



Engendering Democracy Through the Ballot Box in the Mauritius 2005 Elections

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**ISBN: 1-920095-38-1
ISSN: 1811-7449
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Introduction

What is it that is keeping Mauritius women out of politics and invisible from important decision-making positions? The island has maintained a stable parliamentary democracy with regular elections since 1968, peaceful changes of government, and a high level of rule of law based on a liberal Constitution. In preparation for the 2005 elections, women activists made a stout attempt to engender democracy by demanding one woman in each constituency; respect for the SADC 30% declaration; and the need to stop taking money for party tickets.¹ However, the ballot box has not bestowed equal access to power on the women of Mauritius. Is it because women in Mauritius do not have the political clout? Is it because the women in Mauritius are not interested in politics? Is it because Mauritius is steeped in patriarchal traditions? Is it cultural and religious traditions that stand in the way? Is it because Mauritius has never witnessed the nationalist aspirations for popular sovereignty that propel women to fight for more progressive gender politics? Is it because of the well-developed welfare state

¹ Virahsawmy Loga 'Mauritian Women mobilise in Solidarity for Democracy and women Human rights in Parliament. Gender and Media Southern Africa. 18 May 2005. [Http://mediawatch.clickpost.com/article](http://mediawatch.clickpost.com/article).

providing for women's needs and ensuring that Mauritius women are so well looked after so that they do not have to agitate for a feminist presence to represent their needs? A number of reasons have been speculated upon to explain women's invisibility in the domains of power in Mauritius. This paper grapples with these questions and attempts to provide answers based on the authors reflections on the 2005 elections and interviews that were carried out with political party representatives, civil society, electoral officers and party male and female candidates during the 2005 elections.

Since gaining independence in 1968, Mauritius has chosen its representatives through free and fair competitive elections. Indeed Mauritius did not go through any protracted liberation struggles or political upheavals which might have pushed women into the public space. Its transition to independence was smooth although the ethnic segmentation and the different religions and castes have played a major role in shaping political attitudes and behaviour. Mauritius is regarded as one of the developing world's most successful democracies. Freedom House gives Mauritius a rating of 1 on Political Rights and I on Civil Liberties.² It is considered a free country. The country has enjoyed steady economic growth with a per capita income of \$3,860, one of the highest in Africa. However modernisation has not simultaneously led to the rise of women in decision-making positions. Modernity now signifies both an increased transparent and democratic government, with the inclusion of more women legislators as part of the good governance approach to sustainable development. Mauritius' democratic deficit lies in the under-representation of women. Like women worldwide, women in Mauritius face formidable cultural and structural barriers in entering the political arena.

² Freedom in the World Country Ratings 2005. Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

The Mauritius political parties, electoral system, and campaign finance are structural barriers to women's political participation. Nonetheless, there is a degree of neglect surrounding the perpetual marginalisation of women in the institutions of decision-making in Mauritius. This is a country which set up a Ministry of Women in 1975. This was before any other country in the SADC region did so and with the principal aim of "making full use of the contribution of women in all spheres of economic and social activity and to redress the social and institutional factors which discriminate against women" (Beyond Inequalities: Women in Mauritius, 1997:19). The progress has been disappointing and slow. The social and economic status of women has altered but no dramatic changes have taken place in the area of decision-making. When the composition of decision-making assemblies is so markedly at odds with the gender and ethnic make up of the society they represent, this is clear evidence that certain voices are being silenced or suppressed. What does the under-representation of women add to the understanding of democracy in Mauritius? This paper will examine the causes of lack of advancement of women in decision-making in Mauritius by reviewing the literature on gender and democracy, the religious and cultural factors that might be the basis of women's insubordination and uses the 2005 elections and campaign to reflect on why the Mauritius democracy has not had a statistically significant effect on the percentage of women in Parliament.

The most important social change of the past three decades has been the transformation of gender roles that have transformed the lives of a majority of populations in different countries. Women have moved from the role of wife, and mother to politicians, judges, and presidents. Mauritius women have also witnessed this historic transformation in their social and economic lives. However, their rise to occupy decision-making positions has

been moving at a snail's pace. The ballot box on its own without supportive mechanisms has not been an efficient way of ensuring women's presence. The culture of accepting more women in politics does not yet exist in Mauritius. This is evidenced by the lack of commitment by both ruling alliance and the opposition to any constitutional or party quotas. This would have been necessary in the 2005 elections to meet the 30% quota called for by the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. This paper argues that the extraordinary under-representation of women in Mauritius must be considered a serious problem for democracy in that country. Furthermore, the Mauritius state has tended to concentrate on improving women's status in the socio economic realm rather than promoting the development of an inclusive citizenship or encouraging women to enter the political sphere. In spite of the local and international pressures in keeping the issue of women on the agenda, the political will by the political party leaders has been consistently absent.

Gender and Democracy

The under-representation of women is crucial in any discussion on democracy and gender. The literature on democracy takes as its starting point the notion that political equality involves some degree of equality in participation and it treats the systematic absence of particular social groups as a self evident failing of democracy. According to Inglehart et al, (2004) the link between women's representation and democracy should be self evident. Since women account for half the population of most societies, if the majority does not have full political rights, the society is not democratic (Inglehart). Nonetheless in most democracies both old and new, women's representation is still a major problem. Women continue to be excluded from political leadership roles. One common definition of democracy presents itself as a matter of simple majority rule based on the principle of 'one person one vote'.

However, Philips (1995) argues that democracy should involve popular control and political equality as the two key principles of democracy. Political equality has come to set the terms for modern democracy.

The two principles of popular control and political equality provide a good basis for the politics of presence. Control becomes feasible if people are actually there - present. Equality is hardly achieved when some groups have so much more leverage than others (Philips, 1995:31). Philips's arguments for engendering democracy are based on three principles: the first of which is mirror representation. In as much as representative democracy cannot produce a perfect reflection of society as long as the decision-makers are drawn from unrepresentative sample in terms of gender, then democracy will remain profoundly flawed (Philips, 1991: 65). Thus Mauritius democracy fails in-terms of mirror representation.

The second principle in promoting an engendered democracy is to ensure group representation. In this case, it does not mean that women have to be represented as a constituency or that a woman's party has to be formed in order to deal with women's interest as a minority as women anyway, are in the majority. This has led to most countries setting aside reserved seats for women or the implementation of a constitutional or party quota in order to ensure that women's needs and concerns are represented. Feminists presume the use of quotas as a case of increased democratisation of states and gender justice for women as a collective (Philips 1995).

The third principle is interest representation. This principle is popular in the Scandinavian countries where it is argued that women and men have different interests and therefore it is important for women to be present in their numbers. Empowered as a distinct category, with unique experiences, and

interests, women legislators are valued for contributing towards poverty eradication by bringing their difference into the policy process. Women's interests are often related to the value of children. These include equal opportunity for education and employment, reproductive health, nutrition and childcare are understood to benefit the economy as a whole. This has been constantly been referred to as 'the politics of care'. However Philips argues that women are not a homogenous entity and hardly share a common women's perspective, even on issues such as abortion.

According to Philips, women can be said to share at least one common interest: that is that they need improved access to every sphere (Philips, 1991: 73). This argument has led to the emergence of sex quotas in order to bring women into national legislatures. A number of states ranging from South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Ecuador, and Djibouti have adopted affirmative measures to boost their number of female legislators since the 1990s. Bringing more women into legislatures is becoming an important component in the advancement towards the modern market democracy. It is being argued that women, as a category of legislators, move states from tradition to modernity (Towns, 2003). Higher levels of women legislators are overwhelmingly understood as a means of promoting democratic institutions on the one hand, and the complementary markets enabled by such democratic institutions, on the other. A partnership between men and women in politics will benefit society as a whole. Modern democracies have pluralistic institutions and women are at the centre of the renewal of democracy. A gender balanced representation is a matter of good governance (Towns, 2003:5).

Women have become an ideal in the construction of transparent states and also in the fight against corruption, as they are considered less corrupt than

men. General modernisation is understood to be beneficial to women while at the same time, the changing status of women allegedly brings about general progress. The number of women in decision-making has been positively related to a state's level of economic development. A link has been made between the low number of women parliamentarians and the high number of women in poverty. A close relationship between low numbers of women parliamentarians and high levels of general poverty has been established and underscored at UNDP conferences (Towns, 2003). On the contrary, Mauritius is an island that enjoys a relatively high level of prosperity in Sub-Saharan Africa where significant levels of poverty prevail. Mauritius scores sixty fourth on the human development index and thus ranks far ahead of all other African countries including South Africa which ranked one hundred and nineteenth.³ Yet the levels of women in the legislature remained the lowest in the region in 2000 with 5.6% representation. In 2002, Mauritius ranked 16 of 155 developing and newly industrialised countries, far ahead of all other African countries, including Botswana, which ranked in seventy sixth. Amid these high levels of prosperity, Mauritius does have relative poverty as well as significant levels of inequality. This is particularly evident between the Franco Mauritian upper class and the Creole minority. To offset this, Mauritius has been able to build a highly developed welfare regime. There is universal access to healthcare and free education which has raised the status of women. Provision of such welfare may have made many women dependent on the state and thereby weakened their struggle against the state and in demanding parity in representation.

The Status of Women in Mauritius

³ Mauritius Shaping Change and Transformation. <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/1347.0.html?>

Post independent Mauritius has been very successful in implementing state feminist policies. A number of positive laws have been passed in Mauritius, which are favourable to women. Pre-independent Mauritius is said to have been a strongly patriarchal society in which the position of women was quite low (Beyond Inequalities, 1997). This patriarchal tradition has continued up to this day with serious implications for the numbers of women in decision-making positions. Whilst the laws provide that a woman is free to choose her profession, establish a business, open an account or borrow money without her husband's permission, the male head of the family continues to have a say in the professions of women in order not to upset the traditional parameters. Women attained universal suffrage in 1959. Since 1975, an array of NGOs has been established focussing on the improvement of women's status. One of those organisations is the Mauritius Alliance of Women formed in 1978 as an umbrella body for the various women's organisations. In Mauritius, state welfare dates back to the 1930s when the government made improvements in health, education and welfare. Boys and girls were given equal access to primary education but women's advanced education lagged behind, particularly among the Hindu and Muslim communities (1962 census). When the first Ministry of Women was created in 1975, it was mostly aimed on the issues of health, fertility and welfare. The Ministry was so short lived that by 1976, it had already been replaced by a gender desk in the Prime Minister's Office. The different NGOs, however, lobbied for changes in the laws governing marriages, social security and immigration. With social reforms and gender sensitisation, awareness of women as equal partners evolved in Mauritius but social, cultural and economic factors continued to constrain women from asserting their rights and making use of the opportunities created. In terms of employment, women are largely confined to low level, lowly paid

jobs. Less than 10% hold senior management posts or work in the professions as doctors or lawyers (Day-Hookoomsing, 2001). In the administrative sector of government, 84% of senior management is mostly male with females predominating at lower levels. In public boards, women constitute a miserly 23% with men making up the remaining 77%. In private boards, men occupy 74, 81% of those positions and women 25, 19% (Diverse, 2004). In the Export Processing Zones (EPZ), large numbers of women occupy low paid jobs as machine operators, clerks, or typists.

However, there is now a significant change in the levels of female education, which is crucial for women's empowerment. In terms of education before 1976, women tended to have lower levels of education than the men. Since the introduction of free education in 1976, the enrolment figures of both boys and girls have almost been equal. For example in 1999, there were 67, 559 boys and 65,930 girls enrolled in primary schools and 46, 253 boys and 48 934 girls in secondary schools. The girls have consistently registered better results: for example the pass rate for the year 2000 for the School Certificate examination was 78.6% for girls and 74.5% for the boys and in the Higher School Certificate examination, it was 76% for the girls and 67% for the boys (Day-Hookoomsing: 2001). However in terms of employment, women have also entered the non-traditional sectors such as the police force, civil aviation, finance and the judiciary but at a very slow pace.

The successful provision of welfare and the creation of equality through legislative reforms led to some of the political leaders who were interviewed to argue that the women in Mauritius were well looked after and quite comfortable with their situation. Some of the male candidates argued that there was no need to have these radical measures for women to enter the political process as they could do this

gradually. Some of the men even felt that too much had been done for women already (Beyond Inequalities, 1997). Since 1981 when the Code Napoleone was amended, (a law that governed religious marriages and made women minors) Mauritius continued to pass laws that were favourable to women. The government of Mauritius signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. Since then laws on divorce, labour laws, pension, and income tax have all been passed in order to liberate women from their subordinate position. Mauritius also became the first country in the region to pass a protection from domestic violence act in 1997. In terms of progressive laws, Mauritius has done very well but in reality, patriarchy and oppressive religious traditions remain entrenched.

The Cultural and Religious Factors

In a country where 52% of the population are Hindu, Roman Catholic 26%, Muslim 16.6% Protestant 2.3% and others 3.1% it is important that social scientists investigate how these religions shape women's choices and destinies. Although Mauritians often deny it, the ethnicity imposes crucial constraints and incentives in situations relating to work, political activity and marriage (Eriksen, 1989). This is important as traditional cultural attitudes and religious beliefs have long been suspected to function as a major barrier to women's representation in elected office, although there is no research that has been done on this issue in Mauritius to support this claim. Although poor and wealthy states alike, have managed to increase the number of women legislators, democratic institutions have provided an enabling environment for women's increased participation. The primary cause of the weak representation and participation of women in politics is thought to reside in culture. It is now being argued that it is through cultural development, the move away from

traditional society towards modern state institutions that women are empowered in decision-making (Towns, 2003:7). As states modernise, there is an expectation to see a weakening of traditional values and therefore changes in perceptions regarding the appropriate role for women. It is argued that traditional understanding of what constitutes the private and public spaces lie at the heart of most of the difficulties faced by women entering politics. As it is clearly stated by Morna (2004) "At the heart of the under-representation of women in politics are age old attitudes and stereotypes that assign women to the private and men to the public domain."

In most religions and ethnic groups, men are represented as honourable and courageous and active in the public domain while women are the guardians of morality and tradition in the private sphere. Masculinity is the foundation of the nation and society, while women are the guardians of the traditional order (Charles and Hintjens, 1998:2). Men are active in the public sphere; women are centred in the private domain where cultural continuity is guaranteed along with the identity of family community and nation. The domestic sphere and women within it are regarded as significant for the transmission of cultural identity. This is also accepted by modernising states. Cultural explanations hypothesise that, in traditional societies, women will be reluctant to run for office and if they do so they will fail to attract sufficient support to win. Cultural attitudes may have a direct influence upon whether women are prepared to come forward as candidates for office. In the interviews carried out by political parties, this issue emerged clearly as some leaders argued that they really support the idea of women in politics but in reality, they faced a lack of credible women. In other words, there was not enough supply of women candidates to meet the demand of political parties. This is not true.

Culture has been regarded as one of the major reasons why many nations with a

strict Islamic background have often ranked at the bottom of the list worldwide in terms of women in Parliament, even the more affluent Arab societies such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon (Inglehart, 2004:4). In the Islamic world, women are seen as properties of the ethnic group, they are seen as weak, those who work are not held in high esteem, they are under paid, they can be easily attacked, and therefore they must be protected (Kumiko Yagi, 1998:60). This devaluing of women's work is also echoed by the Mauritius Alliance of Women in one of their publications, where they lament the following:

Women's work has been devalued by the culture. It was devalued so that we do not notice our value, which keeps us 'in our place'; we are told to be content with the role of wife and mother; but that is not the important work of the world. If we take jobs outside the home they are underpaid, of low esteem and often as extraneous to the work we do in the home. In reality we have made invaluable contributions to society in our roles as mother, child bearer, teacher, wife, nurse, secretary, cleaning women etc. Our works have been essential to the development and maintenance of society" (Mauritius Alliance of Women 18th Souvenir Magazine, 1996:11)

Whilst women in all societies are burdened by the traditional female roles of childcare and housework, the intensity of these roles and the support services available for women, vary depending on certain cultures, race and class. In some countries such as Norway and Sweden, the critical mass of women in politics has pushed for the change in attitudes towards women's work and roles.

It is also interesting to learn from the literature how the Hindu community position their women as outlined in the law of Manu. This is a series of doctrines that guide the way of living that is generally approved. Within the traditional Hindu culture, a woman is

never fit for independence (Horiuchi, 1998:187). A woman becomes more acceptable in society when she gets married. The official age of marriage in Mauritius is 18 and with the consent of the parents, 16 years. Religious marriages at an early age are still prevalent among the poor in Mauritius even though its against the law (Beyond Inequalities, 1997: 25). The Hindu society is solidly patriarchal and male dominance is generally overwhelming. Male leadership is regarded as superior. Concurrently in most societies, the birth of a male son is cause for celebration and the birth of a female child a cause for anxiety (Prakash, 2004). Such attitudes are still highly prevalent in Mauritius as the popular saying goes " *Garcon premier lot, tifi deuxieme lot*" meaning the birth of a male child in the family is a jackpot whilst a female child is just a consolation prize (Beyond Inequalities, 1997: 40). The assumption of superiority of males has built up the ideas of male dominance and female dependence. Thus cultural attributes have left a deep mark on women's development in Mauritius (Prakash, 2004). Studies have also shown that the low proportion of women in Parliament is also associated with a historical prevalence of Catholicism, which represents more traditional attitudes towards women and the family than the protestant religions (Inglehart, 2004:4). In a study done by Reynolds in 1999 of 180 nation states, it was found out that they were greatest contrasts between dominant Christian countries and all other religions including Islamic, Buddhist, Judaic, Confucian and Hindu. A further investigation of the impact of the Hindu culture, Muslim culture and Catholicism on women's participation in Mauritius might further enlighten us on how cultural beliefs can have a negative or positive impact on women's' struggle for visibility. As pointers have already indicated in that direction:

Mauritius is a very hierarchical and patriarchal society... It is a complex society in terms of religion and culture. All ethnic groups want to be covered in

parliament but they do not want women to represent them” (Loga Virahsawmy, Johannesburg Media Summit, 2004)

Engendering the Mauritius Democracy in 2005

Liberal democracy tends to regard political equality as the equal right to vote and to stand for election. Little consideration is spent on trying to understand the social and economic conditions that might have a negative impact on this equal right to vote. This is regarded as one of the major reasons why in the 50s and 70s, the Western Feminist Movement arose due to dissatisfaction with liberal democracy. Philips (1993) exclaims “Liberal Democracy has not served women well” (Philips, 1993:103) Indeed the Mauritius democracy has not served women well. Thus as the women’s groups lobbied for more women to be nominated on party lists, they were not simply asking for additional numbers. They were asking for a more profound democracy that needs to overhaul the legal framework governing democratic elections and a genuine change in the attitudes and perception of political party leaders and society as a whole towards women. In preparation for the 2005 elections, a civil society organisation called FederAction began to lobby for an increase in the number of women candidates. The rise of the female representation in the Mauritian National Assembly from 5.6% to 17% is attributed to the pressures from civil society.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Women’s equal participation in the electoral process is essential for the conduct of democratic elections. The Mauritius Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, assembly and association for both men and women and the government has upheld these basic rights. The Constitution also ensures the equal representation of all ethnic groups but not the presence of women. It is the

freedom to take part in the conduct of public affairs, hold public office at all levels of government and participate in the formulation of government policy however, that remains problematic. The electoral system in Mauritius is the First Past the Post (FPTP) Block Vote system. The disadvantages of the FPTP to women’s representation have been well documented. There are 62 elected representatives from the party list. A maximum of eight seats, known as the best losers is allocated on the basis of their communities and political parties in order to ensure a fair representation. The political system strives for ethnic balance whilst gender balance is not an issue. The country is divided into 20 constituencies and one constituency and two seats in the Island of Rodrigues. Voters are supposed to elect three representatives, selected by party list, to constitute three seats per constituency. In Rodrigues, it is two seats per constituency.

Whilst the system might seem rather complex to an outsider, the people seemed to be quite comfortable with it. This was witnessed at the polling stations where the voters did not seem to need any assistance except for a few elderly voters and the disabled. Although the different parties raised the need for electoral reform to a Mixed Proportional Representation and First Past the Post system, they were not yet committed to how they were going to go about the electoral reforms. The Alliance Sociale, in its manifesto, promised to restart the debate on electoral reforms once elected and also to focus on the increase in the representation of women in decision-making positions.

It is important to note that for Mauritius, the call for electoral reforms to a mixture of Proportional Representation and FPTP should not be seen as the sole panacea for women’s representation. There is a need to change mindsets and negative stereotypes of women. Furthermore, civil society and gender activists should keep on the agenda the

attention political parties give to the issue of gender parity. Public attitudes play a vital role in shaping the opportunities and challenges involved in advancing women's rights.

The Mauritius 2005 Elections

The Mauritius 2005 elections were carried out without any major constitutional changes despite the recommendations made by the Sachs Commission of 2001. These included a mixture of Proportional Representation and the First Past the Post Best Loser system in order to ensure better representation of women and opposition parties in Parliament. However, the Mauritius Constitution guarantees equal civil and political rights to both males and females. The leaders of the two dominant alliances were acutely aware of the low numbers of women in politics and the fact that they had not made any commitments to change this. The two parties had not instituted a voluntary quota for increasing women's representation in politics until the 2005 elections.

The first experience with the Mauritius electoral process was the accreditation process as foreign observers. The process was carried out with ease although this was the first time observers were officially invited to Mauritius after the Amendment to the Representation of the People Act. Within the Electoral Commissioners Office there is also one woman who holds a senior position. However the verification of ballot papers carried out on 25 June 2005 was marked by a clear dearth of women. In a basement room, there were approximately 40 men all working laboriously, checking ballots names and symbols and counting them, to ensure that all was ready for the voting day. In an interview with one of the senior electoral officers it was revealed that the absence of women from the verification exercise was due to the time schedule; the men were going to work until very

late into the night until they had completed the tasks.

The electoral officer also mentioned the fact that the working conditions were not really suitable for women, especially as the wooden floors were dirty and the nature of the work was tedious. On voting day, the senior electoral officers in most of the constituencies were preponderantly men. A striking observation was made concerning the women's role: a woman was seated at each and every ballot box and her job was just to open the ballot box allowing the voters to drop in their ballot papers and thereafter the women would close the box. This job was considered not difficult and therefore suitable for a woman. The Mauritian elections had few incidences of violence and although most women were not intimidated by it, they expressed their displeasure at such behaviour by the young men involved.

Women's Frustrations and the Creation of a Women's Party

There is evidence that the women in Mauritius wanted to participate in politics not just as voters but as candidates as well. It was clear at a workshop held in Mauritius organised by Gender Links and the Mauritius Media Watch Organisation there were more than 30 women who participated in the workshop who declared that they wanted to stand as candidates. What they lacked was the party ticket. Yet from our interviews with political party leaders both the MSM/MMM and the Alliance Sociale, the same theme was reiterated, namely that "It was very difficult to find the right woman at the right place".

Another common comment was that "There was no need to remove the best male candidate and replace him with a female candidate" Furthermore there was the argument from both parties that those few women who were nominated were in safe constituencies and would therefore win. These frustrations with political parties may have led the women

to form a female political party, although this was not really a good idea.

A group of women led by Paula Atchia launched a party called Parti de la Marjorite (Party Of the Majority) PDM in a bid to increase the number of female parliamentarians. The party leader had the hope of attaining 20 candidates for the July elections. Unfortunately the PDM never became the party of the majority. Women's only parties have never really succeeded in gaining ground. They are viewed almost as protest parties.

The PDM's manifesto called every woman to vote for fellow women.⁴ Ultimately the PDM managed to field only 4 women candidates. This failure of the party to mobilise more women was used endlessly by the two major parties to justify the few women candidates. They argued that if a women's party failed to find suitable women, how could one expect the male dominated parties to locate them. However the four women candidates did not win any seats in the assembly and a number of reasons ranging from attitudes towards women's parties to poor planning by the women and the fact that the party was launched late contributed to this lack of impact of the PDM on the populace. The party was only formed in March and elections were in July. There was no way this party could have made an impact.

Whilst the PDM did not make it into the National Assembly, the formation of the party is clear evidence that the women who want to enter the political arena are available in Mauritius but the major problem is access. The political party and its male dominated leadership remains the only avenue through which women can make it into decision-making positions. The pressure to modernise and democratise these male dominated parties should begin immediately and not a few days before

the next election. The women must begin to demand a place in the party ranks and not to continue to being used and dumped at election time.

Women's Candidature

To better understand the under-representation of women in politics necessarily requires an examination of women's rates of candidature. There are many remaining obstacles to women's equal participation in elections in Mauritius; including gender stereotypes psychological and traditional barriers, and inequalities in education, training and resources. The most difficult of these is their nomination as candidates in a male dominated political party. One of the leaders of a prominent women's organisation interviewed narrated her ordeal, in her attempt to be nominated as a candidate. They were three women who wanted to participate as candidates. They submitted their curriculum vitae's to the party leadership but there were no tickets forthcoming. The women were kept waiting until nomination day passed and they realised that they had obviously not been successful.

When asked to explain the reason for not being nominated one of them said it was because she had not declared how much money she intended contributing to the party. In Mauritius, campaign finance is crucial for both male and female candidates as there is no public finance of political parties. Whilst the Electoral Commission requires candidates to pay a nominal fee of about US\$10.00, the parties often require that candidates bring substantial sums of money before the party can consider them for nomination. This issue of campaign finance discourages most women in entering the political race because they do not want to lose their money and then lose the election. Most women interviewed in Mauritius felt that there were better off keeping their jobs and that their families were much more important than entering politics, which they considered a dirty game. One of the

⁴ Mauritius News April 2005
<http://www.mauritiusnews.co.uk/frontpage.asp>

women who really wanted to be nominated recounted how the men in the party kept calling her and dissuading her from putting her name down for nomination. Some of the men were quoted as saying that she would be character assassinated and would not be able to stand the heat during the campaign. The male candidates were not supportive of women's candidature.

However, as indicated in Table 1, the major political parties fielded a total of 16 women. This is unimpressive. The Alliance Sociale which was more favourably inclined to electoral reform, fielded even less candidates, only 6 in total. Lalit, a party which was not even popular among voters fielded the greatest number of candidates, namely 14. However, the commitment by only one party such as Lalit, in increasing the number of women candidates was not likely to increase the presence of women, especially when that party is in the opposition and with no likelihood of winning any seats in the National Assembly. In a total number of 664 candidates, only 63 women entered the political race. This reflects the reality in most countries: very few women have the access to participate as candidates and very few will be elected.

Table 1: Number of Candidates

Party/Party Alliance	Female	Male	Total
1. Alliance MSM/MMM	10	50	60
2. Alliance Sociale	6	54	60
3. Comite D'Action Musulman Mauricien (CAMM)	-	3	3
4. Conservative Party	-	3	3
5. Democratie Mauricienne	-	1	1
6. Democratie Union Socialist Mauricien (DUSM)	-	-	3
7. Ekta Party	-	3	3
8. F.P.P.R- Front Progressiste du Peuple Rodriguuaais	-	1	1
9. Front Solidarite Mauricienne (FSM)	1	54	55
10. Front Populaire Musulman FPM	-	28	28
11. Group de Cinq	1	5	6
12. Independent Forward Block (IFB)	-	1	1
13. L'Alliance Pour La Justice	1	7	8
14. Lalit*	14	18	32
15. Majority Party Party de la majorite	4	-	4
16. Mauritius Party Rights	-	1	1
17. MDN Raj Dayal Movement	4	22	26

18. Movement Democratic Mauriciene (MDM)	-	5	5
19. Movement National Mauricien	-	3	3
20. Mouvement Rodriguais	-	2	2
21. Mouvement Socialiste Independent	2	7	9
22. M.S.T.M.R.A	-	1	1
23. Mouvement Travailleurs Mauriciens	-	4	4
24. MTS	-	1	1
25. Movement Popular Lendroit	-	3	3
26. OPR	-	2	2
27. Parti Du Peuple Mauricien (PPM)	5	46	51
28. Party Malin	3	7	10
29. PRO	-	1	1
30. RRR	-	1	1
31. Rassemblement des Travailleurs Sociaux	-	1	1
32. RSM	-	2	2
33. Rezistans ek Alternativ	2	9	11
34. Tamil Council	1	8	9
35. Top Dhamaka Vrai Rouge	-	1	1
36. Union Mauricien	-	3	3
37. Union Patriots Ilois Mauricien	-	1	1
Independents	9	239	248
Total	63	601	664

The Attitude Towards Women During the Campaign

Electoral campaigns are the competitive efforts by candidates and political parties to win voter support in the period preceding an election. A heated campaign ensued between the major two alliances, the MSM/MMM and the Alliance Sociale. The MSM/MMM, as the government, was eager to show the achievements of their past five years in power. They called on the voters to judge them on what they had delivered. Their campaign slogan was "Progre" Bizin Kontinie" - Progress must Continue and also emphasised Unity, Stability and Progress and Continuity. Although they acknowledged the few women in their ranks, this did not become an overriding issue for the campaign. The Alliance Sociale on the other hand campaigned on the need for change "Bizin Changement". There was a clear attack on the ruling alliance MSM/MMM's failure to deliver on their 2000 promises. The opposition focused more on the socio economic challenges, the increasing gap between rich and poor, growing unemployment, and corruption. On the issue of women's presence however, the opposition

promised to reform the electoral system and focus more on supportive measures to increase the number of women. There was no special focus on female candidates by the media, nor did parties make a special effort to showcase their female candidates.

Candidates in Mauritius used a variety of techniques to reach the voters, from public appearances and rallies to the use of mass media advertising. During election time, Mauritius becomes alive with this massive and colourful display. Bright ribbons were tied wherever possible and each party had the opportunity to display its colours, the streets were awash with the colours of the two dominant parties, the Alliance Sociale and alliance MSM/MMM. The last two star rallies held on 26 June were the most interesting for both alliances. MSM/MMM held their last star rally in constituency 18 Quatre Bornes and Alliance Sociale held theirs in Port Louis. The most outstanding feature of the rallies was that both men and women turned out in large numbers. We observed both rallies and it was difficult to tell which party had the largest number of supporters. Rallies in Mauritius are like social events as you see a whole family comprising father and mother, children, grannies and grandpas all out in full force. Some even carry foodstuffs and packed picnic foods. This shows both the extent of the freedom of assembly and participation in Mauritius, as well as revealing the vibrancy of competitive politics. No violence was witnessed at the rallies and both men and women interviewed there felt safe and also sensed the importance of participation in the political process. Some even exclaimed that "everyone is a politician in Mauritius" explained by the fact that for such a small country with about 1.2 million people, 664 stood as candidates.

However, this freedom of assembly and participation was marred by the campaign materials that were brought to the rally of the MSM/MMM alliance.

These proved to be very disturbing there was one huge poster of the opposition leader, who is now the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam wearing woman's panties and bra in the colours of his party. This huge poster elicited many cheers and victory signs as those who were carrying it moved towards the leaders of the MSM/MMM alliance who were seated on the stage. Dressing up Navin Ramgoolan's picture in women's underwear indicated a sign of weakness that he would be certainly defeated. None of the leaders, both men and women thought that this was an offending picture and it also clearly showed how women are depicted in such a democratic country. There were a number of demeaning images of women in the campaign especially by the ruling Alliance MSM/MMM, caricatures of the opposition as either naked women, some of them with their legs cut up and surrounding the opposition leaders body and many symbols of women as the weaker sex and therefore without the stamina for politics. Some of the women candidates were quite affected by some of these caricatures that depicted them as either naked or prostitutes dancing with the opposition leader with a miniskirt. One of the women candidates who later won in constituency no 18 and was depicted as a prostitute dancing with all these men almost naked exclaimed that this was character assassination against women and that this was also affecting her family which was very conservative. The culture of accepting more women in politics in Mauritius does not yet exist as evidenced by the lack of respect for the women candidates. One woman who fought all this abuse and still won Kalyanee Virahsawmy commented about the male attitudes

"While my mandates especially women have all been fantastic, the attitudes of the male opponents have been horrible. They did not do honour for a Mauritius where it is said that elections are free and fair. The vulgar and grotesque caricatures and posters distributed on me were unbelievable. They fabricated

another side of my private life and made this public. This is why the women hesitate to go into politics...” (Morna, 2005:30)

The Election Results

The opposition Alliance Sociale won with 49.386% of the vote and Alliance MSM/MMM got 43.295%. This is a very narrow margin which is not reflected by the allocation of seats that translated into 38 elected seats for Alliance Sociale and 22 seats for MSM/MMM, the remaining two seats both went to the OPR in Rodrigues. The First Past The Post System fails to portray a proper representation of the voters in the National Assembly. This adds weight to the argument that Mauritius should revisit its electoral system reform programme, although the old electoral system has served them well for the past 30 years. The increase in the number of women in the legislature from 4 to 12 (5.7%-17%) is a welcome development, nonetheless it does not reach anywhere near the 30% target stipulated in the SADC declaration on Gender and Development, of which Mauritius is also a signatory. Those few women who got elected should be congratulated for their bravery in entering as candidates in a campaign environment that was very hostile to women candidates⁵. As Table 2 indicates, the best loser system only allocated one seat to a woman.

Table 2: The 2005 National Assembly Election Results

SEATS		MSM/ MMM	Alliance Sociale (AS)	Organisation du peuple de Rodrigues (OPR)	Movement Rodrigues (MR)	Total
Men Elected		15	34	2	0	51
Women Elected		7	4	0	0	11
Best loser Seats	M	1	4	0	2	7
	W	1	0	0	0	1
Total Seats		24	42	2	2	70

⁵ Colleen Lowe Morna Missing the Mark: Audit of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development Women in Decision-making, Gender Links, International Idea, 2005.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to examine the reasons why the Mauritian democracy has not made an impact on an increase of the number of women in the National Assembly. A society's traditional cultural heritage still has a significant impact on the percentage of women in Parliament. The paper has also argued that in order for the Mauritius democracy to be engendered, there is a need to meet the three Philips Principles: mirror representation, group representation to ensure gender justice, and interest representation. This can be achieved if there is a critical mass of women in decision-making positions.

Although the percentage of women in Parliament has no direct impact on a society's level of democracy, it would be befitting for the Mauritius success story to grapple with this democratic deficit. Engendering the Mauritius democracy is not just a question of numbers alone. Numbers are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for women's full participation in politics. In countries such as Sweden, Norway and South Africa, there is evidence to show that when there is a critical mass not only are women's issues prioritised in the policy agenda but also they are more likely to be acted upon by policy makers. For example in Sweden there are improvements in childcare leave and national insurance for parental benefits. In Norway there is an increase in publicly sponsored childcare services and improved pension rights for unpaid care work. Basically there is general improvement in the quality of life for women and the rest of society. In South Africa, the establishment of the Commission on Gender Equality has played an important role resulting in the Parliamentary Committee on the Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Parliamentary Women's Caucus; the enacting of the Termination of the Pregnancy Act and the Domestic Violence Act. All these show the results of a progressive gender

politics. The sad reality of the Mauritius women is that whilst the Constitution provides equal opportunity and the state has passed progressive laws on women on the one hand, the society's cultural traditions negate these gains.

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