy as a precursor of mediation but also as a

springboard for solidarity and community: "Empathy is this keyword which can solve our

issues" (Women's focus group participant). Such features of everyday peace, insist on resilience

and on the resources employed by individuals to respond to potential violence, configuring locals

as adaptive and creative (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Conclusion

This research project provided a platform for a cross-section of the population to give

voice to their lived experiences and aspirations for peace in Mauritius. The interlocutors

highlighted their collective commitment to take stock of, calibrate, and energize peaceful

processes within Mauritius. Participants readily acknowledged how peace processes are

characterized by tensions and contradictions and develop with respect to interconnecting

dimensions which are imbricated into a whole, rather than as discrete components.

When defining peace, participants spoke to the prevalence of exchanges of small

kindnesses, and low levels of direct conflict. The peace described by participants was also often

described as tentative, marred by communalism and group-based inequities. While it is clear

Mauritius is relatively peaceful, it is not a utopia, and there are threads of both positive intergroup reciprocity, or interactions between groups characterized by positive exchanges, and negative intergroup reciprocity in the form of structural violence occurring concurrently, suggesting the positive and negative intergroup relations are distinct and to an extent orthogonal (see Coleman et al., 2020; Coleman et al., 2019). This duality is critical to understanding how peace functions on the ground and tells a story that is not always apparent in quantitative measures of peace (e.g., The Global Peace Index, The Positive Peace Index, The Fragile States Index) where Mauritius is consistently ranked as a very peaceful and stable country. While sustainable peace may be an ideal rather than an actual state, there are many lessons to be learned from multicultural societies actively engaged in promoting and maintaining peace such as Mauritius.

This study highlights that on the ground, sustaining peace is a complex process. Rather than occurring through simple direct relationships between factors, the peace that exists in Mauritius is maintained through a constellation of dynamics, interacting in non-linear ways. Many of the dynamics which uphold the peace present in Mauritius also contribute to latent conflict. For example, participants described how non-violent and non-confrontational values help prevent Mauritius from exploding into violence, but also lead to inaction and stymie open discussion of some underlying issues that perpetuate intergroup exclusion, inequity, and other forms of harm. The respect for difference which underlies the multicultural values of Mauritius paves the way for tolerance and harmony, but starkly defined group conceptualizations also contribute to hunkering down, and intergroup cleavages. Further adding to this complexity, at the societal level, seemingly opposing elements can exist simultaneously. For example, many participants described a degree of inaction and silence around addressing root causes of problems, while many participants also described an active civil society advocating for change and addressing issues, and systems for conflict resolution where people could seek redress for injustices. The peace described by focus groups and interview participants was thus rife with paradoxes and contradictions.

There is much literature discussing the need to include perspectives from complexity science to better understand processes related to peace and conflict (e.g., Nowak et al., 2012; Vallacher et al., 2011; Vallacher et al., 2013; De Coning, 2016). This paper contributes a grounded case study of how a complexity lens can offer insight into understanding peaceful

societies and the array of factors which maintain and support peace away from a context of violence and conflict, and in a more peaceful context. The complexity inherent within peaceful societies lends support to calls for more holistic and systemic approaches to measure, understand, and promote peace (Coleman et al., 2019).

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