The Under-Representation of Women in Mauritian Parliament
by

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

The introduction of legislation aimed at decreasing gender imbalances in Mauritius has not led to an increase in women's access to parliament. While Mauritius is not unique in this, it is an interesting case to examine because Mauritius prides itself on being a leader in Africa as a democratic and strong middle-income country that has achieved success in many socio-economic areas. But Mauritius is faced with a paradox: despite its abundance of gender-related legislation, it is lagging behind in gender equality at the national level, as manifest by the few women in parliament. Regarding this issue, little research has been done to examine the challenges of translating legislative gains into actual change. Albie Sachs, former judge on the Constitutional Court of South Africa (2002), summarizes the Mauritian case by stating:

> Mauritius can justly be proud of the admiration which its democratic life enjoys internationally. It cannot, however, hold up its head in terms of participation of women in political life. When half the population ends up with only a one-twentieth share of representation, it manifests a grave democratic deficit (as cited in Athal, 2012, p. 17).

This thesis examines why legal and legislative gains in gender equality in Mauritius have not translated into greater representation of women in parliament. The thesis will answer the specific question: What are the main factors that have limited women's representation in parliament in Mauritius?

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Chapter One: Introduction, Methodology and Literature Review

The issue of gender equality in politics throughout Africa has received increased attention in recent years. Scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and various international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), have noted the slow and patchy pace of change in many countries and have called on governments to take action to remove obstacles limiting women's entry into politics. For example, initiatives such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, specifically Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, aim to promote gender equality in politics, and therefore include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament as one of the indicators of the goal.

Partly as a result of this increased pressure, some African countries, such as Mauritius, have signed onto international protocols and introduced national legislation aimed at increasing gender equality. However, in Mauritius and elsewhere, the introduction of such legislation has not necessarily translated into increasing women's access to parliamentary and executive power. While scholars have noted the slow pace of change and the gaps between legislation introduced and the reality of continued gender inequality on the ground, little research has been done to examine the challenges of translating legislative gains in many middle-income countries throughout Africa into actual changes in gender equality in politics within individual countries.

This thesis will explore these issues by focusing on gender equality in The Republic of Mauritius (Mauritius). The overall research question for this thesis is: Why have legal and legislative gains in gender equality in Mauritius not translated into greater representation of

women in parliament? My case study will answer the question by examining some of the key

factors which typically are seen as barriers to women's participation globally in order to identify

which of those barriers appear to be the most influential in limiting women's representation in

national politics in Mauritius. Although there are other indicators of gender equality in politics,

such as the question of which positions women hold in government (for example: How many

women are appointed to cabinet as ministers? Do women lead any key ministries?), this thesis

will focus on the number (and proportion) of women in the national parliament as a key indicator

of gender (in)equality.

This first chapter provides both an introduction to the overall topic explored in this thesis

and an introduction to the study itself. It offers a brief overview of women in politics and gender

equality issues in Mauritius, and introduces some of the debates in the literature. As we shall see,

scholarly literature on women and politics has tended to focus either on the question of why

women are underrepresented in politics, or on the types of reforms and politics that are most

likely to increase women's representation. In terms of the former, scholars have tended to argue

that it is either (or a combination of) ideological, social structure, cultural, economic

development, and political factors that are the greatest obstacles to women's entry into politics

(Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). The chapter provides a concise overview of these competing

explanations, and then briefly presents some of the key solutions to women's under-

representation that are frequently advocated by scholars and gender activists. The chapter

concludes with a discussion of the methodology and research methods used in my study.

Section One: Women's Under-representation in Parliament

Women's under-representation in parliament is a serious issue for nations that aim for democracy and gender equality. Halder (2004) argues that women's participation is necessary in modern democracies because adequate representation is essential for proper government. According to Halder, "[because] one element of representative democracy is that all citizens, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to participate in politics, increased representation of women in elective positions of power is a matter of justice and equity" (2004, p. 2). With the global parliamentary seats occupied by women at a historic high of 19.8% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012, p. 1), women still remain deeply under-represented. Moreover, 19.8% is a far cry from 30%, which is considered the minimum percentage required to ensure a critical mass of women who can influence decision-making processes and political agendas (UNDAW, 2005, p. 5). The UN has estimated that, based on the current rate of change, women would have to wait until the year 2490 to reach equal representation with men in the higher echelons of power (Seager, 1997, p. 70).

It is frequently argued that women's representation in parliament is important because it provides a platform for those elected to act on behalf of all women and to reflect their ideas, goals, and gender issues. Subramanian (2002) advances this view. For her, "women's disproportionate absence from the political process could mean that the concerns of half the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon as it denies their viewpoints sufficient opportunity to be integrated into the political system" (2002, p. 1). Other scholars claim that this absence is not only an indication that there is not a full democracy in place, but that a lack of women in parliament means that laws which are essential to women and children are not easily

passed. As Lijpahrt (1991), Burrell (1997), and Lovenduski (1997) explain, an increase in

women's representation in parliament provides a platform for women to act on behalf of the

women who elected them and to reflect their ideas and goals. Their position supports the output

orientation that changes in the composition of parliament tend to result in policy changes.

Scholars such as Htun (2001), Skjeie (2002), and Lovenduski and Karam (2002) also advance

this output orientation and believe that as women become a greater presence in parliament, they

will pay more attention to women's interests and will propose and support legislation that better

reflects the needs of women. Regarding women in politics in Latin America, Htun says that "the

growth in women's presence in legislatures has coincided with important legal advances in

women's rights" (as cited in Caldwell, 2012, p. 2). Htun goes on to say that, globally, the number

of laws regarding issues important to women, such as domestic violence, rape, and remedying

years of discrimination, have significantly increased in recent years. However, while the amount

of "women's issues" legislation has increased globally, it does not necessarily mean there is a

direct relationship between more women in parliament and the increase in female-related

laws/bills passed. For example, Wangnerud (2009) claims that results remain "mixed" regarding

the link; her research does show, however, that, "when a large number of studies covering a wide

set of indicators on the importance of gender in the parliamentary process are piled together, the

picture demonstrates that female politicians contribute to strengthening the position of women's

interests" (2009, p. 51) .

　　　　Policy results can also be in the form of changes to the policy agenda and focus of

legislation, not just an increase (or not) in female-related bills. Scholars such as Devlin and Elgie

(2008) draw attention to the fact that women parliamentarians add new dimensions or a different

emphasis to a range of health, legal and social policy issues, such as HIV/AIDS and property rights. The authors argue that increased gender equality in parliament can change a country's policy agenda and can contribute to the overall advancement of women in society more generally. For instance, their research demonstrates that an increased number of women in parliament in Rwanda has contributed to setting a platform for development, empowerment, and advancement of women in all sectors. As their research and that of others has demonstrated, there is certainly some evidence that the increased presence of women in parliament in some countries has resulted in changes to policy priorities and outcomes. For example, in Rwanda, a country that now has the highest level of female representation in parliament in the world at 56.3% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012, p. 1), greater gender equality in parliament has appeared to have resulted in policy changes. Women representatives have demonstrated greater concern both with community issues and with a range of issues that most directly affect women and gender relations. According to female parliamentarians, "in terms of the policy agenda, women's issues are now raised more easily and more often than before, and there has been a strong advocacy of 'international feminism' by many deputies" (as cited in Wangnerud, 2009, p. 53). In short, a growing body of literature has demonstrated that greater gender equality in parliament contributes both to increased democracy and to the development and introduction of policies that are more sensitive to gender and to gender equality (Burrell, 1997; Htun, 2001; Karam & Lovenduski, 2002; Lijpahrt, 1991; Lovenduski, 1997; Skjeie, 2002).

Women in Parliament in Mauritius

Mauritius provides an interesting case study to explore the general issues of women's representation in parliament because, while the country has made major gains towards gender

equality in national legislation and has ratified several gender related international treaties, women remain extremely under-represented in parliament. Although Mauritius is seen to be more advanced than many other African countries in terms of instituting stable, representative democratic structures and processes, the country lags behind other African countries in terms of women's formal participation in politics. For example, with only 6.4% of women in local government, Mauritius has the second lowest level among members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). As of the 2011 year end, only 18.8% of women made up parliament in Mauritius, a far cry from the regional goal of 50% (UNDP, 2012, p. 1).

Mauritius also does not fit the common perception in the literature that higher levels of economic development or growth tend to be associated with higher levels of gender equality. Indeed, while Mauritius is categorised as a middle-income country, and thus stands apart from much of the rest of Africa in terms of economic indicators of development, several other African countries that rank much lower in terms of economic development have achieved far higher levels of gender equality in parliament. For instance, while Rwanda's level of industrial development and economic growth rates are among the lowest in Africa; the country leads globally in terms of women in parliament with 56.3% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012, p. 1). Even if Mauritius is compared to more similar countries in terms of income and economic development – countries such as South Africa, Cuba, Argentina, and Nicaragua (World Bank, 2012) – its performance in terms of increasing gender equality in parliament has been poor. For instance, Seychelles, another small island state with a similar economic profile to that of Mauritius, has been far more successful in increasing the proportion of women in parliament. Seychelles is currently a world leader in terms of the representation of women in parliament. As

of January 2012, it rose to the fifth position globally, with women representing 43.8% of

members in parliament. This was a 20% increase since last year's elections (Government of

Mauritius, 2012, p.2).

The government of Mauritius is aware of the gender gap in politics, and it has taken some

steps to address gender inequality in the country. Mauritius has signed most international

conventions, declarations and protocols relating to gender equality and has made other efforts to

encourage better representation of women. For instance, the government passed the New Local

Government Act at the Mauritian National Assembly in December 2011, which aims at

redressing women's lack of participation in formal politics (Gender Links, 2012). Louis Hervé

Aimée, Minister of Local Government & Outer Islands of Mauritius, noted that "the new

legislation has adopted a gender-neutral approach by imposing a condition that at least one-third

of all candidates standing for a political party in an electoral ward must be of a different sex"

(Gender Links, 2012, p. 4). Despite these steps, women remain extremely under-represented in

national parliament. As noted above, not only do there appear to be high levels of gender

inequality in politics in Mauritius, but the country also continues to lag far behind many other

African countries in terms of women's representation in parliament. Why is this the case? What

are the main obstacles to women's entry into politics in general in Mauritius and to their access

to parliament in particular? These are the questions that this thesis will address.

Breakdown of Chapters

This thesis is broken down into four chapters. Following this introductory chapter,

Chapter Two introduces the Mauritian case study by providing a general overview of the

country, focusing specifically on the political system (including legislation) and key cultural

issues. In addition, it provides an overview of some of the gender issues shaping political

representation in Mauritius. Chapter Three expands on the issues introduced in Chapter Two and

explores the political factors that shape women's representation in Mauritius. It engages with

broad international debates as well as African and Mauritian debates and literature about women

and politics. Chapter Four provides a discussion of the cultural factors that shape women's

representation, with a specific focus on Mauritian and African debates, and it examines how

influential these factors appear to be in shaping women's representation in parliament. Chapter

Four aims to answer the question of whether political or cultural factors appear to be the greatest

obstacle to women's representation in parliament in Mauritius.

Section Two: Literature Review and Introduction to the Key Debates

There is limited research on the topic of women in parliament in Mauritius, and indeed

not much on women's role in parliament in other African countries. South Africa is the

exception, with a number of recent studies focused on exploring women's role in politics, gender

equality in parliament, and the success of politics (such as the quota system) aimed at increasing

women's representation in parliament (see, for example, Bauer & Britton, 2006; Goetz,1998;

Hassim,1999). There is, however, a large body of international work on the role of women in

politics. This section reviews some of the core debates and key issues in this literature in order to

situate my study of gender inequality in politics in Mauritius within broader African and

international debates.

Although many explanations have been advanced, research on women's under-representation in politics has tended to focus on five core areas: ideology, social structure, socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors. For example, Kenworthy and Malami's (1999) research, a global comparative study that examines gender inequalities in political representation, found that the most significant barriers to women's representation in parliament were political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors. Similarly, Ross's (2002) research examined the relationship between various factors and their influence on women in politics internationally. These factors are examined below, beginning with arguments focused on the ideological factors that shape women's participation in politics. Subsequently, there is a brief overview of the debates regarding solutions to increasing representation of women in parliament.

One of the main arguments advanced by some scholars as to why women are under-represented in parliament focuses on issues of ideology. Paxton and Kunovich (2003) contend that while ideology has not been as well measured as socio-structural and political factors, gender ideology strongly affects the number of women in parliament. Gender ideology refers to attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of women and men in society (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). The authors argue that ideology, when measured more precisely, strongly predicts differences in women's political representation in parliament. In a similar vein, Shvedova (2002) contends that societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology about "a woman's place." Shvedova states, "according to this perception, women should only play the role of 'working mother,' which is generally low-paid and apolitical" (2002, p. 8).

Sossou (2011) also maintains that ideology is the greatest obstacle to women's entry into politics: she claims that perceptions of women's role in society shape gendered power relations

and thus are the main obstacles preventing gender equality in parliament. Sossou's claim is supported by her research on women in Ghanaian politics. She argues that in order to achieve gender equality in parliament, various institutions and structures in society (such as the family, educational system, and religious institutions, as well as the social, economic, legal, and political structures) must undergo major structural transformation in order to change the dominant ideology about women's role. Her claim is supported by research in other countries (see, for example, Kiamba, 2008; Shaheed, 2009), which indicates that ideology is a critical determinant in shaping gender representation in politics. According to this research, society has an ingrained ideology about gender roles that permeates all aspects of life, produces unequal power between the sexes, and translates into gender inequality in politics.

Women's societal status (i.e., their place in the social structure) can also serve as a barrier to women's increased representation in parliament. For example, Henderson and Jayden (2010) and Benavides (2003) argue that women's status in society shapes their political role and levels of participation in politics. Continued perceptions of traditional social roles for men and women can serve to discourage women from involvement in politics; and even when women pursue politics, they are more likely to get involved at the local/community level rather than at the national level (McCann & Wilson, 2012). McCann and Wilson support these claims based on their work exploring Australia's female parliamentarian ranking against an international field; that ranking has slipped over the past decade from 21st to 38th. Further, they draw on comparative data relating to women's representation in Australian state and territory parliaments. In doing so, they demonstrate that women remain under-represented in Australian parliament as a result of social and cultural structures.

Those who argue that social structure influences women's entry into politics also draw attention to the societal norms regarding gender and leadership. For instance, Højgaard (2002) contends that leadership at the national level (parliament) is viewed by society as an area reserved for men. Similarly, with reference to Kenya, Nzomo (1997) suggests that societal attitudes are not the only reason for women's small role in politics; she notes that the education system tends to promote women's secondary status as normal. Her work demonstrates that even though women are increasingly active in politics, they often remain secondary in the system, and that many politicians view African women politicians in a negative light and claim that they hold interests which are opposed to the interests of the state.

In contrast to those who point to ideology or social structure, other scholars argue that socioeconomic factors, such as women's educational attainment and labor force participation, are the most important factors shaping women's representation in parliament. According to Matland (1998), economic development leads to "a weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, greater education and labor force participation for women, and attitudinal changes" (p. 113); importantly, all the above factors increase women's political resources and decrease existing barriers to political activity. In other words, Matland and others suggest that higher levels of economic development are positively linked to the increased participation of women in politics. Economic growth and women's increased labour force participation appear to reduce existing obstacles (such as traditional values) and thus lead to higher levels of women's participation and representation in politics (Togeby, 1994).

However, other scholars claim that either the opposite is true, or that economic development and women's labour force participation rates have no or limited impact on gender

inequality in politics. For example, Lowe-Morna (1998) argues that there is no correlation

between economic development of a country and female representation in parliament,

highlighting the fact that many developing countries have made more progress in achieving

higher levels of parliamentary representation than their developed country counterparts. For

example, as Lowe-Morna notes, South Africa and Seychelles have a higher percentage of women

in parliament than New Zealand and Australia (1998, p. 11). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2003)

support this claim, arguing that the new world ranking of women in parliament (with Rwanda

leading at 56.3%) challenges older research that links economic development with representation

in parliament.

Political structures and issues make up a fourth factor frequently pointed to in order to

explain gender inequality in politics. A number of studies, most focused on western

industrialized nations, but a growing number also focusing on countries in the global south, have

found that political factors remain the key determinants in women's representation in politics

(Ginwala, 1998; Goetz, 1998; Inglehart & Norris, 2008; Lovenduski & Norris, 1993; Tremblay,

2008). These analyses have tended to emphasize the importance of electoral structures and

systems, the partisan composition of parliament, and the ideology of dominant political parties as

the main determinants of the proportion of legislative seats held by women. As will be explored

in greater detail in Chapter 3, many scholars have demonstrated that the first-past-the-post

(FPTP) electoral system has tended to disadvantage women and visible minorities. In short,

under FPTP, voting takes place in single-member constituencies; voters put a cross in a box next

to their favoured candidate, and the candidate with the most votes in the constituency wins

(Electoral Reform Society, 2012, p.1). Other scholars focus on the gendered political culture that

permeates political institutions and thus works to exclude or marginalize women. For instance,

Ginwala argues that, "men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political

game; and men define the standards for evaluation. The existence of this male-dominated model

results in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics" (as cited in

Shvedova, 2002, p. 2). Krennerich's work focuses on electoral systems (the entire electoral

process, including provisions concerning electoral rights and election administration) and shows

how such factors have had a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected

bodies (2009, p. 9). While some scholars focus on electoral systems, others suggest that women's

marginalization from politics means that one of the main challenges to equality in their

participation in politics once they are elected, is that of getting to know the rules and mastering

the parliamentary procedures. According to Jabre, "when women come into parliament, they are

often unaware of how the institution functions and how to use the rules of parliament to their

best advantage" (as cited in IPU, 2009, p. 54). She argues that there may also be "unwritten

rules" or informal decision-making processes that are not entirely accessible to women. These

challenges result in the ineffectiveness of women's contribution and act as a barrier to women

pursuing positions in parliament. Similar claims are advanced by Goetz (1998), who argues that

institutionalized resistance to gender equity is one of the main factors in the political forum, and

such resistance leaves limited room for structural adjustments that would allow women to

compete on a level playing field. A further examination of political factors and how they affect

the representation of women in parliament is provided later in the thesis.

        Lastly, a number of scholars suggest that culture is the greatest obstacle to women's

representation in parliament. According to Tremblay (2008), not one, but several factors

influence the outcome of women's representation in parliament. For her, religion, education, and

views of gender-based social roles make up cultural factors. Those who argue that culture and

cultural attitudes towards women in politics disadvantage women, support their claims by noting

that countries with egalitarian cultures usually have more women in parliament. For example,

Norris and Inglehart (2001) highlight the fact that Scandinavian countries are at the forefront of

female representation in parliament; and in contrast, less egalitarian cultures such as Arab states

(e.g., Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, and Iran) tend to have very low

percentages of women in parliament. The authors' opinion is that cultural attitudes, more than

any other factors, are strongly and significantly related to women's empowerment, and

particularly women's representation in parliaments. They state, "in cultures with traditional

attitudes toward the role of women in the home and family, many women may be reluctant to run

and, if they seek office, may fail to attract sufficient support to win" (2008, p. 6).

Research on countries in Northern Africa has tended to support the claim that culture has

more of an influence on the outcome of representation by female parliamentarians than voting

systems. For example, Diaz (2005), Paxton and Kunovich (2003) and Gribaa (2009) are just

some of the authors who maintain that regardless of socioeconomic status, political life has not

favored women's representation in politics in the region. Gribaa claims there is a strong

resistance to the integration of women in politics in Northern African regions, such as Algeria,

and that it is the perception of roles attributed to men and women that have the greatest influence

on the outcome of women's representation in politics. Similarly, these views are supported by

Ballington, whose research shows that in many societies a significant challenge to women's

representation is patriarchal norms that have restricted women to domestic roles (2008). In

particular, Ballington argues that men and women entering politics are challenged by different

factors; for women, domestic responsibilities are seen as the single most important deterrent. She

argues that women's greatest obstacles to obtaining seats in parliament are cultural perceptions

about the role of the women. A further examination of cultural factors and how they affect the

representation of women in parliament will be provided later in the thesis.

Solutions to Gender Inequality in Politics

Based on scholars' perspectives of what the core reasons for women's under-

representation in politics are, a number of solutions are advanced. With reference to Africa,

scholars (see for example, Bauer & Britton, 2006) suggest that African women are key to

changing low levels of representation and that women are already helping to formulate

legislation and promote democracies that include women's interests/issues. Their work

demonstrates how women, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, and societal class, can work,

and have worked, together to strengthen the voice of women in politics and increase women's

representation in parliament. They argue that despite the continued prevalence of male-

dominated systems, African women have persisted in fighting for electoral success while

effectively working alongside so-called "adversaries" (i.e., men). Similarly, Goetz (1998) credits

explicit affirmative action interventions in political institutions and processes to the success of

women's representation in parliament in Africa (specifically Uganda and South Africa). In short,

like Bauer and Britton, she claims that despite cultural and structural restrictions, women can

overcome obstacles and achieve a presence in parliament. Krennerich (2009) and Davidson-

Schmich (2006) also maintain that it is gender quotas that have the greatest influence on

women's parliamentary representation, pointing out that many success stories have come from

the quota system. For example, Davidson-Schmich highlights the cases of Rwanda (with the

highest global percentage of women in parliament at 56.3%) and Senegal (at 42.7%) (IDEA,

2012, p. 1), both of which have achieved major gains in women's representation since imposing

quota systems. On the other hand, Hassim focuses on issues of institutional development,

political will and perseverance. Hassim's work (2003) on South Africa, for example,

demonstrates that an increase in female representation in parliament in South Africa, notably

44.5% (IDEA, 2012, p. 1), resulted from a quota campaign. She contends that quota campaigns,

such as the African Unions 50% Campaign, and the emphasis on representation are part of an

important revival of feminist activism in Africa.

I will return to a brief discussion of these various solutions at the end of the thesis by

discussing the possible ways in which Mauritius might be able to address the obstacles to

women's entry in politics.

Section Three: Research Design and Methodology

I use a qualitative approach as the research method for this thesis. A qualitative research

approach is appropriate because it is primarily used to investigate and study a wide range of

topics in the social world (Kalof, 2008, p. 79). Specifically, I draw on secondary sources

regarding key debates in the literature which examine barriers to women's representation in

parliament (and politics in general). These sources are used to provide an overview of women's

representation in parliament and politics globally, as well as to identify important debates about

what affects women's political representation (namely political and cultural factors) and how

they apply to the Mauritian case. I also draw on United Nations documents, mainly for statistical

information and project and program information regarding gender equality initiatives in

Mauritius and internationally. In addition, I use government reports for information regarding the

political structure, history and culture of Mauritius.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the key debates in the literature focused on

explaining why women are under-represented in international parliaments. It has drawn attention

to the five main categories of the debate: ideology, social structure, economic development,

culture, and political systems. While all categories are important, cultural and political factors are

the focus of this thesis as they apply to the Mauritian situation. I turn to these factors in the

following chapters; however before doing so, in the next chapter I provide a brief overview of

Mauritius, focusing specifically on the political system (including legislation) and key social and

cultural issues. In addition, the chapter presents an overview of some of the gender issues related

to women's representation in parliament in Mauritius.

Chapter Two: Overview of Mauritius

This chapter introduces the Mauritian case study by providing a general overview of the country, including its cultural make-up and political system. It also explores gender issues and provides a brief summary of core actions that have been taken to address gender inequality. Finally, it outlines some of the key issues surrounding women's representation in Mauritian parliament.

Section One: Overview of Mauritius

Mauritius is one of six African island nations. It is a small country, covering approximately 1,865 square kilometers, and is situated in the Indian Ocean to the east of Madagascar. Mauritius is a multi-racial and multi-religious society, the result of massive immigration, mainly from India, between 1834 and 1910. Ethnically, the island contains Northern and Southern Hindus, Muslims of Indian descent, Franco-Mauritians, Chinese, and Creoles of mixed African and European ancestry. The latter group includes those of Malagasy origin and descendents of slaves brought from East and Southern African countries, including Portuguese colonies such as Mozambique, with smaller groups originating from West Africa (Kasenally, 2011, p. 161).

The island was first known to Arabs and Austronesian sailors in the 10th century. In 1507, the island was explored by the Portuguese, who established a visiting base without inhabiting it (Puttur, 2007, p. 165). The first permanent settlement was established in 1638 by the Dutch and later abandoned in 1710. Five years later, the island was occupied by the French and renamed *Ile de France*. The French then surrendered to the British (1810) after the latter invaded *Cap*

Malheureux. Under the British, the island regained its original name and was finally granted its independence in 1968 (Puttur, 2007, p. 165).

The population currently comprises four main ethnic groups: Indo-Mauritians (68%), Creole (27%), Sino-Mauritians (people of Chinese origin) (3%), and Franco-Mauritians (2%) (Puttur, 2007, p. 168). The official languages are English and French, though Mauritian Creole remains the core language with 80.5% of the population. Although the country does not have an official religion, due to the large population of Indo-Mauritians, Hinduism is the most common religion. The remaining religious population is made up of Christians and a small Muslim population (Puttur, 2007, p. 166).

Cultural Context

As in most societies around the world, women in Mauritius are the traditional home makers and do the vast majority of unpaid domestic tasks. Until the early 1980s, women formed a small minority of the paid workforce. Indeed, it was only after the adoption of export processing legislation (the Export Processing Zone Act) in 1970 that employment opportunities emerged for women. Skilled labor shortages in the manufacturing sector, and especially in the apparel industry following the establishment and rapid growth of export-processing zones (EPZs), led to employers hiring and training growing numbers of female workers. In the 1980s, hired housekeeping and child care became relatively new and important industries. Still, gender discrimination continued, with women earning less than men for comparable employment in manufacturing, and with women concentrated in lower skilled positions. Other signs of continued gender inequality included high levels of domestic violence.

The government was slow to introduce legislation aimed at addressing socio-economic inequality, but several pieces of legislation were introduced in the 1990s and other actions were taken. For example, the Domestic Violence Act, introduced in 1998, addressed domestic-related gender issues. The Act made it a crime for men to abandon their families or pregnant spouses for more than two months, or not to pay food support, or to engage in sexual harassment; and it gave greater protection against – and legal authority to combat – domestic abuse (UNDP, 2010, Domestic Violence Act).

Despite this legislation, gender inequality has remained high and appears to be shaped and reinforced by culture and religion. As late as 2011, Familara noted that "there are some women who can go to cinemas, who drive cars, but there are some women, who depending on their culture, shouldn't go out at night, should obey their husbands" (Familara, 2011, p. 24). However, some critics claim just the opposite is true of Mauritius's unique culture and its effect on women. For instance, both Erikse (1998) and Sisisky (2006) argue that many aspects of Mauritian society point towards an inclusive and egalitarian society. They suggest that the size of Mauritian society, the use of Creole as a shared language, the shared history as immigrants, developments in the private sector, and greater interaction in the younger generation have all contributed to the erosion of tradition and the development of an the egalitarian society (Familara, 2011, p. 27).

Political System

Mauritius is a constitutional republic with three tiers of government: central, local and village. There is no constitutional provision for local government other than the Rodrigues

Regional Assembly. The Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands (MLGOI) is

responsible for overseeing local authorities. Local government in Mauritius has two tiers

(Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012, p. 6). The first tier comprises urban councils, known as

municipalities, and rural authorities, known as district councils; the second tier relates only to

those district councils that oversee 124 village councils (Bertelsmann Stiftung, p. 6). The

Supreme Court heads the judicial system and has the power to interpret the constitution and to

judge the constitutionality of legislation brought to its attention. The Chief Justice, appointed by

the Prime Minister and the President, helps to select five other judges to the court. The Supreme

Court also serves as the Court of Criminal Appeal and the Court of Civil Appeal (Puttur, 2007, p.

168).

Mauritius has a unicameral parliamentary system; thus the president, who is indirectly

elected by parliament for a five-year term, is head of state. The parliament, or National Assembly

(*Assemblée Nationale*), has 70 members directly elected for a five-year term. Members are

elected from 20 three-member constituencies on the island, and one two-member constituency on

the island of Rodrigues, under the first-past-the-post system (FPTP). The Local Government Act

was amended to include the local authorities, namely village, district and municipal councils

(Virahsawmy, 2012, p. 1). In January 2012, an amendment to the Local Government Act

regarding a gender quota was passed by parliament. The New Local Government Act includes a

legislated quota requiring that political parties field a minimum of one-third of candidates of

either sex for the municipal and village council elections (Virahsawmy, 2012, p. 1). At this point,

the new quota system only applies to local elections and, given its newness, has not yet been

applied to a local election. Consequently, and unless other reforms are introduced, the

representation of women holding parliamentarian positions in Mauritius will likely, at least for

the time being, remain low.

Gender Departments

There are a number of gender departments in the Mauritius government. For example, the

Ministry of Women's Rights and Family Affairs was created in 1982. In July 1984, it merged

with the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Security, changing its name to the

Ministry for Women's Rights and Family Welfare. In October 1991, the Ministry was given

additional responsibilities relating to the development of children and was renamed the Ministry

of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare. In 2008, it was renamed the

Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (its current name)

(MGECDFW, 2012, p. 3).

The Ministry focuses on designing programs to promote women's empowerment; its

main objectives are: 1) to promote and defend women's rights as human rights, work for the

elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and ensure that legal measures are

taken to promote equality between men and women; and, 2) to implement gender-sensitive

macroeconomic policies and strategies, including those related to poverty alleviation

(MGECDFW, 2012, Background). The Ministry is made up of the following main divisions: the

Women's Unit – to promote the development and advancement of women and serve as a focal

point for women's issues; the National Women's Council (NWC) – to ensure that Government

policy and action meet the needs of women at a grass-roots level; and the National Women

Entrepreneur Council – to increase the technical, organizational and management capacity of

women in the entrepreneurship sector (MGECDFW, Background). In addition, the Ministry of

Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, along with the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP), launched the National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF)

(2008), which aims to set up operational and institutional guidelines to mainstream gender as an

issue at policy and programming levels (MGECDFW, Background). The NGPF is quite

progressive in that it calls for each ministry and institution (including the private sector and the

media) to develop specific gender policy statements and strategic partnerships at all levels.

Section Two: Advancing Gender Equality in Mauritius

Mauritius has introduced legislation to promote women's participation in politics,

specifically in parliament. In addition to the legislation discussed above, the country has recently

made other legislative changes to increase women's participation in political life. Initiatives

include the Amendment of the Jury Act (1990), which gave women the right to be jurors, and the

Amendment of the Constitution (1995), which made sex discrimination illegal. Recently, as

noted above, the government introduced the New Local Government Act (2012), which requires

that one-third of candidates in local elections must be women. Mauritius has also ratified a

number of international treaties, such as: the Millennium Development Goals Declaration

(ratified contextually in 2000); the International Labour Organization (ILO) Equal Remuneration

Convention, 1951 (No. 100) (ratified in 2002); the ILO Discrimination (Employment and

Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); the Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of

Employment and Occupation (ratified 2002); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (ratified and acceded to in 1984); the Beijing

Platform for Action (adopted in September 1995); and, the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development (1997).

Most relevant to this thesis is the ratification of CEDAW, the ratification of the SADC

Declaration, the subsequent non-ratification of the SADC Protocol (which will be explored

below), and the ratification of the New Local Government Act. The CEDAW "provides a basis

for realizing equality between men and women through ensuring women's equal access to, and

equal opportunities in, political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for

election" (CEDAW, 2011, p. 1). In theory at least, through its different ministries, the

government could go a lot further in making the ratification of CEDAW more successful. As

Bunwaree (2007) argues, "women are often not treated as full-fledged citizens. Having equal

rights on paper does not necessarily translate into effective practices on the ground. Subtle

discriminatory mechanisms rooted in patriarchal norms and values continue to pervade peoples'

lives" (2007, p. 2).

Mauritius, along with Botswana, are the only two countries that have not ratified the

Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development,

which, under Article 12-13, calls for "an endeavor to ensure that 50 percent of decision making

positions in all public and private sectors are held by women including through the use of

affirmative action measures" (SADC Gender and Development Protocol, 2008, Article 12-13).

Mauritius' failure to ratify the SADC Protocol is unfortunate, because in 1997 Mauritius, along

with SADC Heads of State, signed the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development.

Although not binding, this declaration committed states to 30% female representation in

parliament by 2005 (Kiamba, 2008, p. 1). The declaration emphasizes the importance of ensuring

the equal representation of women and men in decision-making; therefore, one could assume

Mauritius was headed in the right direction regarding gender equality. Why Mauritius would sign

the Declaration and later not ratify the Protocol for it remains ambiguous. The Government

justified not ratifying the Protocol due to it being a "Contradiction to the Mauritius Constitution"

(Athal, 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, the Government justified its decision by stating,

"[g]uaranteeing the equal fundamental rights of women of the country in every sphere of life is a

contradiction to the Constitution as it guarantees these rights to *all* citizens without any

discrimination by reason of sex" (Athal, 2010, p. 17).

With regards to the New Local Government Act, it may be too soon to speculate how it

will affect women's representation; however, it is seemingly a step in the right direction because

it calls for women to make up at least one third of representatives. The problem may not be as

simple to solve as merely imposing a one third rule. As Bunwaree points out, there is a

patriarchal culture in Mauritius that encompasses the entire political system and "makes men

fight for tickets like vultures" (2008, para. 8). The result is a system which is difficult for women

to fit into. Ackbarally (2008) agrees, stating that most men are hostile to their female

counterparts: "they consider that the females are out to take their place" (para. 6). As will be

discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this hostile environment existing in the Mauritian

political system has unfortunately resulted in fewer women succeeding in the political arena

(particularly at the parliamentary level).

National Empowerment Initiatives

The Government of Mauritius is aware of continued gender disparities in the country, as

well as the pressure from the United Nations and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to

prioritize the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In addition to putting

pressure on the government to take action, the UN has taken specific actions to promote gender

equality in the country. Along with the abovementioned NGPF, (launched by the MGECDFW

with support from the UNDP), the United Nations Development Programme, as per the

Millennium Development Goals (specifically MDG 3), launched two projects in 2005 and 2006

in Mauritius (UNDP, 2012, p. 8): "Capacity Building for Gender Equality and Empowerment of

Women" and "Empowerment of Women in Mauritius Through Capacity Building, Re-skilling

and Entrepreneurship" (UNDP, 2012, p. 9). The UNDP also supported the setting up of Women

in Networking (WIN) 2006-2007, WIN's projects for boosting Women Leadership Project (WLP

– 2008-2009) and Women In Politics (WIP - 2010). While the United Nations has seemingly

made gender equality and increasing the number of women in parliament its priorities in the

country, the UN's efforts have been met with scepticism from the government itself.

Women in Parliament

Certainly some progress has been made in terms of increasing women's representation in

parliament. For example, women in parliament more than doubled from 2000 to 2010 as the

proportion of women increased from 23% to 39% (Ministry of Gender Equality, 2010, p. 6).

However, although the *number* of female candidates in parliament has increased considerably

over the past 20 years, the representatives included only three women ministers (11%) out of a

total of 25 candidates in the 2010 National Legislature (MGE, 2010, p. 6). Currently, as

mentioned, women make up 18.6% of parliamentarians (as at 2012).

At present, the main challenges facing women in general include gender inequality in

parliament (18.6 %) and in the private sector, gender-based violence (1952 out of 2215 cases of

violence in 2010 involved violence against women) and socio-economic inequality. In terms of

the latter, higher levels of unemployed women (in 2011, 13% compared to 4.7% of men)

continue, as do higher levels of poverty amongst women and a recent reversal in maternal

mortality (increasing since 2007) (UNDP, 2010, MDG Report Mauritius). The section below

explores the continued problem of socio-economic inequality. As the next chapters will show,

some of these issues continue to intersect with and reinforce political and cultural obstacles to

women's entry into politics.

Socio-Economic Inequality

Mauritius has a strong economy, and the country has successfully moved away from

being a monocrop economy based on sugar cane cultivation to being an economy with a fairly

diversified manufacturing sector. Rapid and sustained economic growth over the last three

decades has been linked to the introduction of an export-oriented growth strategy based on the

manufacturing of clothing and textiles. The government has used a range of incentives to further

diversify the economy, and such incentives have been successful not only in expanding the

country's manufacturing sector but also in building a strong service sector, including financial

services. Diversification strategies have also resulted in the establishment of a growing

information technology sector. This strong and sustained growth has resulted in the country

achieving the status of an upper-middle income country, with a per capita income of more than

USD 7,500 in 2011 (IMF, 2011, p.1). In 2011, Mauritius had the second highest Human

Development Index (HDI) ranking in Sub-Saharan Africa (Human Development Report, 2011, p.

8).

While Mauritius has experienced strong and sustained economic growth over the last several decades, socio-economic gender inequality remains high, with for example, women still concentrated in lower-paid manufacturing and service sector jobs and earning less than their male counterparts (Bunwaree, 1997, p. 312). Furthermore, the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which reflects the loss in human development due to inequality between women and men, rates Mauritius' GII at 0.353 (the *global average* score on the GII is 0.492) (UNDP, 2010, Countries Mauritius). Mauritius' GII is notably low given its strength in other areas. Despite various initiatives, significantly higher levels of women are unemployed in Mauritius (up to three times more than men), and major inequalities within the workplace still exist. For example, though women represent a higher proportion than men in the working age population (16 years and above), they are under-represented among the economically active population, i.e., those who are in employment or those looking for work. In 2010, the economic activity rate for women was 43% compared to 76% for men (MGECDFW, 2010, p.3).

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in public areas are still common and may be the result of the subtle discriminatory mechanisms ingrained in patriarchal norms and value systems. According to the UNDP Millennium Development Goal Report for 2010, these issues are due in large part to insufficient regulatory instruments and their thorough application, as well as cultural factors (which will be outlined below) (UNDP, 2010, Mauritius MDG Status Report). As already mentioned, women lag far behind men in their participation in formal politics, with the proportion of women in national parliament only 18.6% (as of 2012), leaving the country far from the 30% goal it had committed itself to in the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. The government has taken steps to address this problem, such as introducing the

New Local Government Act (2012) stating that at least one woman must be elected in each

municipality during the forthcoming local government elections. While this legislation will help

bridge the gender gap in politics, other issues, such as culture, appear to be a major challenge for

the country and an ongoing barrier to ensure new legislation aimed at increasing gender equality

translates into real changes on the ground. According to the UNDP, the country will need to have

strong political will, commitment, and appropriate supportive initiatives in order for the New

Local Government Act to be successful (UNDP, 2012, p.4).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a brief overview of Mauritius' cultural make-up, political

system, and the range of legislative and policy initiatives that have aimed to address gender

inequality in Mauritius and increase women's political participation. As noted, the country has a

rich cultural and ethnic make-up. In contrast to all other African countries, all Mauritians are the

descendants of immigrants whose ancestors arrived over the past two-and-a half centuries. The

country has a strong and stable democracy and has experienced several decades of sustained

economic growth, making it one of the strongest economies in Africa. Further, as the chapter

outlines, the country has taken important steps towards addressing gender inequalities in society,

and has introduced a number of pieces of legislation specifically aimed at increasing women's

political participation. Although the government admits there is gender disparity in the country,

the general consensus seems to be that there are sufficient gender-related legislation and

programs to address gender inequality and increase the representation of women in politics. Yet,

women still lag far behind men in a range of areas and are poorly represented in parliament.

Bunwaree (2008) claims that this disjuncture is often explained by political leaders claiming that

women are simply not interested in politics and therefore do not come forward to claim their

place in government. Could this be true? Is there evidence that women in Mauritius are simply

"not interested in politics"? My thesis takes up this question by further exploring why women are

not more equally represented in parliament. It does so by examining two factors that potentially

limit women's participation: 1) the structure and functioning of the country's political system;

and 2) the cultural issues that serve to prevent or limit women's participation in formal politics.

It is these questions that the next two chapters address in order to determine what factors have

most limited women's representation in parliament.

Chapter Three: Influence of Political Factors on Women's Representation in Parliament in Mauritius

Women's under-representation in politics is often explained with reference to various political factors. While scholars do acknowledge that supply-side factors, such as the will and experience of women to compete against men in running for political office shape gender inequality in politics; a number of scholars, including Matland (2004) and Tremblay (2006), argue that demand-side political factors – for example, the structure of a country's electoral and political party system – are key factors shaping women's representation in politics. This chapter explores these issues by examining the political factors that shape women's representation in Mauritius' parliament and by engaging with broad international debates, African-specific research, and Mauritian debates about women's under-representation in politics.

The chapter's overall aim is to test how influential political factors appear to be in determining women's participation in formal political life, specifically their representation in national parliament. While there are a range of political factors that are typically viewed as key obstacles to women's entry into politics, this chapter will focus on electoral systems, political party behavior, and women's political activism. I briefly discuss each of these and examine whether or not they appear to influence women's representation in parliament in Mauritius, and if so, how and to what extent. While the chapter provides a general historical analysis of women's participation in politics and governance, it will focus on recent elections and examine how women fared in the Mauritian general elections of 2005 and 2010. Finally, given that the adoption of the quota system is often seen as a solution to women's under-representation in politics, this chapter concludes by exploring the quota system and its potential benefits for

increasing women's representation in politics. Finally, I examine whether such a system is being

or can be applied to Mauritius.

Political Background and Overview

Mauritius was governed for many years by a group of white, elite, large-scale sugar

planters who remained unopposed until the founding of the Mauritian Labour Party (MLP) in the

mid-1930s (Kasenally, 2011, p. 161). After 1948, when an amendment to the 1886 Constitution

allowed all adults to vote, the MLP became not only a way for advocating independence but also

a way for the Indian community to rise to political pre-eminence (Kasenally 2011, p. 161). As

seen in previous chapters, Mauritius' ethnic breakdown is quite complex; and Mauritian politics

are equally complex. While the country has adopted a multi-ethnic approach to ensure all ethnic

groups are included in politics, the Indian (primarily Hindu) community remains dominant in

Mauritian politics today. Indeed, as Kasenally (2011) points out, despite steps taken to facilitate

a multi-ethnic approach to politics, "ethno sectarian appeals to support 'one's own kind' are a

staple in Mauritius" (p. 167). Kasenally attributes this ethno sectarianism to the time before

independence, when the Indian population began growing and Indo-Mauritians began to classify

themselves as Muslims, Tamils, or Hindus. As a result, Hindus have a considerable amount of

influence in the country; particularly in the political sphere. Since independence, every prime

minister (except for one, Paul Berenger, in 2003-2005) has been Hindu (Kasenally, p. 167).

Regarding women in politics in Mauritius, in 1956 women obtained the right, from the

British Government, to stand for elections. However, there were no women in parliament until

three women were elected in 1976 (Bunwaree & Yoon, 2008, p. 17). Since then, the number of

female parliamentarians has fluctuated slightly but has never gone beyond six (in a 70-member

legislature) until the July 2005 general election, which saw the percentage of women in

parliament increase from 5.7% to 17.1%. Since 2005, the number has continued to increase

slightly to its 2012 level of 18.8% (IPU, 2012). Although Mauritius does not have a quota system

at the national level, the Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform in 2001, often

referred to as the Sachs Commission (examined below), looked at electoral fairness and reform

as its mandate.

        The political culture of Mauritius can be hostile and also fluid as a result of shifting

alliances. The two major parties are the Mauritian Labour Party (MLP) and the Mauritian

Militant Movement (MMM). In general, national elections have been run democratically;

however, there have been exceptions. For example, in 1971, the MLP coalition government of

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam was challenged by the radical and popular MMM. In response,

Ramgoolam disseminated the Public Order Act, which banned many forms of political activity

until 1976 (Peerthum, 2011, p. 1). The MMM were eventually elected to power in 1982. The

following year, members of the MMM joined the Mauritian Socialist Party (PSM) to form the

Militant Socialist Movement (MSM) and then formed a majority in coalition with the MLP.

Since then, one of these three parties (MLP, MMM and MSM) has always been in power by

forming a coalition government (they have all formed coalitions with each other at one point in

time) (Peerthum, 2011, p. 5). Despite their history and many differences, the major political

parties have worked successfully toward the country's main priority: economic welfare. As noted

in the previous chapter, Mauritius has a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, and an electoral

system that has tended to be slanted against small parties. Consequently, smaller parties form

coalitions. As will be explored in detail below, these features of the country's political system have contributed to the gender gap in politics. Moreover, even women who manage to obtain a seat in parliament face difficulties. Perhaps one of the greatest is trying to fit into or change the political structures that were developed by, and are dominated by, men.

Gender and Electoral Systems

Much of the research on political factors shaping women's political participation and representation has focused on voting and electoral systems. The term "electoral system" refers to the entire electoral process, including "the type of voting system, the district magnitude, the nature of the lists, closed, open or flexible, etc." (Tremblay, 2006, p. 5).While electoral systems alone do not determine the level of representation of women, they are important because they can be, and regularly are, changed.

It is frequently argued that the Proportional Representation (PR) system is more woman-friendly than the FPTP electoral system. The PR system is advantageous to women and visible minorities because a party receives seats in direct proportion to its overall share of the national vote, with seats being filled from lists of candidates submitted by political parties. Furthermore, most PR systems use closed lists in which the political party determines the rank ordering of candidates. This system has proven to be the most beneficial to women, provided that a sufficient number of women are nominated as candidates and placed in electable positions on party lists (2004, p. 3). The proof is in the statistics, as Ballington explains:

> …it is no coincidence that 13 of the 15 countries with the highest representation of women use some form of proportional representation and have an average

representation of 34.7 percent women in their parliaments. At the other end of the

spectrum, the 15 countries with the lowest representation of women use plurality or

majority systems, averaging one percent women in their legislatures. (p. 3)

Contrary to the PR system, the FPTP system tends to have a negative influence on

gender equality. Because the FPTP restricts a constituency's choice of candidates, representation

of minorities and women suffer from a "most broadly acceptable candidate" syndrome, in which

the safest looking candidate is the most likely to be offered a chance to stand for election

(Electoral Reform Society, 2012, p. 1). Mauritius has not adopted quotas and has retained the

FPTP electoral system with no foreseeable plan to change (Hassim, 2005, p. 10). However, that is

not to say that there have not been strong calls for electoral reform in the country. For example,

the Sachs Commission (2001) recommended extensive reforms to the electoral system, including

the adoption of a mixture of the PR and FPTP systems in order to ensure better representation of

women and opposition parties in parliament (Ballington, 2004, p. 100). Specifically regarding

women candidates, Albie Sachs (former judge on the Constitutional Court of South Africa)

suggested that the under-representation of women should be addressed by adopting a mixed PR

system, but highlighted that "the major responsibility for correcting the massive gender

imbalance rests with the parties" (as cited in Virahsawmy, 2010, p. 7). The Commission

highlighted a number of other measures that could be introduced with relative ease, including

that lists be structured in a way that would secure greater representation of women.

Unfortunately, some parties rejected proposals to replace the FPTP system with a mixed

PR/FPTP system, and reforms suggested by the Commission were not adopted. Consequently,

the 2005 elections ran on the established FPTP system.

Other features of the country's electoral system also seem to have negatively affected women's representation in parliament, including the existence of smaller parties and the tendency towards coalitions. Both these factors pose a major challenge to women's representation because more candidates compete for nominations when parties form an alliance. In particular, when a large number of parties form an alliance, the competition is stiff, and women tend to be the first to go. The formation of coalitions, say Kadima & Kasenally (2005), brings an additional level of competition to the one that already exists at party levels, where women are already significantly marginalized. As Bunwaree and Yoon (2008) point out, even well-qualified and experienced women often cannot get a ticket. According to Mayhunga, there are so few women in politics in Mauritius because the country's governments are usually coalitions and women tend to become the victims. When two political parties fuse, some politicians are sacrificed. Mayhunga suggests that these sacrifices must be gender balanced: "let's have both male and female politicians affected equally" (2005, p. 3). Additionally, at the inter-party level, negotiations are even more difficult because fewer seats are available to each coalition party, and this too results in fewer women being nominated (Kadima & Kasenally, 2005, p. 133).

Political Parties, Rules and Norms

Party rules and norms affect the way a party carries out the actual process of nomination (Matland, 2004). The process of candidate selection also differs from party to party, and from country to country. As Ballington points out, "when the rules are unwritten it becomes much harder to devise a strategy to break into the inner circle of power" (2004, p. 2). For women, bureaucratically-based systems that have incorporated rules guaranteeing women's representation

are a significant advantage; especially, Matland argues, if they include a *party quota*

guaranteeing women a certain percentage of the candidacies. However, as Shvedova (2012)

points out, even when there is no specific quota or representation legislation in place, having

clear procedures by which candidates are chosen can be a distinct advantage to women (2012, p.

14). For instance, while Matland points out the significant impact quota systems have had on

women's representation, he also highlights the example of Norway where women were

successful even before the implementation of a quota system, as a result of Norway's closed-list

proportional representation system and very clear guidelines for the nomination/election process.

With explicit rules, it is possible for women to identify crucial decision points around which they

can mobilize to push for their demands (2002, p. 4).

     In the case of Mauritius, unclear electoral procedures have acted as a significant barrier to

women's representation in parliament. The Sachs Commission made recommendations regarding

the inclusion of women, and the SADC Declaration (which Mauritius has signed) called for 30%

of women in parliament. Unfortunately, neither is legally binding. Therefore, the rules in the case

of women seeking seats in parliament in Mauritius are basically unwritten. Matland states that it

may be extremely difficult to devise a strategy and break into the inner circle of politics without

any clear-cut rules. Political parties in Mauritius have claimed otherwise, arguing that the main

reason women are not equally represented is due to a lack of interest among women to stand for

election. Matland counters that this is a popular counter-argument used by political parties to

justify low levels of women in parliament: "they claim the pool of women candidates is small

and there are simply not enough women willing to stand for election as they lack experience and

confidence to stand" (2012, p. 9).

The 2005 and 2010 General Elections of Mauritius: a Short Lived Victory for Women in Parliament

The 2005 elections in Mauritius brought a significant increase in women's representation when the percentage of women rose from 5.7% in 2000 to 17.1% in 2005. However, that figure then rose by a mere 1.7% for a total of 18.8% in the 2010 elections. Scholars such as Chiroro (2005) believe the increase in 2005 was due to women demanding that one woman be present in each constituency (in line with the SADC 30% Declaration). Although Mauritius signed the SADC Declaration (calling for 30% of women in parliament by 2005), it has not signed the SADC Protocol, which has 28 targets for the attainment of gender equality by 2015 – one of which is to increase the number of women in parliament by 50% by 2015 (SADC Gender and Development Protocol, 2008, p.2). Mauritius has a long way to go before it meets the 30% target, let alone the 50% target committed to by other countries in the region.

In addition, there are some critics, such as Virahsawmy (2012) and Bunwaree and Yoon (2008), who believe that the increase in women in parliament in 2005 was *not* a success at all. Virahsawmy points out that achieving a mere 17.1% of women in parliament is a far cry from the regional target of 50% set by SADC and worries the current number of 18.8% will only decrease with time. Regardless of how much of a victory the 2005 elections were or were not for women, it is clear that women still have not achieved equality in parliament, are well behind the regional quota, and are seemingly at a standstill politically (as we will see when examining the 2010 elections below).

One way of exploring the role of political parties and their influence on the outcome of women in parliament is to examine the three main alliances that dominated the political arena in

the 2005 elections. These parties were: the MLP of Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, the

MMM of Paul Bérenger, and the MSM of Pravind Jugnauth (EISA, 2005). In total they put

forward only 13 women candidates, out of a total of 180 standing for election. Twelve of these

13 women were elected, compared to two in 2001, six in 1995, and four in 2000 (Bunwaree &

Yoon, 2008, pg. 15). Two of the elected women were assigned ministerial jobs: Sheilabai

Bappoo as Social Security and National Solidarity Minister and Indira Seebun as Women and

Family Welfare Minister. In addition, Kalyanee Juggo was appointed as the Deputy Government

Whip (Ackbarally, 2008, para. 4).

While it is clear there was an increase in the percentage of women elected in 2005, the

reason for this is debated among scholars. Some critics such as Waring (2010) argue that the

recommendations made by the Sachs Commission, although not applied to the 2005 elections,

contributed to the increased number of female parliamentarians. As Waring explains, while no

concrete measures were adopted, or legislative or party policy changes made, the Sachs Commission

led to raised awareness of the gender inequality issue in parliament, which in turn led to an increase

of female parliamentarians (2010, p. 14). This increased awareness of gender inequality resulted in

parties discussing the issues of gender inequalities in politics, and also discussing possible steps

that they could take to increase women's representation. For example, the electoral coalition

Alliance MSM/MMM highlighted the need to promote women's representation, and although no

party policy changes were made, female candidates were proportionately more successful than

male candidates, and the few women nominated had been placed in seats that were more

"winnable" (Chiroro 2005, p. 11). Of the 10 candidates nominated by the Alliance MSM/MMM,

seven were successful, as opposed to only 15 of the 50 male candidates. By contrast, the *Alliance*

Sociale coalition nominated only six women of whom four were successful, with roughly the same proportion of men being successful – 34 men elected out of 54 male candidates (Chiroro 2005, p. 13). The steps taken by the MSM/MMM coalition demonstrate that, if nominated, female candidates can be successful.

In the 2010 elections, Prime Minister Ramgoolam's Labour Party formed *Alliance de l'Avenir*, comprising the MLP, the Mauritian Social Democrat Party (PMSD) and the MSM. Former Prime Minister Berenger led the *Alliance du Coeur*, comprising the MMM, the National Union (UN) and the Mauritian Socialist Democratic Movement (MMSD). Both coalitions campaigned on a similar platform, pledging to alleviate poverty, strengthen the welfare state and increase social justice. Despite Mr. Berenger's promises to increase the number of women in parliament by suggesting political parties have at least one woman candidate in every constituency, only eight (13%) of the 60 candidates of his party were women. This was five fewer than the Prime Minister's *Alliance de l'Avenir,* which fielded 13 (21%) (EISA, 2005, p. 1). The final results of the 2010 elections were 41 seats to Prime Minister Ramgoolam's *Alliance de l'Avenir*, 18 seats to the *Alliance du Coeur,* and the rest of the seats to smaller parties. In all, 13 women were elected, only one more than in the 2005 elections (IPU, 2012, p. 1). Questions as to why the two major parties fielded so few female candidates when they promised to field more still have not been answered.

Is Women's Representation in Mauritius at a Standstill?

While some gains were made in both the 2005 and 2010 elections, women's representation in parliament will likely remain at a standstill until gender equality is made a

priority in Mauritius (Virahsawmy, 2010). Virahsawmy believes that the only way to ensure

Mauritius sees an increase in representation in female parliamentarians is to adopt a quota system

at both the party and national levels. This would ensure that parties would be legally bound to

their commitments. Without a national level or party level quota system, parties will likely

continue to make empty promises. Furthermore, a quota system at the national and party levels

would guarantee that Mauritius fulfills its commitments to SADC and the UNDP's MDG#3. The

increase of just one additional elected woman, or in percentage terms a 1.7% increase, is indeed

disappointing; based on this trend, Mauritius may be sliding backwards in gender representation

(Mlangeni, 2010; Virahsawmy, 2010). Or even worse, it may be heading down the same path as

Botswana and Namibia, which have been going backwards in female representation in

parliament.

Part of the reason why Mauritius may be at a standstill is attitudinal; there is a widespread

view amongst politicians and in society that gender inequality does not exist in the country and

that there is adequate gender-related legislation. For example, L'Estrac, a former cabinet

minister, claims that Mauritius has a gender sensitive government with progressive laws

concerning women, and that the government has done much for both women and children in the

last 20 years. Many party officials share this sentiment and argue that adequate legislation is

already in place to tackle gender disparity. According to them, neither changes to the electoral

system nor the introduction of new legislation are necessary. Instead, they believe that more

women simply need to step forward to run in elections.

Male-dominated Political Parties

As we saw in Chapter One, an argument put forth by scholars is that the male-dominated culture of political parties and the political arena makes it difficult for women to enter politics. Men formulate the rules of the political game and define the standards for evaluation. According to Ginwala, "the existence of this male-dominated model results in either women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics" (1998, p.1). In Mauritius, there are very few women who hold decision-making or high level positions within political parties. This situation, as Bunwaree and Yoon explain, "not only decreases the pool of politically well-qualified women for elections, but also affects nomination of women because male party leaders tend to nominate men as candidates" (2008, p. 17). Discriminatory nomination practices and male-dominant culture (which we will examine in the next chapter), have, according to several female candidates, deeply affected their attempts at nomination. Chiroro (2005) explains that the greatest obstacle facing women in Mauritius is their failure to be nominated as candidates in a male-dominated political system. A leader from a well-known women's organization (whose name remains anonymous) explained how she and other women submitted their *curriculum vitaes* to the party leadership to be nominated as candidates for the 2005 elections. They were kept waiting until nomination day passed, and they realized that they had obviously not been successful (Chiroro, 2005, p.10). This shows that not only did women (for the most part) take a backseat position during the 2005 elections, they were also, in some instances, ignored altogether.

Quota Systems: a Solution to the Under-Representation of Women in Parliament

Quota systems are often seen as a solution, or at least a partial solution, to the under-representation of women in parliament. Quotas operate in different ways, but all such systems

aim to increase the pool of female candidates. Quota systems can be divided into three main

categories: constitutional quotas or reserved seats in which the country's constitution mandates a

particular kind of gender representation; election law quotas that use rules to ensure

representation for women; and political party quotas in which parties set out rules or targets for

the gender balance of the individuals they place in office (Davidson-Schmich, 2006, p. 2). Party

quotas are different from constitutional quotas and election law quotas because they lack the

sanctioning power of the state (Davidson-Schmich, 2006, p. 2).

How effective have quota systems been with regard to increasing the representation of

women? Tripp and Kang (2008) and Chen (2003) maintain that the quota system is crucial, and

perhaps the only way, to achieve gender equality in parliament. They maintain that globally the

biggest increases in women's representation have happened in countries where quotas (legislated

or voluntary) have been introduced. One such country is Rwanda, which has the highest

representation of female parliamentarians in the world at 56.3% (UNDP, 2010, p. 2). Other

critics, such as Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo (2012), who conducted a global comparative

study, and Engelstad and Teigen (2012) argue the opposite: that quotas act as an obstacle to

increasing women's representation in parliament. They claim that quotas have a negative

influence on women's representation in politics because women elected through quotas may not

be perceived as being equally competent to their male counterparts. In addition, Franceschet,

Krook and Piscopo's research concludes that gender quotas will not work to advance the quality

of public decision-making towards women's interests. In a global comparative study over the

past decade, Engelstad and Teigen's research looked at quota systems and their impact on

women in the political sphere as well as in the workplace and concluded that many women prefer

to be elected without a quota system because winning an election without a quota system in place demonstrates that they have been elected because of merit rather than obligation.

Opposition to quota systems often stems from the argument that they are discriminatory, since one group of candidates will be favored at the expense of potentially better qualified candidates who, as a result of the system, are set aside (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2003). Dahlerup and Freidenvall state that some opponents view quota systems as reverse discrimination: better-qualified men may lose out in order to achieve a quota for women (2011, p. 153). Furthermore, opponents often see quotas as a violation of the liberal principle of merit (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2003, p. 2). Krook (2010) points out that opponents of the quota system express concerns that quotas will facilitate access for unqualified women by bringing individuals to office who "have little interest in promoting women's concerns, reinforce stereotypes about women's inferiority as political actors, and deter ordinary women's political participation" (p. 5).

In contrast, a number of scholars, especially those focused on women's political representation in countries in the global south, contend that quota campaigns, such as the African Union's 50% Campaign, with a target of 50% representation of women in parliament by 2020 (Gender Links, 2009), play an essential role in the revival of feminist activism in Africa (see, for example Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2003; Hassim, 2003). Hassim explains that in the case of South Africa, the first democratic election in 1994 was an important turning point for women because the African National Congress (ANC) was the first party in the country to introduce a quota system to ensure the representation of women in politics. While the system was not legislated, but rather established in the ANC's guidelines for nominations of public representatives, it was extremely important for women in South Africa in that the quota system

allowed a platform for large numbers of women activists to participate in politics (Manzini,

2003, p. 1). The quota system in South Africa contributed to breaking down barriers to women's

access to politics and decision making. According to Hassim, a combination of institutional

development, political will and perseverance allowed for a new relationship between women and

the state, which in turn resulted in increased female representation in parliament in South Africa.

With the help of a quota system, South Africa is now one of the global leaders of women in

parliament at 42.3% (IPU, 2012).

As the next section will demonstrate, the lack of reform to the political system in

Mauritius can be seen as one of the major problems in the advancement of gender equality.

Moreover, even parties who have "adopted" gender quotas and attempted to implement positive

change for gender equality simply promise to improve the gender balance of their elected

officials while offering no official penalties for failure to comply.

Quota System in Mauritius: Examining the New Local Government Act

While Mauritius has not adopted a national quota system, some parties have made

commitments to increase the representation of women at the party level. However, the

commitments have not always been clear or binding, and therefore have been largely ineffective.

For example, the MLP has a 30 percent quota target; however, the commitment is vague in that it

makes mention of "all structures," but does not specifically discuss women's representation in

parliament. Even so, that number has never been met, and according to Bunwaree and Kasenally

(2005), this quota may make women more visible in party operations but it does not necessarily

secure them seats as nominated candidates (p.11). As seen above, the MMM Party's constitution

stipulates that at least 20 percent of its candidates for legislative and municipal elections be

women; it is the only party to have adopted a voluntary quota. However, this percentage has

never been met (Chiroro 2005, p. 9). Lastly, the MSM Party encourages women to join its

regional and local branches so that they become integrated into the party structure and eventually

advance to higher levels of responsibility within the party; but again, the party never makes

specific mention of women's representation in parliament (Bunwaree & Kasenally, 2005, p. 8).

On the other hand, the New Local Government Act, effective 2012, is a bill that has

amended the Local Government Acts of 1989 and 2003 to give municipalities and village

councils more authority it includes a legislated quota requiring that political parties field a

minimum of one-third of candidates of either sex for the municipal and village council elections

(Virahsawmy, 2012, p. 1). While this amendment is seen as a positive step forward for gender

equality in politics, it is difficult to say what the outcome of the Act will be because it has not yet

been applied to a local election. As with the international debate on gender quota systems,

opinions are mixed regarding the new Act. For example, Haniff Peerun, chairperson of the

Mauritius Labour Congress, disagrees with applying a quota system, stating, "Do women need a

locomotive to carry them to the top? I don't think so. They can make it on their own.*

(*Ackbarally, 2012, p. 1)*. Peerun suggests that women are competent and can win elections

through their own initiative; and he is convinced that the quota system shows that men still

consider women to be weak (Ackbarally, p. 1). Vishwanee Boodhonee, a candidate in the 2010

Mauritian general election, agrees with Peerun. She contends that the quota system of the new

Act is "contrary to the concept of equal opportunity. Where is the need for enacting an Equal

Opportunity Act if there is to be a quota for women? How can we then speak of gender

equality?" (as cited in Ackbarally, para. 19).

Nevertheless, many women's organizations welcome the quota law in the New Local

Government Act, which they claim will allow for a substantial increase in the number of women

in local politics. Up to now, parties have generally fielded few women as candidates in elections.

However, even those who believe the quota system will significantly increase the number of

women in local government believe the Act will do little to increase the representation of women

in national politics because the Act only applies to local government elections. Shortly after the

Act was passed, and referring to the reforming of the FPTP electoral system, the Prime Minister

announced that there would soon be major electoral reforms for general elections, which would

radically change the electoral system for the next parliamentary elections of 2015. If reforms to

the electoral systems are made (reforms which this paper has determined to be favorable to

women), they would coincide with the 2015 deadline for the SADC Gender Protocol and the

UNDP MDG3 targets. Thus, it would appear that electoral reforms would be a step forward for

women in politics in Mauritius. When asked by the opposition about whether or not the gender

quota would be adopted at the national level, Prime Minister Ramgoolam replied, "let us wait for

the report by Prof. Carcassone and study the whole system before taking a decision" (referring to

a study regarding gender disparity in politics in Mauritius) (Ackbarally, 2012, p. 3). This delayed

action, according to many observers, indicates that the Prime Minister is not in a hurry to change

the system.

Of course, introducing a quota system is only one step towards reducing the obstacles

facing women in politics. Also important is the issue of whether parties actually comply with

their own quotas and what steps parties take to ensure quotas are followed. As will be discussed

in the next chapter, culture is often viewed as both a barrier to women's political participation

and a reason why parties do not comply with their own quotas. Scholars such as Davidson-

Schmich (2002) and Dysart (1994) suggest that, for cultural reasons, political parties do not take

the responsibility they should to promote the democratic process of equating the voices of men

and women (Dysart, p. 3). They also note that culture shapes women's role in society, and that

their role in unpaid, reproductive household labour makes it difficult for women to finance and

run political campaigns, even if quota systems were in place. Indeed, as we shall see in the next

chapter, cultural and political factors often overlap and reinforce each other. In particular, the

continued strong Hindu presence in, and control of, parliament alongside cultural assumptions

about gender roles, have had a major influence on gender equality in parliament.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the political factors that shape women's representation in

parliament in Mauritius. Scholars remain divided as to whether or not the 2005 and 2010

elections should be considered successes with respect to women's increased numbers in

parliament. While it is clear that political factors have posed obstacles to women interested in

politics, many scholars point to a discriminatory, male driven and patriarchal system within the

political arena that has played a great role in the outcome of women's lack of representation in

parliament. Chapter Four aims to answer whether political factors, cultural factors or a

combination of both are the main determinants of women's lack of representation in parliament

in Mauritius.

Chapter Four: The Influence of Cultural Factors on Women's Representation in Parliament in Mauritius

A range of cultural factors often shape women's political participation and representation in various countries around the world; and many scholars and political actors in Mauritius frequently point to culture as an explanation for gender inequality in politics in the country. This chapter examines cultural factors that shape women's representation in parliament in Mauritius. It begins by returning to some of the broader international and national debates, and then analyzes if – or to what extent – culture seems to limit women's political participation. The chapter answers the question of whether or not cultural factors are more convincing and relevant to the Mauritian case than political factors discussed in the previous chapter, or whether it is a combination of both these factors that restrain women from participating in politics. The final section provides an overall conclusion to the thesis by answering the central research question and providing possible solutions based on the findings.

In many cases national culture has had a significant impact on women's entry into politics in general, and to parliament in particular. Scholars such as Norris and Inglehart (2008) argue that culture provides a plausible reason for women having made such striking advances in parliaments within the Nordic region compared with other comparable European societies like Switzerland, Italy or Belgium. They contend that since all of the above mentioned countries are affluent, post-industrial welfare states and have established parliamentary democracies with proportional representation electoral systems; culture, more specifically the emphasis on egalitarianism, is the plausible reason why Nordic countries have had such success regarding

women's representation (2008, p. 8). Similarly, Abu-Zayd (2002) argues that countries with deep

patriarchal systems often rank at the bottom of the list of women's representation in parliament.

For example, countries such as Yemen, with 0.3% of women in parliament, Qatar with 0%, and

Saudi Arabia with 0% are among the lowest in terms of women's representation in parliament

globally (Inter Parliamentary Unit, 2012, Women in National Parliament).

Other scholars contest the argument that culture is an obstacle to women's entry into

politics, insisting that countries with deeply patriarchal systems do not necessarily have fewer

women in parliament. For instances, Rosenbluth, Salmond, and Thies (2006) claim that many

egalitarian societies actually have very low percentages of women in parliament. They cite

countries such as Brazil with 8.6%, Malta with 8.7% and Japan with 10.8% to support their

argument (Inter Parliamentary Unit, 2012, Women in National Parliament).

Before examining how culture has influenced women's representation in parliament in

Mauritius, it is important for us to understand what scholars mean by cultural variables.

Tremblay (2007) defines cultural variables as "the values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes that

underpin a society and its institutions and that animate the population's ways of being, talking,

and doing" (p. 9). What she and other scholars tend to focus on are issues such as religion,

education, and views of gender-based social roles. This chapter explores religion and education

as cultural factors, and focuses primarily on gender-based social roles and how they have

influenced women's representation in parliament in Mauritius.

Religion

Religion can act as a key barrier to women's representation in parliament. In the case of

Mauritius, with a predominant Hindu population, it seems that religion has seeped into the

political arena, and has, in turn, affected women's participation in politics. Mauritius is one of

the most ethnically heterogeneous countries in the world; as already noted its religious

population is complex: 52% Hindu, 26% Roman Catholic, 16.6% Muslim, 2.3% Protestant and

3.1% other (Bundoo, 2009, p. 2). However, Hindus have a considerable amount of influence in

the country, particularly in the political sphere. Since independence, every prime minister

(except for one, Paul Berenger, 2003-2005) has been Hindu (Kasenally, 2011, p. 167). A

common feature of Hinduism and Islamism is an ideology of male authority over women and the

view that a woman's role in society and in the family is primarily one of caregiver, wife and

mother (Ramtohul, 2009, p. 18). According to Ramtohul, this leaves little room for women to

challenge patriarchal authority in politics.

The link between religion and women's political participation is certainly not

straightforward. There are a number of countries, including many in the global south, that have

large populations of Hindus and yet have made good progress towards gender equality in

politics. India, for example, is one the oldest democracies in the world, and while approximately

80% of the country's population identifies as Hindu, women politicians command power and

respect throughout the country. However, women continue to be extremely under-represented at

a national level, even while they are very active in rural politics and in local government

(Sossou, 2011, p.71). As in other countries with large Hindu populations, cultural attitudes

towards women and continued male dominance in Indian society have shaped women's political

participation in the country, and women have had to overcome cultural barriers in order to advance in politics (see Kumar, 2006; Rahlhan, 1995). One possible reason for their greater success is the fact that a certain number of seats are reserved for women in local government, and the country has also adopted a range of policies to promote multicultural pluralism. While India has taken these steps to promote gender equality in politics, Mauritius has not done so. Thus, in Mauritius, cultural barriers remain in place and continue to limit women's political participation. Riksen (1989) argues that religion continues to impose crucial constraints regarding political activity in Mauritius. Familara points out that in Mauritius, a woman's religion largely dictates the way she lives her life. She explains how some women are free to pursue whatever careers they want; however, others must ask for permission from their husbands just to leave the house, a condition that poses an obvious restriction to their pursuing political careers (Familara, 2011, p. 25).

Another way in which religion influences women's political participation stems from cultural attitudes towards women in politics. Women who do run for office report that their status in society is actually reduced, and that neighbors and community members do not support their political endeavors (Bidnoux, 2012; Jhowry, 2012; Navarre-Marie, 2004). Navarre-Marie has had a longstanding career in Mauritian politics and explains that she has experienced many challenges throughout her career including lack of support from the community and lack of support within the larger political sphere. Her career has also prevented her from spending sufficient time with her family and she has had to make many personal sacrifices as a result. She explains that many women in Mauritius are not prepared to face the personal sacrifices it takes to have a successful career in politics:

> Even though women are equal in education, there is an attitude which prevents us
> from participating in politics. We can be pilots, judges, doctors, etc., but when it
> comes to participating in politics women normally hesitate. We are not ready to
> sacrifice our careers and families. (Navarre-Marie, p. 2)

Even well-educated Hindu and Muslim women fear their status in their community could be put at risk if they pursue careers in politics. For example, religious leaders have blocked Muslim women from entering politics because of their belief in attributed gender roles that do not include political involvement (Ackbarally, 2008). According to Juggo, "there is a triangular rapport between women, religion and politics that clumsily defines the place of the latter in the society" (as cited in Ackbarally, 2008, p. 5).

Finally, not only are perceptions about women's role in society linked to religious values and reinforced by religious leaders, but also male political figures tend to reinforce exclusionary attitudes towards women. Virahsawmy (2004) argues that male politicians have never been prepared to make room for women, and that the push for religious and ethnic equality seemingly overshadows gender equality. Consequently, as she notes, "all ethnic groups want to be covered in Parliament but they do not want women to represent them" (as cited in Mavhunga, 2004, para. 5).

Education

Education can also act as an obstacle to women's participation in politics because it can reinforce socially-constructed gender roles and the related perception that women are secondary citizens. For example, with reference to Kenya, Nzomo (1997) suggests that education tends to

make girls and women accept their secondary status as normal. Her work demonstrates that even

though women are increasingly active in politics, they are less likely to take on leadership roles

and are frequently treated as inferior to their male counterparts in parliament. Women's

secondary status in politics, according to Nzomo, is largely due to having patriarchal attitudes

ingrained into boys and girls at a very young age through the country's education system. Just

why education, usually thought of as a liberating force, should ultimately, and counter-

intuitively, serve as an obstacle to women seeking political access needs to be examined.

While few studies on the role of education in shaping gender roles and the perception of

them in Mauritius have been carried out, what little research exists does indicate that the

education system may contribute to gender inequality in the country. As noted in Chapter One,

national data on Mauritius does not indicate any real gender disparities in the general education

sector. Girls make up 49.2% of the total enrollment at the primary level and 47.8% at the

secondary level (UNESCO, 2011). Education in Mauritius was expanded under British colonial

rule, and mass education (for both genders) was promoted under the British and then under the

post-colonial government. Nevertheless, problems exist in both the content of the curriculum and

in the exclusion of girls.

National statistics on attendance and completion rates indicate that the number of females

in secondary and post-secondary education is slightly lower than the number of males.

According to Bunwaree (2008), although the official discourse in Mauritius is one of educational

gender equality, the educational system fails to translate this claim into reality. First, as she

notes, the schooling process and education-related decision making at the household level remain

undemocratic and highly gender insensitive. In particular, parents allot different resources to

their sons and daughters, frequently prioritizing boys' educations over girls' educations

(Bunwaree, 2008, p. 135). Second, the curriculum reinforces gender inequality, with school

textbooks presenting women and men in very stereotypical ways, and often presenting girls and

women in inferior or unequal roles. Third, she and others note very little gender training is given

to teachers. Consequently, teachers tend to be very insensitive to gender issues and teach in ways

that reinforce gender stereotypes and cultural attitudes about women's roles. In short, the

education system in the country appears to contribute to the disempowerment of girls by

reinforcing their secondary status in an already patriarchal country. Although women's education

in Mauritius has significantly improved over the past few years, according to Bunwaree (1997)

the education system continues to encourage women to perform traditional, domestic gender

roles. Therefore, even though girls do well in school and there is an almost equal enrollment rate

between the sexes, traditional educational values reinforce for girls that their role is secondary in

terms of their social and public role, and therefore has no place in the political arena.

Gender-based Social Roles

In addition to religion and education, many scholars draw attention to gender-based

social roles in shaping women's decisions regarding entry into politics. Research in this cluster

tends to advance three core and related arguments. Firstly, in a strong patriarchal society, women

are often designated to the home and to unpaid domestic labour, and they are discouraged from

seeking paid employment in the labour market. Not only does this role as homemaker limit their

public role in society, it also places women as solely responsible for domestic tasks and

childrearing, both of which result in women having less time than men to participate in politics.

In particular, scholars have frequently noted that political meetings and events (including

campaigning for elections) require evening and weekends, and women—especially those in

strongly patriarchal societies—are less able to leave the home during these times (Fox &

Lawless, 2012).

What is more, many women in Mauritius still believe that politics, particularly at the

national level, is a man's role (Ackbarally, 2008). Gender stereotyping and ideas of gender-based

social roles generally result in men—not women—being viewed as natural political leaders. As a

result, it is hard for women to gain public support when running for political office, especially if

they are newcomers to the political scene; it is equally difficult for women to advance in the

political arena. A common stereotype in Mauritius is that men are the bread winners and have the

right to a public life, while women belong in the household (Kiamba, 2008, p. 15).

Secondly, as the 2005 election makes clear, women are also discouraged from running

for parliament both directly and indirectly. In terms of the latter, demeaning images of women,

particularly as sex symbols, were evident in political posters and caricatures as a way to deter

women from running as candidates (Bunwaree and Yoon, 2008, p. 22). Bunwaree notes that,

"there is a patriarchal culture here that pervades the whole political system and makes men fight

for tickets like vultures; how can women fit into that?" (as cited in Ackbarally, p. 8).

Lastly, the ongoing domination of men in the political sphere has contributed to a male

culture in politics, and to ongoing resistance and hostility to women politicians (Waring, 2010).

Powley (2006), whose work focuses on women in parliament in Rwanda, notes that globally,

women who manage to break barriers and obtain seats in parliament are still met with resistance.

Kiamba (2008) makes the definitive statement: "women's potential, specifically their political

potential, is not being realized in Mauritius." (p.9).

Patriarchal Societies and Domestic Obligations

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union conducted a global survey on women and men in

parliament in which participants were asked to identify the factors they considered to be the

largest obstacle to entering politics. Overall, the female participants claimed that domestic

responsibilities were the most significant deterrent. This survey supports the argument that

women find it difficult to balance their family lives with political responsibilities and/or that

women feel they do not have the support to pursue both at the same time. Ballington (2008),

Kiamba (2008), and Kilimo (2009) maintain that men and women entering politics face different

barriers, with domestic responsibilities frequently seen as the single most important deterrent for

women. As noted above, while balancing a political career and family life is a common

challenge for women globally, it is especially difficult for women in patriarchal societies, such as

Mauritius, because they receive little support from their families or communities to perform both

roles simultaneously (Ackbarally, 2008; Blin, 2008). Where men are basically exempt from

domestic responsibilities in such societies, and usually have full support from their families and

communities, women do not.

Male-dominated Competitive System

In Africa, there tend to be set traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding the role

and status of women in society. Consequently, some female politicians find it difficult to diverge

from the male-dominated culture in politics and often conform to it for fear of not being accepted

(Jackson, 2012). According to Beethum (2005), male hostility is the main factor which has most influenced women's political participation. In Mauritius "many women are put off taking part in politics because of its competitive and adversarial character, and the sacrifice it means for family life" (Beethum, 2005, p. 20). Furthermore, even women who manage to overcome the barriers and stand as candidates do not always show unity with one another. During the 2005 and 2010 election campaigns, she claims women activists and candidates were just as confrontational with each other as were men.

Finally, there are a number of financial barriers to political participation. First, Mauritius (similar to other countries) does not have public funding for campaign expenditures of individual candidates, which means candidates have to finance their campaigns themselves. This factor adds to the competitiveness of being elected, especially for women who in Mauritius and elsewhere are reported to spend more of their income on the household, thus leaving less disposable income to engage in politics. Consequently, it is usually only women of the middle or higher income group who are financially able to run for election. In the case of the 2005 elections, many educated, qualified women said that they were better off keeping their jobs and that their families were much more important than entering politics, which they considered a "dirty game" (Chiroro, 2005, p. 10). Second, political parties often require that candidates bring with them substantial sums of money before the party can consider them for nomination. When asked to explain the reason for not being nominated, one of the women who ran in the 2005 elections (who remains anonymous) claims it was because she had not declared how much money she intended contributing to the party (Chiroro, 2005, p. 11). In brief, in order to pursue a seat in parliament, Mauritian women must be prepared to fight against gender-discriminate

campaigns, have a significant amount of financial support, and have strong support from their families or be willing to jeopardize their roles within their families should their families not be supportive.

Potential Decline of Women's Representation in Parliament

As already noted, there was an increase in the percentage of women in Mauritian parliament in the 2005 and 2010 elections, although not as significant an increase as many had hoped. While the 2005 elections were somewhat of a letdown regarding women's representation in parliament, 2010 was seen as a major disappointment to women. In 2010, the representation of women went from 17.1% to 18.8% – a 1.7% increase. This can hardly be considered a success, particularly while other countries in the region are making significant gains regarding women's representation in parliament – notably, Seychelles and South Africa. Overall, the results of the 2005 and 2010 elections for women were quite negative, particularly given that those who managed to be elected were met with a great deal of hostility. For example, the former Leader of the Opposition, Paul Berenger, reportedly referred to the seven out of thirteen women fielded by the Alliance of the Future as being "sent to the slaughterhouse." In response to this comment and the elections, Nita Deerpalsing, Communications Manager of the MLP said:

> I am so sorry that there will be less women in Parliament. It is also very
> unfortunate that we have had to suffer all sorts of sexist and blatant language.
> Telling us that we will go to the slaughterhouse is like treating us like animals. In
> my constituency I was the main target of discrimination and people were told not
> to vote for me because I am a woman. (p. 8)

This example shows that women are still not considered equal or treated equally in the political arena. It is no wonder that women's representation in parliament in Mauritius has been gravely affected.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that Mauritius has had successes regarding women's representation in parliament in recent years; however, these gains are not nearly sufficient when compared to comparative percentage representations in regional countries, and when analyzed as to what women are faced with as representatives. Chapter Two suggests that Mauritius has more than an adequate amount of gender legislation in place to achieve a higher number of women in parliament, yet it has failed to meet the SADC regional target of 30% of female parliamentarians. As Chapter Three reveals in its examination of the 2005 election, it is a combination of political factors that deter women's political hopes: electoral systems, party behaviors and women's lack of political activism. Chapter Four shows how culture has influenced women's representation in parliament. Although there is limited research on women and politics in Mauritius, much of the existing research demonstrates that culture, specifically socially-constructed gender roles and the continuation of gender stereotypes, remains one of the greatest obstacles to women's entry into politics. Furthermore, there is a strong element of denial that gender inequality in parliament exists in Mauritius. A recurring argument made by politicians as to why women have not been successful in obtaining seats in parliament is that women are simply not interested or motivated and that there is adequate legislation in place for them to succeed should they wish to. Regardless of the gender-related legislation, however, progress on the political front for women in Mauritius has been extremely slow. While the laws state that a woman is free to choose a

profession (including one in politics), in general, men remain the heads of families and continue to dictate the responsibilities and professions of women. This combination of factors and conditions makes it very difficult to change traditional structures.

Based on my research, it appears that it is a combination of culture and political factors that together are the main determinants in women's political participation in Mauritius. Certainly, pervasive patriarchal culture has influenced society's view on gender roles and has seeped into the political arena, thus making it nearly impossible for women to pursue successful careers in politics. At the same time, a number of political factors continue to limit women's participation. If politicians are correct in arguing it is a lack of women's activism and interest that is the main barrier to women pursuing seats in parliament, then even that stems from a deeply gender-unequal society where women do not feel they can successfully pursue the same goals as men. In short, both cultural and political arguments point to an underlying factor that has entrenched itself into the political sphere, making it extremely difficult for women to achieve gender equality in parliament. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, despite calls for reforms to the country's political system, little action has been taken. Without the introduction of political reforms (such as a quota system), it seems unlikely that progress towards greater gender equality will happen any time soon. What's more, other changes, such as changes to the education system and curriculum, are needed to address the deep and entrenched power gap in the country.

Recommendations

Mauritian women have seemingly hit a plateau with regards to an increase in the number of women in parliament. The 2005 elections brought a significant increase in women's

representation; however, this increase was not nearly close to the 30% and 50% SADC regional

targets. The 2010 elections saw an increase of a mere 1.7%, which Virahsawmy (2012) sees as a

sign the country is actually regressing regarding women's representation in parliament. It is clear

that without proactive measures such as gender quotas, and without a radical change in cultural

norms, women will not achieve gender equality in parliament for a very long time. It is also

clearly necessary for change to happen in all aspects of society before change will be mirrored in

the political arena. Virahsawmy argues that the solution lies in a quota system in accordance with

the SADC principles. Gender quotas have been successful on many occasions (notably in the

case of Rwanda) in increasing women's representation in parliament. When properly

implemented, they ensure women's access to parliament rather than their having to wait for

change to happen on its own. Without affirmative action measures such as a quota system,

Mauritius runs the risk of never achieving regional targets of gender equality in parliament.

An effective way to achieve parliamentary equity would be for Mauritius to ratify the

SADC protocol with a 50% target of women in parliament. Any action to ratify would once

again raise awareness throughout the country about the under-representation of women in

parliament. Perhaps that would be enough to make equity a priority issue in the next general

elections. In addition to this, a stricter implementation of the already signed SADC declaration

asking for 30% representation of women in parliament would also aid in closing the gender gap.

If properly implemented, Mauritian women's representation in parliament would significantly

increase, and were that to happen, societal norms might begin to mimic politics and not vice

versa.

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