

of a little book I wrote which stopped at 1994 and it is an important question to keep asking.

BILL FREUND

*University of KwaZulu/Natal*

**The Franco-Mauritian Elite: Power and Anxiety in the Face of Change** by TIJO SALVERDA

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Mauritius is not what it used to be. And neither are the Franco-Mauritians. Tijo Salverda traces the rise and decline of the Franco-Mauritians, who have controlled the island's staple export (sugar), best land, and leading commercial enterprises. After a long period of hegemony, independence in 1968 thrust Franco-Mauritians into an unfamiliar position, forcing them to protect their interests without their colonial allies and within a democratic framework. Consequently, the Franco-Mauritians shed their prominent political role and prefer a low profile in the island's affairs. Mauritius now has separate, or what Salverda terms 'functional', elites: a Franco-Mauritian economic elite and a Hindu political elite. Salverda uses nearly 150 surveys, 70 formal interviews, and participant observation to gauge how Franco-Mauritians have navigated this change.

Salverda's main claims are that the Franco-Mauritian elite is anxious and has been forced to use its power 'defensively' to guard its advantages. Yet although Franco-Mauritians are a tiny slice of the electorate, the Hindu-led governments have cooperated with them, eschewing major redistributive policies such as land reform. Mauritius' first prime minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, forged this precedent, which Salverda attributes to mutual interests in a robust economy: 'Franco-Mauritian economic status was scarcely challenged' (p. 67). Today, Franco-Mauritians remain the key actors in the private sector. They dominate the island's largest companies and solidify their position through interlocking directorships and ethnic favouritism when hiring managers.

Relations with the government can get tense, but policy clashes are not existential fights. In 2005, Franco-Mauritians sparred with the government when it proposed raising lease rates on state-owned beachfront property where many of them have second homes (*campements*). The government raised rates, but most Franco-Mauritians kept their homes anyway, despite their public outcry. And when politicians rail against Franco-Mauritian privileges, Franco-Mauritians seem to interpret such 'white bashing' as political theatre more than a harbinger of attack. One of Salverda's informants judges that the 'Franco-Mauritians have never had it so good as today' (p. 103).

If Franco-Mauritians are passive in formal party politics, they are active in policing their group boundaries. They send their children to private French-language schools (public sector schooling is in English), mingle at their *campements*, embrace exclusive leisure activities (boating is popular) and practice endogamy. Few Franco-Mauritians publicly criticise their group's privileges; one politician who does, Paul Bérenger, receives extended analysis (pp. 159–67).

Franco-Mauritians' solidity partly comes from their white skin, which differentiates them from almost everyone else on Mauritius. Some informants divulge to Salverda feelings of superiority compared with their compatriots. They frame this belief not in bald racial terms, but with reference to their elite education, business acumen and class upbringing. Although much has changed in the past half-century on Mauritius, I felt that the Franco-Mauritian elites profiled did not seem anxious about their position and future, but rather confident and at ease.

RYAN SAYLOR  
*University of Tulsa*